

RESTORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE RIO GRANDE CANALIZATION PROJECT: PROJECT BRIEF JUNE 2009 – MAY 2016

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION, U.S. SECTION

RESTORING THE RIO GRANDE

BACKGROUND: The Record of Decision

In 1999, the International Boundary and Water Commission, U.S. Section (USIBWC) began a public scoping and consultation process to develop alternatives for an Environmental Impact Statement on river management of the Rio Grande Canalization Project

(RGCP), the 105-mile project area from the Percha Dam near Arrey, NM downstream to the American Diversion Dam in El Paso, TX. In

June 2009, after ten years of discussions with the public and stakeholders, the USIBWC signed the Record of Decision (ROD) on River Management Alternatives for the RGCP. The ROD committed the USIBWC to continuing the agency's mission of water delivery, flood control

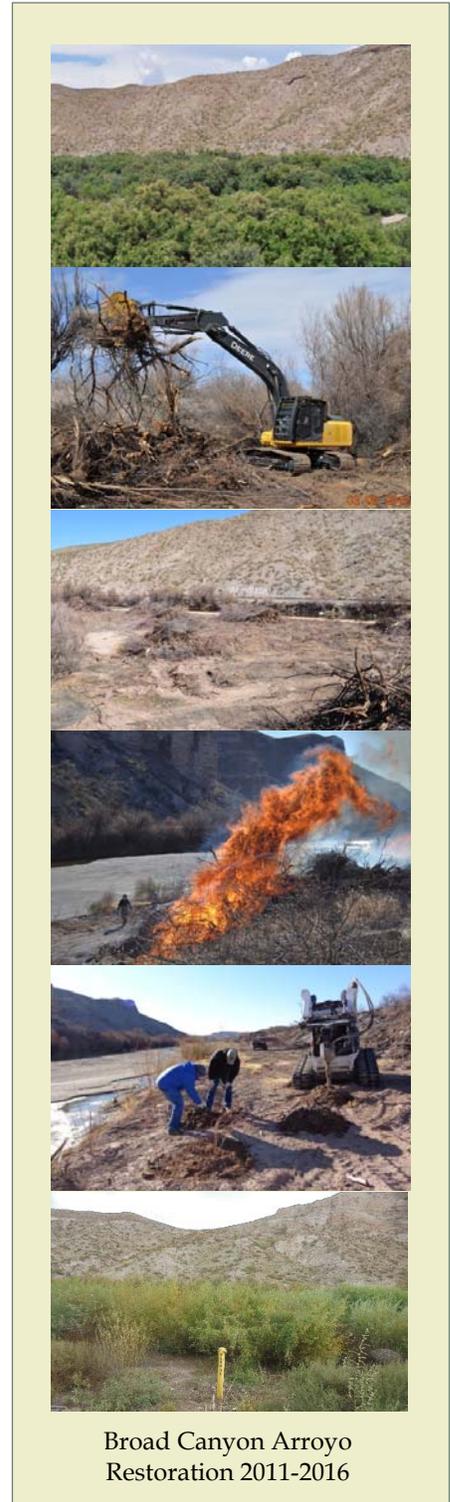
and maintaining flood capacity while changing management practices of the Rio Grande corridor. New management practices would now include implementation of a variety of environmental improvements through the year 2019, including:

- implementing 30 habitat restoration sites which would restore about 550 acres of 12 habitat types,
 - phasing out grazing leases,
 - ceasing floodplain mowing on almost 2,000 acres to develop managed grasslands,
 - updating the river management plan,
- evaluating alternative channel maintenance activities,
- resurveying river cross sections, and
- developing an environmental water transactions program to acquire water rights.

The 2009 Record of Decision committed the USIBWC to implementing about 550 acres of habitat restoration and 2,000 acres of managed grasslands along the Rio Grande in Lower New Mexico and West Texas.



*On Right: Broad Canyon Arroyo Restoration:
From top:
Dense saltcedar August 2011;
Saltcedar excavation March 2012;
Post saltcedar excavation March 2012;
Prescribed burns of saltcedar debris piles January 2013;
Planting along the river banks February 2013; and
Growing willow trees August 2015.*



Broad Canyon Arroyo
Restoration 2011-2016

Implementation: First 7 Years

In the first 7 years of ROD Implementation, the USIBWC and its partners have completed the following:

Restoration Work

- Completed base studies for implementation
- From 2011 to 2016, planted almost over 27,000 trees and over 1,000 longstem riparian shrubs and treated or excavated over 360 acres of saltcedar on the first 11 restoration sites. Work was done by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through an Interagency Agreement, and by USIBWC contractors.
- Installed 55 shallow groundwater monitoring wells at 21 sites.
- Began a restoration site monitoring program.

From 2011 to 2016, USIBWC and its partners have planted over 27,000 native trees and over 1,000 longstem shrubs on 11 restoration sites totaling 346.7 acres.

Environmental Water Transaction Program

- Developed an Environmental Water Transaction Program (EWTP) through a Public-Private partnership with USFWS, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Audubon New Mexico, and the Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID). The EWTP established rules and procedures for the USIBWC to acquire water rights for restoration sites, through a market-based voluntary program.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with EBID to work collaboratively on the EWTP.
- EBID passed a policy in 2013 that authorizes use of EBID-administered water for native vegetation on restoration sites.
- Purchased 5.6 acres of surface water rights and leased supplemental water for the same site
- Irrigated the Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8 restoration site four times from 2014 to 2015.

Other Implementation Work

- Finalized portions of the River Management Plan; working with stakeholders to finalize the draft Channel Maintenance Plan.
- Consulted with the USFWS under the Endangered Species Act on possible impacts to the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher. The USFWS issued a Biological and Conference Opinion in August 2012, requiring the USIBWC to maintain 53.5 acres of flycatcher habitat.
- Secured exclusion of the Lower Rio Grande from designation as critical habitat for the flycatcher because of USIBWC's commitment to a flycatcher management plan, water rights acquisition, and restoration.
- Signed an Interagency Agreement with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to conduct flycatcher surveys.
- The USIBWC continues to coordinate with stakeholders (environmental groups, irrigation districts, and elected officials) through an Implementation Committee.
- Concluded a sediment transport study that evaluated alternatives to channel maintenance.

Future Implementation: The Next 3 Years

- In the next 3 years, the USIBWC anticipates restoring more restoration sites, purchasing up to 475 acres of water rights, and finalizing the Channel Maintenance Plan to complete ROD requirements.

For more information, call 915-832-4701 or visit http://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/canalization_eis.html



Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8 Restoration Work: From top: Tree planting February 2012; Measuring groundwater levels July 2013; Blooming cottonwoods & willows May 2014; Ceremony at first irrigation June 2014; Historic first irrigation June 2014; Habitat after 4 irrigation events Oct 2015.