

HABITAT RESTORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE RIO GRANDE CANALIZATION PROJECT: SUMMARY JUNE 2009 – SEPTEMBER 2022

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 flood control project from Percha Dam near Arrey, NM downstream to 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

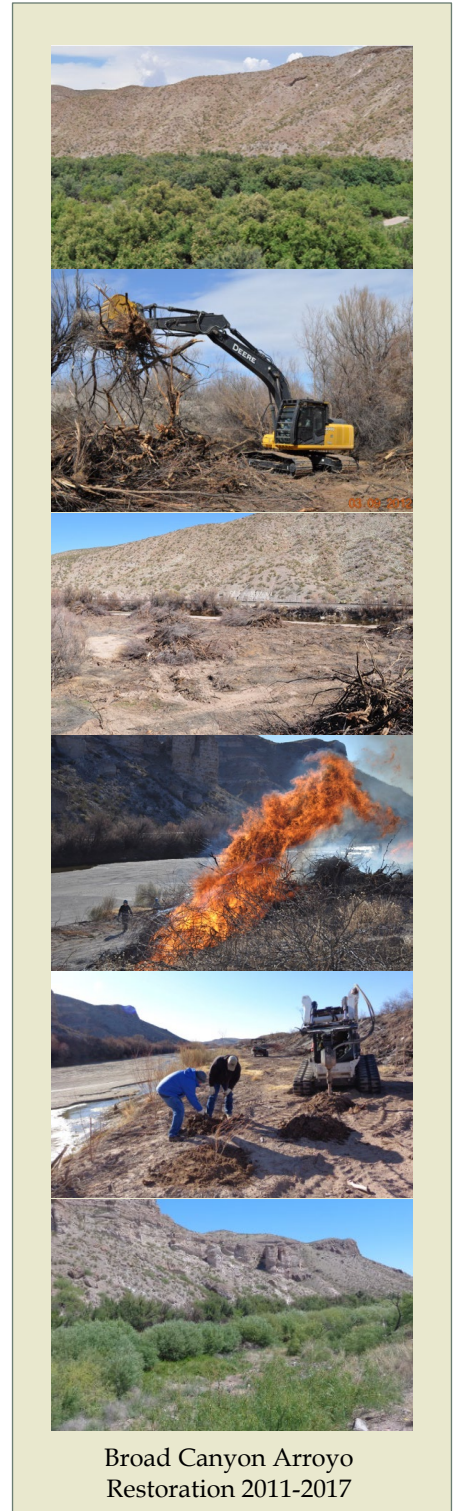
The 2009 Record of Decision committed the USIBWC to implementing about 550 acres of habitat restoration and 2,000 acres of managed grasslands along the Rio Grande in Lower New Mexico and West Texas.

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

- implementing up to 30 habitat restoration sites which would restore about 550 acres of 12 habitat types,
 - phasing out grazing leases,
 - ceasing mowing on almost 2,000 acres of floodplain 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 or lease water rights.



*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 May 2017.*



Broad Canyon Arroyo
Restoration 2011-2017

Implementation

From 2009 to 2022, the USIBWC and its partners completed the following:

Restoration Work

- Conducted baseline studies
- Implemented 22 riparian habitat sites on 508 acres. Work was done by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), through an Interagency Agreement, and by contractors.
- Planted over 110,000 native trees and nearly 12,000 riparian shrubs.
- Treated or excavated over 800 acres of saltcedar on restoration sites and No Mow Zones; eliminated debris with mulching, hauling, or fires.
- Installed 55 shallow groundwater monitoring wells at 21 sites and implemented a restoration site and groundwater monitoring program.

From 2009 to 2019, USIBWC planted nearly 123,000 native trees and shrubs on 22 riparian restoration sites totaling 508 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 or lease 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 Board passed a policy in 2013 that authorizes use of EBID-administered water for native vegetation on restoration sites.
- Purchased 47.4 acres of surface water rights and worked on irrigation plans and infrastructure at several restoration sites.
- Irrigated the first site, Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8, in 2014.
- Worked with EBID to construct irrigation infrastructure at four new sites.
- USIBWC now irrigates all five sites annually.

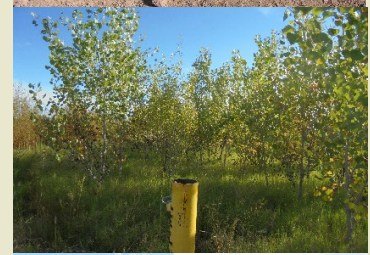
Other Implementation Work

- Created the River Management Plan, covering channel maintenance and monitoring, endangered species management, floodplain management, and designation of 1,700 acres of No Mow areas.
- Consulted with the USFWS on possible impacts to threatened and endangered species. The USFWS issued a Biological and Conference Opinion in August 2012 and an updated Biological Opinion in 2017.
- Collaborated with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to conduct ongoing annual surveys of threatened and endangered species.
- Concluded a sediment transport study that evaluated alternatives to channel maintenance. Contracted the design of two pilot project sediment basins on the Thurman I and II Arroyos in Hatch, NM.
- USIBWC continues to coordinate with stakeholders (environmental groups, irrigation districts, federal agencies, and elected officials).
- Evaluated potential aquatic habitat restoration projects in 2021.
- Completed a report on the Ten-Year implementation of the ROD.

Future Implementation

- In the upcoming years, the USIBWC anticipates continuing irrigation and monitoring of restoration sites, assessing maintenance needs of habitat sites, implementing aquatic habitat projects, purchasing or leasing additional water rights, and updating the River Management Plan.

For more information, call Elizabeth Verdecchia at 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; Historic first irrigation June 2014; Habitat after 4 irrigation events Oct 2015; Habitat after 9 irrigation events, Sept 2017.