

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

An Introduction to the Conservation Plan

Prepared by Christopher S. Harris,
Colorado River Board of California
Updated by Lesley Fitzpatrick, USFWS



Purpose

- Provide an overview of the content of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program Conservation Plan
- Discuss the costs of the program
- Review the schedule for completion
- Answer questions



California Black Rail

Colorado River Basin





LCR Multi-Species Conservation Program

Planning Area:

Functionally,
Lake Mead to
SIB (historic
floodplain)



Introduction

- History of Program development
- ESA coverage under sections 7 & 10
- Provides avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures
- Benefits for both human and wildlife populations dependent on the LCR

LCR MSCP Participants

- **Broad cross-section of interests representing:**
 - Department of the Interior (USBR, USFWS, BLM, NPS, and BIA)
 - Department of Energy (Western Area Power Administration)
 - Native American Tribes (6 tribes along the river)
 - State Agencies in Arizona, California, and Nevada (Water, Power, and Game & Fish)
 - Colorado River Water and Power providers in the three states
 - Environmental organizations
 - County, City, and general public representatives

LCR MSCP Goals & Objectives

- Conserve habitat and work toward recovery of listed species
- Attempt to reduce the likelihood of additional species listings
- Accommodate current water diversions and power production and optimize opportunities for future water and power resources development

Goals & Objectives (cont.)

- Provide a 50-year coordinated and comprehensive species-conservation and habitat-management prescription for the Lower Colorado River planning area
- Provide the basis for incidental take authorizations pursuant to the Federal Endangered Species Act under section 7 & section 10 for 26 covered species

Covered Actions

- The delivery, diversion, and return flow of up to 7.5 MAF/year, plus any surpluses or unused apportionment, as the Secretary of Interior may determine;
- The future transfers and changes in points-of-diversion of up to 1.574 MAF/year;
- Additional conversion of riparian habitat to agricultural land on Indian reservations;
- Operation and maintenance of existing facilities and associated activities, both flow and non-flow-related, all of which have been identified and approved by the MSCP Steering Committee and analyzed in the Conservation Plan; and
- Implementation of the Conservation Plan.

Conservation Plan

- Data driven and Science-based
- If data were not available, “worst-case” assumptions were made
- Effects of “covered activities” on “covered species” analyzed in detail
- Conservation Plan mitigates impacts and contributes to the recovery of listed species – exceeds ESA standards

Conservation Plan (cont.)

- Conservation opportunity areas are intended to establish partnerships with private, Tribal, State, and Federal landowners and managers to acquire and restore habitats
- Conservation measures are scheduled to be in place prior to adverse consequences of the covered actions occurring
- Reduce the risks and consequences of wildfire within the planning area

Elements of the Conservation Plan

- Creation and restoration of native wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitats
- Implementation of measures to maintain and enhance existing habitats
- Native fish population enhancement
- Implementation of species-specific conservation measures
- Implementation of avoidance and minimization measures
- Implementation of long-term monitoring & research activities
- Implementation of adaptive management

Habitat Creation

Land Cover Type	Acres Affected	Acres To Be Created
Cottonwood-Willow	2,141	5,940
Mesquite	590	1,320
Marsh	284	512
Backwaters	444	360
TOTALS	3,459	8,132

Conservation Area Site Design

- Habitat will be created in patches of optimal sizes
- Designed to create an “integrated mosaic,” to approximate historical vegetation conditions
- Habitat restoration may involve conversion of agricultural lands to native riparian and marsh habitats
- As necessary, incorporate buffer areas
- Minimize construction of new infrastructure

Riparian Habitat Restoration



Marsh Restoration



Backwater Restoration



Maintenance of Existing Habitat

- \$25,000,000 Fund – Up front in process, used to fund actions to avoid impacts to existing habitats within the planning area
- Available to Land Managers with consent of USFWS, Reclamation, and State participants



Native Fish Proposal

SPECIES	ACTIVITY
Razorback Sucker	660,000 fish Over 50-year period
Bonytail	620,000 fish Over 50-year period
Humpback Chub	\$10,000/year to GCDAMP For 50 years
Flannelmouth Sucker	\$80,000/5 years



Avoidance & Minimization Measures

- Habitat creation/restoration would avoid removing existing habitat
- Impacts at Topock Marsh minimized by controlling water surface elevations
- Vegetation management would avoid avian breeding seasons
- Use of herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers would be minimized, and buffers used as appropriate

Monitoring & Research Elements

- **M&R Elements include:**
 - **System Monitoring**
 - **Species Monitoring & Research**
 - **Restoration Technology Research**
 - **Post-development Monitoring**
 - **Development and management of a comprehensive database**

Adaptive Management

- Adaptive Management Elements include:
 - Measure effectiveness of Conservation Measures
 - As need arises, propose alternative Conservation Measures
 - Address changed or unforeseen circumstances
 - Consistency with relevant existing and future USFWS Recovery Plans

Implementation Costs

- Proposed habitat restoration on a 30-year build-out schedule
- Habitat maintenance, monitoring, research, and adaptive management costs are included over 50-year period
- Estimated costs in 2003 dollars is \$620 million
- Funding for program: 50% Federal and 50% from State partners as described in Implementing Agreement (IA)

Proposed Governance Structure

- Governance described in Funding and Management Agreement (FMA)
- USBR-LC to provide staff and management of annual LCR MSCP implementation
- “Steering Committee” comprised of stakeholders will assist USBR in developing annual work plans, budgets, monitoring and research, and in utilizing adaptive management

Recent Activities

- Documents distributed to public on June 18, 2004
- Comments received by August 18, 2004
- Cost-share agreements signed in September 2004
- Final Documents distributed on December 17, 2004

Completion Schedule

- Joint Record of Decision will be signed on April 4, 2005
- Federal agencies and State permit applicants will sign the IA and FMA and provide the signed documents to USFWS
- USFWS will issue the section 10(a)(1)(B) permit shortly after the receipt of the final signed IA and FMA.

Conclusion

- The LCR MSCP is a unique program that required all participants to work closely together to achieve the needs of both people and wildlife. This cooperative atmosphere enabled the development of a comprehensive Conservation Plan and provided 50-year certainty for deliveries of water and power from the LCR to Arizona, California, and Nevada.
- Implementation of the Conservation Plan will continue this important relationship to ensure the benefits of the Conservation Plan are realized.



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