

I. Project Title: Colorado River Wildlife Management Area Easement and Weed Monitoring and Management/Ouray NWR Floodplain Management

II. Bureau of Reclamation Agreement Number(s): N/A

III. Principal Investigator(s):
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IV. Abstract:

The Colorado River Wildlife Management Area (CRWMA) easement program began in the late 1990's with the intent of acquiring flood easements on floodplains within the upper Colorado River system that would function as important habitat for the four Colorado River endangered fish species. The purpose of the easements is to allow floodplains to flood and function as naturally as possible. Easements were acquired through the 2000's and were turned over to the National Wildlife Refuge System for management by the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), which is part of the Lower Green River NWR Complex (Complex). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service owns very little interest in many of these easements. This project involves annual inspections of easements and partnerships with landowners to enhance habitat conditions, which has involved annual funding of \$50,000. These funds are used for administration and enforcement of the easements to ensure that the landowners are abiding by the easement language, as well as projects to control invasive plants. In addition, funds also were applied to management activities at Ouray NWR for the first time this year to support floodplain restoration & management and benefit endangered fish.

V. Study Schedule: Annual, ongoing

VI. Relationship to RIPRAP:

-GREEN RIVER ACTION PLAN: MAINSTEM ACTIVITY II.
RESTORE HABITAT

II.A. Restore and manage flooded bottomland habitat.

-COLORADO RIVER ACTION PLAN: MAINSTEM ACTIVITY II.
RESTORE HABITAT

II.A. Restore and manage flooded bottomland habitat.

-COLORADO RIVER ACTION PLAN: GUNNISON RIVER ACTIVITY II.
RESTORE HABITAT

II.A. Restore and manage flooded bottomland habitat.

VII. Accomplishment of FY 2017 Tasks and Deliverables, Discussion of Initial Findings and Shortcomings:

- The Biological Science Technician position at Browns Park NWR provided assistance with CRWMA work early in FY 2017 before that position was vacated in January 2017 (see additional narrative below). The remaining work in FY 2017 was handled by permanent staff at Ouray and Browns Park NWRs.
- With funds provided through the national USFWS Cooperative Recovery Initiative (CRI), we completed a major restoration project at Ouray NWR to reconnect the Green River to the Sheppard Bottom wetland area and provide nursery habitat for larval razorback sucker and other endangered fish species.
- Ouray NWR hosted a UCREFRP Biology Committee tour of Ouray NWR flooded bottomland areas in October 2016.
- Developed information on CRWMA easements for the BLM Vernal Field Office (VFO) for their consideration during the planning process for the proposed December 2017 oil & gas lease sale. Delivered information and met with BLM to discuss easement purposes and management.
- Provided review/feedback on the Preliminary Environmental Assessment for the BLM VFO December 2017 oil & gas lease sale. Worked with the Utah Ecological Services Field Office and UCREFRP to develop a single U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service comment memo, which included potential impacts to floodplain habitat within the CRWMA area.
- Refuge staff conducted annual monitoring of easements to evaluate the easement areas and confirm that there were no violations of easement conditions.
- Provided information and chemicals to one easement landowner to conduct treatment of Russian olive along the Gunnison River, covered by Browns Park NWR invasive funds (\$332.50).
- Added updates to CRWMA easement monitoring notebook.
- Administrative maps and descriptions of the easements were reviewed.
- Acquisitions included purchase of a replacement flow meter to measure Pelican Lake water used in Ouray NWR floodplain management (McCrometer \$2,155) and rip rap for the Sheppard Bottom CRI levee breach (Staker Parson \$3,490).
- Participated in UCREFRP and Flaming Gorge Technical Working group conference calls.
- Numerous communications conducted with Regional Office Refuge Program and UCREFRP staff in an attempt to recruit a permanent or term GS-6/7 BioScience Tech to conduct CRWMA work.
- The Scope of Work developed in FY 2016 to remove 8.5 acres of salt cedar and Russian olive trees on the Grand Junction Pipe parcel was put on hold in FY 2017 due to staff shortages.

VIII. Additional noteworthy observations: N/A

IX. Recommendations:

Continue existing funding levels of \$50,000/year at a minimum in FY 2018 in order to support the easement management program at its current level. The Complex is seeking to fill a permanent or term BioScience Tech position who would continue easement monitoring and efforts to work with landowners to enhance habitat conditions. This position also would have some capacity to assist with ongoing and planned floodplain enhancement projects at Ouray NWR. However, the existing UCREFRP funding is insufficient to allow us to significantly expand these efforts. With additional funds and staff, the Refuge could expand the role of landowner contacts, initial scoping of projects, and project planning & implementation on the easement areas, and could increase floodplain restoration and management activities on Ouray NWR. All of these actions would result in enhanced conservation of important habitat for the four Colorado River endangered fish species.

X. Project Status: This project is ongoing. Funding is required for coordination, management, restoration, and monitoring activities. There continues to be a need to monitor proposed energy development and construction activities to ensure easement terms are not violated and to minimize and mitigate potential negative impacts to riparian floodplains from oil & gas development on the CRWMA easement areas and on Ouray NWR. We have carryover funds from FY 2017 and plan to conduct weed monitoring and control efforts on select easement properties as well as management/monitoring of restoration project areas on Ouray NWR (depending on available staffing).

XI. FY 2017 Budget Status (*see narrative below)

- A. Funds Provided: Recovery Program funding: \$89,346 (\$50,000 funded in FY17 and \$39,346 was carried over from FY16)
- B. Funds Expended: \$40,542
- C. Difference: \$48,804
- D. Percent of the FY 2017 work completed, and projected costs to complete: Most core work completed (i.e., easement monitoring), 55% funds expended
- E. Recovery Program funds spent for publication charges: None

* We have had significant levels of carryover funds since FY2014, when the \$50,000 from Bureau of Reclamation was received too late in the fiscal year to spend and we therefore only spent \$11,000. In FY15 we spent \$67,404 and in FY16 we spent \$65,676. We had planned to spend the majority of the remaining carryover and FY17 funds this fiscal year. However, the person in the term BioScience Tech position at Browns Park NWR (who had undertaken primary responsibility for the Colorado River WMA easement work and whose salary was being partially covered by these funds) left for a permanent position in January 2017. Despite significant efforts since then we have been unable to fill the vacancy, which resulted in much of the planned work

