

**Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program  
San Acacia Ad Hoc Work Group Meeting**

4 November 2010 – 9:00am – 4:00 PM

**Bosque Del Apache Wildlife Refuge, San Antonio NM**

**Action Items**

- Tetra Tech will finalize the September 23<sup>rd</sup> SAR meeting notes after incorporating Amy Louise's comments and changes.
- Yasmeen Najmi will make a bullet list of actions that were identified in the San Acacia work shop (*continued from September 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting*).
- Robert Padilla will schedule a Reclamation conference room for the SAR work group meeting on December 2<sup>nd</sup> from 12:30pm to 3:30pm (*continued from September 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting*).
- Terina Perez will forward the SAR work group request for an MPT summary presentation of the FY10 monitoring efforts and results.
- Terina Perez will raise the questions "will the 'internal' MPT monitoring efforts be extended to the San Acacia Reach? What would the potential timeframe(s) be?" to the MPT work group.

**Meeting Summary**

- Gina Dello Russo brought the meeting to order and introductions were made. Several Program Management Team (PMT) members were in attendance as were members of the Public Information and Outreach (PIO) work group. A total of 12 people attended the field tour.
- Prior to the site visits, attendees addressed general work group business. All action items were completed as assigned with the exception of 2 with unknown status; the 2 action items will be continued over to next month. The September 23<sup>rd</sup> notes will be finalized with the incorporation of the PMT liaison's comments/changes.
  - In the Program updates, it was shared that the EC will be meeting on Thursday November 18<sup>th</sup>; the draft agenda for this meeting is not available yet. EC members will be meeting with the Adaptive Management Plan contractors for individual interviews at the end of November. The CC will be meeting Wednesday of next week to continue discussing the FY11 budgeting spreadsheet. The PMT will be presenting the work group recommended activities priorities for CC consideration and/or approval. The CC also continues to work on the Long-term Plan (LTP). The notes from the Adaptive Management workshop (October 13<sup>th</sup>) are not available yet. The Database Management System (DBMS) work group continues to collect information for inclusion in the database - only a few outstanding items remain. The Monitoring Plan Team (MPT) has been in the field completing the low intensity vegetation monitoring for this year. There has also been some fish monitoring as well. The report for the monitoring efforts is expected next month. The Population Habitat Viability Analysis (PHVA) work group met last week. The URGWOM tech team will be making final updates (to the initial model conditions – to reflect the most current 2010 conditions) and then the model will be considered final. Within the next month, the modelers will be running the pre-ESA water management and 2003

BiOp All Tools runs to inform the BA development. The Population Viability Analysis (PVA) work group will not be meeting again until early December; in the mean time, the PVA modelers will be completing the first portions of their model runs for the work group to review and discuss.

- Attendees then began the site visits.
  - Stop #1: Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge Tour Loop – for a brief history on the refuge
  - Stop #2: ET Transition Towers Project – funded through the Collaborative Program - for a distance glimpse of the tower located on treated land with a brief project description, vegetation response, channel formation, and a hike to the river
  - Stop #3: Channel Widening Project – for a brief discussion of the project and visual of the widened and relocated river
  - -----Lunch & Drive to East Side of River -----
  - Stop #4: Wetlands – for a brief discussion and description of the wetlands that are a key habitat
  - Stop #5: River Mile 83 – for a view of the project site and description of this current project
  - Stop #6: Rhodes' Property – for a visit and description of this 350 acre privately owned property where salt cedar has been removed, flycatcher habitat restored, Pecos sunflower established
- Summary discussion: it was suggested that more field trips be taken with focused discussions on the issues that are or need to be addressed. It was also suggested that the next trip could start at San Acacia Diversion Dam and tour infrastructure/diversions/delivery system(s) in the valley.

