

UPPER COLORADO RIVER ENDANGERED FISH RECOVERY PROGRAM

FY 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

PROJECT: C-6 Easement

Project Title

Colorado River Wildlife Management Area Easement and Weed Monitoring and Management

Bureau of Reclamation Agreement Number:

R20PG00024

Project/Grant Period:

Start date: 10/01/2019

End date: 09/30/2024

Reporting period end date: 09/30/2023

Is this the final report? Yes _____ No x

Principal Investigator:

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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 and Browns Park National Wildlife Refuges, which are part of the Lower Green River NWR Complex (Complex). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not have an ownership interest in most of these easements. This project requires annual inspections and partnerships with the landowners and their land, which requires annual funding of about \$50,000. When and where possible the Complex will try to enhance these properties through partnerships and additional project funds. These funds are used for administration and enforcement of the easements to ensure that the landowners are abiding by the easement language.

Study Schedule:

Annual-Ongoing

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

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Accomplishment of FY 2023 Tasks and Deliverables, Discussion of Initial Findings and Shortcomings:

For the first time since 2021, a GS-7 biotech with specific responsibilities for the CRWMA was hired and entered on duty September 11, 2022. Besides easement evaluation and inspection, the position description was modified to include assistance with Ouray National Fish Hatchery and Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) operations. Funding for the position is split evenly between BOR Agreement funding and Refuge Operations funds and would not be possible without continuation of the agreement funding.

Other accomplishments included:

- Assisting Ouray NFH with fish transfer and PIT tagging during hatchery staff shortages.
- Review of easement files and maps to determine future information needs, especially as it relates to potential oil and gas development.
- Contacts with private landowners and USFWS Partners for Fish Wildlife staff to investigate the possibility of habitat restoration efforts on easements (invasive plant control).
- Administrative maps and descriptions of the easements were reviewed and updated.
- Participated in Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) and Flaming Gorge Working Group conference calls.
- Issued Special Use Permit and coordinated with NPS and USGS staff to implement the Green River monitoring plan (evaluate channel & vegetation effects of Flaming Gorge experimental releases for endangered fish).
- Continued communications with Recovery Program staff to facilitate refuge water management benefitting endangered fish species. These communications also provided input for development of the Complex Habitat Management Plan and the proposal to replace an existing refuge water control structure on Woods Bottom (Old Charley).
- Worked with Recovery Program staff to plan for and manipulate water control structures to entrain larval razorback sucker within wetland management units.

Additional noteworthy observations:

N/A

Recommendations:

In FY 2023 it is recommended this project continue to be fully funded to maintain the easement management program at its current level, at a minimum. The Complex does not have adequate funding or personnel to address additional potential floodplain enhancement projects. With additional funds the Complex could expand the role of landowner contacts, initial scoping of projects, and project planning & implementation through retention of the GS-7 biotech. This could result in better relations with the landowners and enhanced conservation of important habitat for the four Colorado River listed fish species.

Project Status:

This project is ongoing. Funding is required for all coordination and enforcement issues. There continues to be a need to monitor proposed energy development and construction activities to ensure easement terms are not violated. We have no carryover funds from FY 2023 and plan to conduct weed monitoring/control efforts on select properties (at management discretion).

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FY 2023 Budget Status

Funds Provided: \$52,801.48 (\$49,977.22 funded in FY23 and \$2,824.26 carried over from FY22)

Funds Expended: \$52,801.48

Difference: \$0

Percent of the FY 2023 work completed, and projected costs to complete: 100% tasks from SOW completed.

Recovery Program funds spent for publication charges: None

Status of Data Submission

N/A

Signed:

/s/ Rob Bundy

Principal Investigator

10/19/2023