

UPPER COLORADO RIVER ENDANGERED FISH RECOVERY PROGRAM

FY 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

PROJECT: C-6 Easement

Project Title

Colorado River Wildlife Management Area Easement and Weed Monitoring and Management

Bureau of Reclamation Agreement Number:

R18PG00023

Project/Grant Period:

Start date: 10/01/2017

End date: 09/30/2021

Reporting period end date: 09/30/2020

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 many 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 2020 Tasks and Deliverables, Discussion of Initial Findings and Shortcomings:

Letters were sent to landowners to reiterate easement obligations. Landowners were given the opportunity to inform staff of issues or changes in ownership within their easement. Point of contact information was updated.

Due to COVID-19, easement sites were viewed remotely via satellite imagery. CRWMA work in FY 2020 was handled by permanent and term staff at the Complex.

Other accomplishments included:

- Updates to CRWMA easement monitoring notebook.
- Review of old easement files and maps to determine future information needs, especially as it relates to potential oil and gas development.
- Contacts with private landowners to investigate the possibility of habitat restoration efforts on easements (invasive plant control).
- Administrative maps and descriptions of the easements were reviewed.
- Participated in Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) and Flaming Gorge Technical Working group conference calls.
- Worked with Grand Valley Audubon Society staff to discuss proposed wetland enhancement project.
- Worked with NPS and USGS staff to discuss details of the Green River monitoring plan (evaluate channel & vegetation effects of Flaming Gorge experimental releases for endangered fish).
- A term GS-6/7 Biological Technician assisted with CRWMA work.
- 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.
- Worked with Recovery Program staff to manipulate water control structures to entrain larval RZBs within management units.

Additional noteworthy observations: N/A

Recommendations:

In FY 2021 it is recommended this project continue to be funded in order 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. The end result would be 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 limited carryover funds from FY 2020 and plan to conduct weed monitoring/control efforts on select properties (at management discretion).

FY 2020 Budget Status

Funds Provided: \$60,889 (\$50,000 funded in FY20 and \$10,889 carried over from FY19)

Funds Expended: \$45,093

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Difference: \$15,796

Percent of the FY 2020 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/ Dan Schaad

Principal Investigator

11/18/20