**Next Meeting: December 2<sup>nd</sup> from 12:30pm to 3:30pm at Reclamation.**

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San Acacia Ad Hoc Work Group Meeting**

4 November 2010 – 9:00am – 4:00 PM

Bosque Del Apache Wildlife Refuge, San Antonio NM

**Meeting Notes – 11/04/10 9:00am to 4:00pm**

- **Introductions and Agenda Approval:** Gina Dello Russo brought the meeting to order and the agenda was approved with no changes.
- **Approval of 09/23/10 SAR Meeting Minutes:**
  - The September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 SAR work group meeting notes will be finalized after the PMT liaison's changes/comments have been received and incorporated.
- **Action Item Review**
  - ✓ Amy Louise will give the CD copy of the low flow realignment draft EIS to Jenae Maestas to post to the Program's website (since it is too large to email). – *completed;*
  - ✓ Robyn Harrison will send the Socorro Floodplain mapping link to Tetra Tech to distribute to the work group. – *completed;*
    - In a quick update, it was shared that the Socorro floodplain mapping is 2/3rds finished and completion is expected by the end of the year.
  - ✓ Amy Louise will check to determine in an electronic copy of the themes table with ISC responses can be provided for posting to the website. – *completed;*
    - ISC responses will not be released in electronic form.
  - ✓ Tetra Tech will update the SAR membership to reflect Ayesha Burnet is no longer participating. – *completed;*
  - ✓ Amy Louise will inform the PIO work group that the SAR field trip has been postponed until November 4<sup>th</sup>. – *complete;*
  - Yasmeen Najmi will make a bullet list of actions that were identified in the San Acacia work shop (*continued from September 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting*). – *status unknown;*
  - Robert Padilla will schedule a Reclamation conference room for the SAR work group meeting on December 2<sup>nd</sup> from 12:30pm to 3:30pm (*continued from September 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting*). – *status unknown;*
- **Program Update**
  - *Executive Committee (EC):* The regular EC meetings are scheduled for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month. The next EC meeting will be November 18<sup>th</sup>; the draft agenda for this meeting is not available yet.
  - *Coordination Committee (CC):* The CC regularly meets twice a month; the next meeting is Wednesday, November 10<sup>th</sup> (next week). The Program Management Team (PMT) has provided the CC with the work group recommended activity priorities. The CC will be reviewing the list of work group proposed activities for FY11 funding, the FY11 spreadsheet, and the FY10 final budget numbers. All work

group co-chairs are invited and encouraged to attend this meeting. A conference call line will be available if co-chairs are unable to attend in person.

- Regarding the proposed SAR activity to hire out the “white paper” development, it was shared that the PIO work group began the information gathering process with their signatory questionnaire and a task order could be issued to GenQuest to do the editing work. It was recommended that this project be covered internally within the Program and not by issuing a solicitation.
- *Long-term Plan (LTP) & Adaptive Management (AD)*: The CC continues to work on the LTP; the new completion deadline is March 2011. The draft AD notes from the “kick off” workshop with the contractor (October 13<sup>th</sup>) are not available yet. The next step in the AD process is individual EC interviews with the AD contractor; these are scheduled for the end of November and beginning of December.
- *Database Management System (DBMS) & Monitoring Plan Team (MPT)*: The DBMS work group will be meeting on Monday. They continue to attempt to gather identified data needs for incorporation into the database – there are only a few items that remain. Once all of the identified data has been incorporated into the database, the next step will be the development of the pilot database. The pilot database is expected spring of next year. The MPT has been in the field completing the low intensity vegetation monitoring for this year. There has also been some fish monitoring as well. The report for the monitoring efforts is expected next month. The monitoring has been completed for the year – the last site was done last Friday. The MPT will continue to work on the development of the scope of work for the high intensity monitoring. The intent is to have the high intensity monitoring contracted out in FY11.
  - In summary, the monitoring indicated nothing “striking”; however, the purpose is to determine whether or not restoration features are working as designed and it may take several years (for data comparison) to make that determination. Originally, the MPT was “forced” into monitoring themselves because a contract was not in place in time, but now the plan is to continue to cover the low intensity monitoring as a work group for a while. It helps to facilitate internal understand of what is going on with/in the river.

**Action:** Terina Perez will forward the SAR work group request for an MPT summary presentation of the FY10 monitoring efforts and results.

