

Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance Project Proposal

Project name:

Highway 60 North Fuel Reduction and Noxious Species Extraction Project

Project type(s) (Initial treatment, re-treatment, re-vegetation):

The project is a combination of initial treatment and re-treatment

Project proponent (SWCD):

Socorro SWCD

Project location (city, county, nearest intersection, etc.):

Town: Between and east of communities of Bernardo and Abeytas, NM

County: Socorro County

Nearest intersection: U.S. Highway 60, east of I-25 and west of NM Highway 304. Main entrance for the project start is located west of Rio Grande, east of the San Francisco Drain, north of Hwy 60. Please see attached map of the project area with the treatment delineated.

Landowner(s):

For private land: Has the landowner(s) submitted an application form (for example, State Forestry's Landowner Request for Assistance Form) for this project?

n/a

For public/tribal land: Does the landowner or land management agency support this project?
Has the landowner or land management agency formally requested assistance for this project?

The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) is the owner/land management agency of the proposed project site. Socorro SWCD approached the MRGCD to collaborate on the project, and the MRGCD agreed to the cooperation and assistance with this project to leverage funds to reduce noxious weed species in the Middle Rio Grande Bosque.

* landowner (MRGCD) can support up to \$10,000 (10% GRGWA requirement for Water Trust Board loan fee)

How is this site accessed?

Is access controlled? (Is there a locked gate or will we need to make arrangements with the landowner for access?)

The project area is located west of the Rio Grande, east of the MRGCD access ditch road (San Francisco Drain), north of NM Hwy 60. All areas are controlled by locked gates and arrangements can easily be made for access to the project site.

Project objective(s) (This is something that is specific and measurable; i.e., remove and control all salt cedar and Russian olive from within project boundary):

The objective of this *Highway 60 North Fuel Reduction and Noxious Species Extraction Project* is the removal and eradication of Salt cedar (*Tamarisk spp.*) and other invasive weed species within the proposed site. By removing this species, two desired developmental and improvement outcomes will be accomplished. One is the primary outcome of the reduction of fuel load for wild fires that are prevalent in the area. Second is the expected benefit to wildlife habitat and Bosque health in this region by enhancing and restoring riparian area along the Rio Grande.

Size of project (If this project includes multiple project types, indicate the size of each type. For example, the project may have 23 acres of initial treatment and 10 acres of re-treatment. The treatments must also be delineated on an attached map.):

***All areas are approximate.** Please see attached map for delineated areas. All acreage totals are subject to change with RFP bid. Scope of project shows two phases, one for the current proposal, two for additional areas as more monies become available and MRGCD has additional funds for the extraction process. Phase II area shows projection of work to complete in the future or in the next funding cycle (year 2).

Phase I- Starts at Hwy 60, at the MRGCD gate, east of the river, and continues north.

Initial treatment: 42 acres.

Re-treatment: 220 acres.

Total acres: 262 acres.

Phase II- starts where Phase 1 ends and continues north.

Initial treatment: 40 acres.

Re-treatment: 130 acres.

Total acres: 170 acres.

Current site description: Include the following: ecosystem type (riparian, upland, wetland), dominant vegetation, soils, hydrology, wildlife (if known), current land use, infrastructure within the project area (including fences and jetty jacks), and current problem areas or areas of concern (erosion issues, noxious weeds, etc.).

The proposed project site is a riparian-wetland ecosystem. The following description outlines the proposed project.

Soils: USGS soil code 60, Typic Ustifluent, 0-2% slope.

Hydrology: Flow in the Rio Grande is low due to drought conditions which have resulted in a lack of snowmelt runoff and reduced storage of water in upstream reservoirs.

Currently (June 2012) discharge in the Rio Grande at Rio Grande Floodway near Bernardo, NM (USGS Gauge 08332010) remains on average \pm 100 cfs. The annual surface water statistics for

the river are below 600 cfs from before the end of the previous irrigation season (1 November) throughout the calendar year. Summer monsoons, usually present in late July through August, may provide brief and minimal relief to the drought conditions.

