

I. Project Title: Colorado River Wildlife Management Area Easement and Weed Monitoring and Management

II. Principal Investigator(s):
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III. 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 (Refuge), 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 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.

IV. Study Schedule: Annual, ongoing

V. 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.

VI. Accomplishment of FY 2016 Tasks and Deliverables, Discussion of Initial Findings and Shortcomings:

The Refuge contacted landowners to prepare them for site inspections and reiterated easement obligations. Landowners were given the opportunity to inform the Refuge of any potential issues within their easement. Easement sites were visited via ground transportation and on foot. We evaluated the easement areas and confirmed that there were no violations of easement conditions.

Bio Science Tech. positions at both Browns Park NWR and Ouray NWR continued to assist with CRWMA work in FY 2016.

Other accomplishments included:

- Revision/update of CRWMA easement monitoring notebook.
- Review of old easement files and maps to determine future information needs
- Mapping of parcels through use of GPS units and GIS software. Maps of these areas are improving; more accurate maps will improve our ability to effectively monitor these areas. This is a work in progress.
- Installation of two interpretive panels for the FWS-owned Grand Junction Pipe parcel. Panels were purchased through contract with Formations Inc. (Contract #F11PC00288, \$15,000) and installed by Ouray and Browns Park staff in July.
- A Scope of Work was prepared to remove 8.5 acres of salt cedar and Russian olive trees on the Grand Junction Pipe parcel.
- Increased contacts with private landowners to investigate the possibility of habitat restoration efforts on additional parcels (invasive control, possible plantings of native riparian plants).
- Purchase of necessary equipment to complete work listed above.
- Administrative maps and descriptions of the easements were reviewed.

VII. Recommendations:

In FY 2017 it is recommended this project be fully funded in order to continue the easement management program at its current level, at a minimum. The Refuge does not have adequate funding or personnel to address additional potential floodplain enhancement projects. With additional funds the Refuge 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 endangered fish species.

VIII. 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 additional carryover funds from FY 16 and plan to conduct weed monitoring/control efforts on select properties.