**Action:** Terina Perez will raise the questions “will the ‘internal’ MPT monitoring efforts be extended to the San Acacia Reach? What would the potential timeframe(s) be?” to the MPT work group.

- *Population Habitat Viability Analysis/Hydrology (PHVA/Hydro) & Population Viability Analysis (PVA)*: The PHVA/Hydro work group met last week on October 26<sup>th</sup>. The URGWOM tech team will be making final updates (to the initial model conditions – to reflect the most current 2010 conditions) and then the model will be considered final. Within the next month, the modelers will be running the pre-ESA water management and 2003 BiOp All Tools runs to inform the BA development. The PVA modelers have requested that the certain data need be provided to them in ASCII format - so the PHVA work group provided a document of model outputs for the modelers to select the specific information they want converted to ASCII.

- There had been discussions about not bothering with another PHVA refresher, but interest in a refresher has been expressed by other Program participants. The idea behind the refresher is to (1) provide “catch up” to any new Program participants and (2) to make the technical modeling process and work-to-date more understandable. Details on a refresher will be widely distributed once available.
- The PVA work group will not be meeting again until early December; in the mean time, the PVA modelers will be completing the first portions of their model runs for the work group to review and discuss.
- **FY11 Project Update:** The SAR scopes of work have been submitted to the CC for review and approval.
- **Field Trip:** At the conclusion of the regular business, attendees carpooled to several restoration and other sites.
  - Stop #1: Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge Tour Loop – for a brief history of the refuge
    - Founded in 1939, the Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge is a 57,331 acre refuge that straddles the Rio Grande Valley in Socorro County, New Mexico. It ranges in elevation from 4,500 to 6,195 feet above sea level and receives approximately 8 inches of precipitation each year. Within the refuge borders lie three wilderness areas totaling approximately 30,850 acres and five research natural areas totaling 18,500 acres.
    - Several management techniques are used to provide food, water, shelter, and space for wildlife. The three main management techniques are: (1) farming; (2) wetlands; and (3) restoration.
      - Farming cooperatives allow for crops grown on the refuge for wintering waterfowl and cranes. Farmers plant alfalfa and corn, harvesting the alfalfa and leaving the corn for wildlife. The refuge staff also grows corn, winter wheat, clover, and native plants as additional food.
      - The refuge manages wetlands by imitating the ebb and flow of the Rio Grande before channelization and dams. Water levels in marshes are manipulated in order to create moist fields that promote growth of native marsh plants. Marsh management is rotated so that varied habitats are always available.
      - The refuge also manages habitats including continued restoration activities. Many of the existing habitats were restored from monotypic saltcedar stands over the past 20 years and this work continues today. Invasive exotic plants are removed from floodplain forests and native plants replace them using a variety of techniques. Floodplain meadows have become rare in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. These areas of saltgrass and alkali sacaton are preserved and restored on the refuge wherever possible. Seasonal wetlands are managed by applying and removing water, disturbing the soil, and using prescribed fire, all to grow preferred plant species.
  - Stop #2: ET Transition Towers Project – funded through the Collaborative Program - for a distance glimpse of the tower located on treated land with a brief project description, vegetation response, channel formation, and a hike to the river

