Ten-Year Implementation of the Record of Decision for the Rio Grande Canalization Flood Control Project and Future Management

Gilbert Anaya
International Boundary and Water Commission, U.S. Section

Rio Grande Citizens Forum July 2019
Rio Grande Canalization Flood Control Project

Canalization Project constructed in early 1940s

- ~ 105 miles
- Percha Dam to American Dam
- Rectified river channel within a leveed floodway
- To facilitate deliveries under the 1906 Convention with Mexico
- To control floods
Rio Grande Canalization Flood Control Project Record of Decision

USIBWC signed Record of Decision (ROD) June 2009 with a 10-year timeline

- Long term management of the river corridor
- Mission requirements (water delivery, flood control)
- Included environmental measures, such as
  - Habitat restoration - 550 acres
  - Environmental Water Transaction Program
  - Establishing areas of managed grasslands
Stakeholder involvement since 1999
- ROD Implementation meetings regularly scheduled
- Participants include:
  - Irrigation districts
  - Local Elected Officials
  - Environmental Groups
  - Federal agencies (Reclamation, USFWS, USACE)
  - USIBWC staff in Engineering, Environmental, and Operations divisions
Habitat Restoration

- 30 conceptual sites totaling 550 acres with 12 sites for endangered flycatcher
- Target habitats:
  - Aquatic
  - Open riparian woodland
  - Riparian woodland
  - Riparian forest
  - Dense riparian shrub
  - Riparian savanna
  - Saltgrass meadow
  - Screwbean mesquite

- ACTUAL: 22 sites totaling 508 acres
- 12 restoration sites targeting 95 acres of flycatcher breeding habitat
- Aquatic habitat sites are under evaluation
Restoration Accomplishments 2009 to 2019

- **Cooperative Agreements** with USFWS, NM State Parks, EBID, USBR
- 22 sites underway (**508 acres**)  
  - 9 by USFWS  
  - 13 by USIBWC environmental contractors  
- Planted **over 109,000 trees and shrubs** 2011-2019  
- 500+ acres of saltcedar cleared  
- 4 **prescribed burns** for saltcedar debris piles  
- 55 shallow groundwater monitoring wells installed  
- **Monitoring protocol** established  
- Acquired almost 48 acres of EBID-administered surface water rights  
- **Irrigated 5 restoration sites** (11 times at LEL WW8 site in Las Cruces 2014 to 2018, twice at Mesilla East, twice at Crow Canyon B, once at Trujillo, and once at Yeso East)
Collaboration for Restoration Work

- Partnership with USFWS San Andres NWR to implement 9 sites targeting endangered species habitat
Collaboration on Biological Surveys

- USIBWC and Reclamation collect threatened and endangered species and habitat surveys under an agreement.
Collaboration
Irrigation Districts

- Finalized a Memorandum of Understanding in 2013 with the Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) to work together to implement the EWTP
- In 2013, EBID Board passed a policy to classify irrigation of restoration sites as agriculture
- In summer 2014, EBID Board approved first transfers of water rights to USIBWC lands
- October 2017 USIBWC closed on acquisition of 41.75 acres of EBID suspended water rights
- Worked under the MOU to construct irrigation infrastructure at several sites
- Working with EPCWID#1
- Worked with Districts on channel maintenance and river management plan
Broad Canyon Arroyo Site

Radium Springs, NM
October 2015 new trees on north terrace
June 2018 New planting along Broad Canyon Arroyo
May 2019 New trees along Broad Canyon Arroyo
Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8 Restoration Site
Las Cruces, NM
Irrigation of USIBWC restoration site June 2014
Biological Opinion

- USIBWC consulted with USFWS under Endangered Species Act Section 7 in 2011-2012
  - 2012 Biological Opinion required establishment of 53.5 acres of flycatcher habitat
- USIBWC re-consulted after the 2016 River Management Plan was finalized with channel maintenance plan
  - 2017 BO allows USIBWC to remove up to 50 acres of flycatcher habitat (ex: channel islands) as long as no net loss of habitat within RGCP, restoration work continues, and vegetation from islands with suitable breeding is moved to the bank or restoration sites
Willows on 4 acres of islands in Sunland Park and Country Club bridges were salvaged by USIBWC restoration contractors Jan-Feb 2018 and transplanted at 5 restoration sites in Sunland Park and El Paso.
Aquatic Habitat

- USIBWC is currently working with contractors to evaluate locations for aquatic habitat (ex below Courchesne Bridge)
- Draft EA is open for public comments
- Several sites have potential to create or enhance wetlands and other sites have potential to create fish habitat
Channel Maintenance Study

- Completed Channel Maintenance Alternatives Study 2015
- Construction of Sediment Basins at Thurman I and II completed May 2019

Thurman I sediment basin June 2019
Channel Maintenance Activities

- Surveyed 160 cross sections 2017 with plans to update models
- Initiated the Sediment Control Initiative Federal Workgroup
- Worked with stakeholders to establish priority areas for sediment excavation
- Contracted removal of sediment in FY19
- During the 2018-2019 non-irrigation season, USIBWC removed more sediment than we have in decades (over 420,000 CY)
- USIBWC is working with regulatory agencies on permitting requirements and best management practices to minimize impacts from sediment removal
River Management Plan

- River Management Plan incorporates all commitments from the ROD
- RMP describes:
  - Restoration work
  - Environmental water transaction program
  - floodplain management
  - endangered species management
  - mow/ no mow areas
  - levee maintenance and other operations
  - channel maintenance work
- Finalized DEC 2016, and draft update in Nov 2018 will be finalized late 2019

https://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/Project_Documentation.html
Final ROD report

- Final Report on the Ten-Year Implementation of the Record of Decision 2009 to 2019
- Includes more photos of restoration activities and documents in more detail the previous topics
- [https://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/Project_Documentation.html](https://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/Project_Documentation.html)
Future Work

• Draft Environmental Assessment for **Aquatic Habitat**
  • Comments due **July 22, 2019**
  • USIBWC will implement 2 to 4 sites targeting creation of aquatic habitat

• Draft Environmental Assessment for **River Management Plan**
  • Comments due **August 5, 2019**
  • USIBWC will continue implementation of RMP, as well as other alternatives for channel maintenance, restoration, and recreation.
For More Information:

http://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/canalization_eis.html

Contact

Elizabeth Verdecchia, Natural Resources Specialist
915-832-4701, elizabeth.verdecchia@ibwc.gov