

COLORADO RIVER RECOVERY PROGRAM
FY 2018 ANNUAL PROJECT REPORT

RECOVERY PROGRAM
PROJECT NUMBER: C-6 Easement

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

II. Bureau of Reclamation Agreement Number: R18PG00023
Project/Grant Period: Start date: 10/01/2017
End date: 09/30/2021
Reporting period end date: 09/30/2018
Is this the final report? Yes _____ No X

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 (Refuge), which is 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.

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

VII. Accomplishment of FY 2018 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.

CRWMA work in FY 2018 was handled by permanent staff at Ouray and Browns Park NWRs.

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.
- A Scope of Work was prepared to remove 8.5 acres of salt cedar and Russian olive trees on the Grand Junction Pipe parcel in FY 2016 (these plans were put on hold in FY 2018 due to staff shortages).
- Limited contacts with private landowners to investigate the possibility of habitat restoration efforts on additional parcels (invasive control, possible plantings of native riparian plants) due to staff shortages
- Administrative maps and descriptions of the easements were reviewed.
- Major acquisitions included purchase of valve parts to supply water to wetland impoundments in Sheppard Bottom and road gravel to replace what was lost due to construction work associated with the Sheppard Bottom CRI project.
- Participated in Colorado River Recovery Program and Flaming Gorge Technical Working group conference calls.
- Numerous communications conducted with RO/Recovery Program staff in an attempt to recruit a permanent or term GS-6/7 Biological Technician to conduct CRWMA work. This position should be filled in FY 2019

VIII. Additional noteworthy observations: N/A

IX. Recommendations:

In FY 2019 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 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.

X. Project Status:

This project is ongoing. Funding is required for all coordination and enforcement issues.