- Funded by the Collaborative Program back in 2001/2002, the ET (evapotranspiration) tower project is a ~500-acre project on the active floodplain of the Rio Grande, located on the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. This project involved removal of monotypic saltcedar stands in preparation for native tree species reestablishment, reestablishing and monitoring diverse native-dominated riparian plants to improve flycatcher habitat and monitor groundwater and surface water dynamics and water use associated with habitat restoration. One tower is situated on the “control” property which was left untreated and the other tower is located on the treated property. Originally a cooperation between several entities and agencies including NMSU, UNM, Sandia, etc. the collection of data has been on-going for almost 10 years now.
- Stop #3: Channel Widening Project – for a brief discussion of the project and visual of the widened and relocated river
  - In 2008, the Collaborative Program funded work to widen a portion of the Rio Grande located on the Refuge. After investing options and alternatives, the river channel was also mechanically relocated.
- Lunch & Drive to East Side of River -----
- Stop #4: Wetlands – for a brief discussion and description of the wetlands that are a key habitat
  - Before the damming of the river, the braided river meandered across the valley floor, creating a mosaic of wetlands (or marshes), oxbow lakes, forests and meadows. The spring runoff scoured vegetation and accumulated sediment, soil nutrients, and seeds from upstream. The patchwork of habitats attracted a variety of wildlife – birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and insects. The wetlands provided safe harbor and food for winter waterbirds – ducks, geese, and cranes – in process of migrating.
  - Wetlands were a naturally occur habitat that has been greatly affected and reduced due to river diversion and channelization, forest destruction, overgrazing, and non-native species invasion. Wetlands are important for multiple reasons:
    - Provide food (growth of marsh plants);
    - Provide natural protection against predators such as coyotes who can easily be detected by splashing noises when entering the wetlands;
    - Provide habitat (nesting sites, breeding sites, resting stopover sites, etc.) for a wide variety and number of wildlife and plants; including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrates like crabs, crayfish, dragonflies and of course, mosquitoes. Some animals live their whole lives in wetlands and others depend on wetlands for essential parts of their life cycle such as breeding sites.
    - Filter, clean and store water, and act like kidneys for other ecosystems;
    - Collect and hold flood waters;
    - Absorb wind and tidal forces;
    - Provide places of beauty and many recreational activities.
- Stop #5: River Mile 83 – for a view of the project site and description of this current project

- Stop #6: Rhodes' Property – for a visit and description of this 350 acre privately owned property where salt cedar has been removed, flycatcher habitat restored, Pecos sunflower established
  - Doris Rhodes owns ~350 acres of property along the east bank of the Rio Grande a few miles south of Socorro. Ms. Rhodes has been interested and active in habitat restoration for many years and collaborates with the government, scientists, and local activists to preserve this unique piece of Rio Grande habitat.
  - Isolated at the foot of a bluff, the Rhodes property is one of the few areas of wide open flood plain left on this stretch of the river, unprotected by a levee. That means high river flows can inundate portions of the land; overbanking and inundation used to happen up and down the river before dams and flood control systems were built. Ms. Rhodes allows that natural “flooding” to occur.
  - One particular success story on her property is the establishment of the endangered Pecos sunflower (*helianthus paradoxus*) which is a species being nursed back from the brink of extinction. In 2008, state and federal biologists planted a patch to see what would happen. The first year, the plants did not do well. And while the second year was a bit better, the third year (2010) the sunflowers really took off. There were thick, huge patches of the sunflower. Biologists indicated that the key is that the flowers reseeded themselves, without the need for human intervention.
  - In addition to the sunflowers, willows have been planted to create habitat for the flycatcher and saltcedar has been cleared. Discussions are apparently under way about the possibility of creating fish habitat along the river's edge for the minnow.
  - Ms. Rhodes is currently in talks with the U.S. Department of Agriculture about establishing a conservation easement on the land. Under the deal, 360 acres, including the area where the sunflowers are thriving, would be protected forever from development. As of 11/04/10, it was shared that a personal communication between Ms. Rhodes and Gina Dello Russo indicated that the conservation easement had indeed been agreed upon.
    - The information on the Rhodes property was taken from previous work group discussions, communications with Gina Dello Russo and the following two articles:  
<http://www.abqjournal.com/news/state/1823027state10-18-10.htm> and  
<http://dchieftain.com/dc/index.php/news/269-saving-a-treasure.html>
- Summary discussion: it was suggested that more field trips be taken with focused discussions on the issues that are or need to be addressed. It was also suggested that the next trip could start at San Acacia Diversion Dam and tour infrastructure/diversions/delivery system(s) in the valley.
- **Next Meeting: December 2<sup>nd</sup> from 12:30pm to 3:30pm at Reclamation.**

**San Acacia Reach Ad Hoc Work group  
4 November 2010 Meeting Attendees**

NAME	AFFILIATION	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
Gina Dello Russo	FWS/Co-chair	575-835-1828	gina_dellorusso@FWS.gov
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