

- I. Project Title: Land Acquisition Activities for the Habitat Restoration Program
- II. Principal Investigator: David L. Soker, Colorado River Recovery Program, 764 Horizon Drive, South Annex A, Grand Junction, Colorado 81506. E-mail: Dsoker@fws.gov
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- III. Project Summary: The purpose is to acquire interests in land from public and private landowners to restore and protect bottomland habitat. This involves acquisition planning, community involvement, establishing and monitoring acquisition procedure, acquiring land from willing landowners, and transferring that land.

During Fiscal Year 2001, completed an assessment for all habitat on the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers, researched ownership, and contacted all the remaining priority habitat landowners in the project area. Negotiated refuge review and approval procedure for acquisitions with the Service. Recommended and implemented cost saving procedure for property surveys. Continued to prepare tracts with new interested landowners for offers and tracts with outstanding offers for acquisition. Made offers on five tracts and acquired six properties in fee or easement.

- IV. Study Schedule:
 - Initial Year: FY97
 - Final Year: Unknown

- V. Relationship to RIPRAP:

GREEN RIVER ACTION PLAN: MAINSTEM
ACTIVITY II. RESTORE HABITAT

II.A.2. Acquire interest in high-priority flooded bottomland habitats

COLORADO RIVER ACTION PLAN: MAINSTEM
ACTIVITY II. RESTORE HABITAT

II.A.5. Acquire interest in high-priority flooded bottomland habitats

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

II.A.3. Acquire interest in high-priority flooded bottomland habitats

- VI. Accomplishment of FY 2001 Tasks and Deliverables, Discussion of Initial Findings and Shortcomings. All required project approvals have been received as shown below:

Land acquisition steps to complete the project:

1. Define habitat requirements/policy - completed.
2. Set geographic limits - completed.
3. National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) compliance. The environmental assessment was drafted, approved and then supplemented - completed.

4. Section 7 compliance with the Endangered Species Act - Biological Opinion was drafted and approved - completed.
5. Navigable river ownership (Green River). Researched legal rights and contacted State of Utah.
6. Negotiated real estate agency responsibility - Resolved. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) will acquire easements working closely with the Land Acquisition Coordinator. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will complete contaminant surveys, give approval for the acquisitions and accept the acquired property by transfer of administrative jurisdiction. Negotiated with Service to directly acquire easements on the Colorado River above De Beque Canyon in Mesa and Garfield Counties, Colorado. Also negotiated with Service to implement refuge review and approval of all acquisition parcels - completed.
7. Identify every priority habitat area within the project - completed
8. Research ownership for all habitat areas and identify landowners - completed. (This includes the Green River in Uintah County, Utah; the Colorado River in Mesa and Garfield Counties, Colorado; and the Gunnison River in Mesa and Delta Counties, Colorado.)
9. Draft right-of-entry agreements and get approvals - completed.
10. Draft easement document and get approvals. Document has been drafted, reviewed and approved by Program staff, Reclamation, and Service. These have also been amended and approved - completed.
11. Project ownership maps. Completed for Green River in Uintah County, Utah; Colorado River in Mesa County, Colorado; and Gunnison River in Delta County, Colorado. Ownership in other areas was determined without making acquisition maps.
12. Contact all landowners - completed
13. Non-profit participation in fee/easement conversions - This applies on an "as needed" basis when a landowner will not sell an easement, but will only sell in fee. Non-profit help to acquire one property was requested in FY 98.
14. Public involvement efforts. Throughout the project proactive public involvement efforts were taken to inform landowners and the public as a whole about the land acquisition project and the Recovery Program as a whole.
15. Procedural adjustments and changes in policy are implemented on a continual basis to improve communication between the Program and the participating agencies and make the acquisition process more efficient and successful.

VII. Recommendations:

1. Complete acquisitions for properties with existing offers.
2. Process additional property for an offer where the landowner is willing to consider acquisition.
3. Continue to develop alternatives to speed up the acquisition process.
4. Develop and strengthen partnerships with local government and gravel industry leaders to protect habitat.

VIII. Project Status: On track and on going.

The complexity and amount of time required to conduct land acquisitions for habitat has been underestimated from the beginning of this project. Project approvals that were required to begin acquisition were not received until the middle of FY 1998. The amount of effort required to define the project, establish policy, set up interagency coordination, develop community awareness and support, and obtain project approvals has been extensive and continues to evolve. This coupled with the need to identify potential habitat, find willing landowners, study each individual property for suitability, prepare them for acquisition, and acquire those properties is complicated and time consuming out of necessity. This considerable effort that has been invested to restore and protect habitat through land acquisitions is now being realized through successful easement agreements.

IX. FY 2001 Budget Status

- A. Funds Provided: \$
- B. Funds Expended: \$1,003,662*
- C. Difference:
- D. Percent of the FY 2001 work completed, and projected costs to complete:
Land acquisition depends on willing sellers. Our success, and therefore the estimated project costs in the future, depends on the numbers of landowners that accept our offers to acquire their property. There are more than enough potential acquisitions to obligate all current available funding, so there is no surplus funding.
- E. Recovery Program funds spent for publication charges: None

*** Estimated because the internet connection is down.**

X. Status of Data Submission: Not Applicable

XI. Signed: David L. Soker December 17, 2001
Principal Investigator Date