Wildlife: Animals that are found in this region include but are not limited to: raccoons, pheasants, hawks, owls, quail and various songbirds. Occasional sightings occur of elk, mule deer and bobcat. The river area also has beavers and various amphibians and reptiles that call it home.

Current Land use: Riparian habitat for wildlife and migratory bird flyway, permitted wood gathering by MRGCD.

Infrastructure: Within the project area, jetty jacks are found at varying distances, running primarily perpendicular from the river to and within the Bosque.

Current condition: Proposed project area is a mix of vegetation and densities, both living and dead. Due to wild fires, previous areas of cottonwood galleries are dense with Salt cedar and some Russian olive trees. In burned re-treatment areas, Cottonwoods have basal re-growth, and other native species such as wolfberry, native grasses, forbes and other shrubs can be found. These natives are found competing with invasive weed re-growth of Salt cedar, Russian olive, Perennial Pepperweed and other noxious species.

If this is a re-treatment or re-vegetation project, describe work that has been done previously and when it was completed:

Within the last 4-5 years (2007 -2012) approximately 40 acres inside the retreatment vicinity had Salt cedar extracted and piled as a fuel break area. Local residents were provided the opportunity to obtain and remove wood for home/personal use. Restoration efforts included native plant seedling establishment. The 2003 wildfire and subsequent other wildfires in the following years have killed established galleries of Cottonwood trees in the Bosque, as well a Salt cedar and other species. It is noted that within burned areas, Cottonwoods are re-establishing themselves, as well as other native and non-native species. In much of the burned area, the faster growing Salt cedar is the dominant species and many areas are monotypic.

Desired site condition (Describe the site following treatment. Include potential revegetation, both natural and planted):

The desired site condition is a riparian-wetland habitat mosaic that is predominately native plant species (approximately 75- 80% natives is acceptable) with the characteristics of the understory having a low or reduced fuel load. The access for fire suppression and improving admission to the Bosque for emergency vehicle operations is a beneficial outcome.

Justification (Why is this project needed?):

One of the main justifications of this Middle Rio Grande watershed project includes fire protection for the Bosque and homes nearby. The reduction of fuel load to the Bosque-Urban interface by the removal of noxious, invasive species; primarily Salt cedar (*Tamarisk spp.*) lessens the catastrophic high fire risk. This vicinity of the watershed has had several fires in the last decade (2002 to 2012). Acres of native Cottonwood and riparian habitat have been destroyed due to the thick, fast growing habit of the understory of Salt cedar. The mechanical removal of salt cedar had been completed in many areas but re-treatment is necessary to improve habitat and reduce fire threat from Salt cedar resprouts.

Is this project adjacent or near previous restoration projects?

If yes, identify previous projects and the geographical relationship to the proposed project.

The project area has had previous fuel reduction treatments in the northern and southern sections of the proposed site. The proposed project area lies within two previously extracted, (completed by the MRGCD), south of the Valencia County. The MRGCD completed a noxious tree removal project within the last 4-5 years on approximately 40 acres. The Socorro SWCD (recently in late winter 2010) using capital outlay monies, oversaw and coordinated the extraction of 101 acres of Salt cedar at the NM Game and Fish Ladd S. Gordon Game Refuge, at Hwy 60, directly to the south and west of project proposed site entrance.

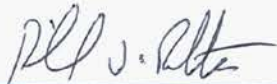
Is there any baseline data (vegetation, ground water monitoring, etc.) available for this site?

If yes, describe what is available and how the information can be accessed.

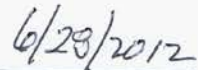
The MRGCD has limited ground water monitoring information from river studies. Information can be accessed through the MRGCD. Additionally the MRGCD has GIS maps available at: <http://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=ca4396b6d0ba496c84a29cf033ca43ad>

How and by whom will the project be maintained?

The MRGCD will be responsible for maintaining the project site with MRGCD approved herbicide re-treatment program and/or extraction practices.



SWCD board member/representative signature



date

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Typical view of Bosque, looking east from San Francisco drain road, at the northern section of Phase II. Note size, growth variance and dominance of Salt cedar from different wildfire events. Bottom picture, in background shows view of native Cottonwood establishment amongst Salt cedar. June 2012.



Socorro SWCD Proposed Treatment Area

