DATE: March 30, 2023

TO: The Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program (MRGESCP) Executive Committee (EC)

FROM: The MRGESCP Science and Adaptive Management Committee (SAMC)

RE: Recommendations from October 2022 MRGESCP Workshop on Management of Vegetated Islands and Bank-attached Bars

Following the October 2022 Workshop on Management of Vegetated Islands and Bank-attached Bars, the SAMC reviewed problem statements, objectives and strategies developed during the breakout sessions, and identified key findings from the workshop. This memo summarizes those findings and recommends to the EC next steps for the MRGESCP regarding this important topic.

First, although the focus of the breakout sessions was management of vegetated islands and bars, the groups quickly realized that this issue was ancillary to three primary management priorities within the MRG: water delivery, flood control, and ecosystem management. The critical question became: *How do we balance these priorities through collaboration and partnerships in the face of a dynamic river system under climate change?*

Importantly, bars and islands are not replacements for the floodplain. Although bars and islands might create habitat for certain species and generate ecosystem services, they also impede important water and sediment transport processes in the channel. Active floodplain needs to be maintained despite a perceived inevitability of bar/island development. Formulation of a conceptual model is suggested for the island/bar phenomenon in the Middle Rio Grande. This model should account for spatial and temporal rhythms of successional changes on islands and bars. The model will help to characterize trends and conditions, which in turn help to identify management alternatives and potential impacts.

Finally, a more comprehensive and common understanding of the workshop topic is needed. To address this need, workshop breakout groups proposed strategies for tool development (i.e., maps and models), defining technical terms and relationships relating to this topic, and a summary report to develop consensus among stakeholders. Groups also identified research, planning and management needs, particularly all relevant data sets that are currently available, as well as data gaps. A designated team (or additional workshop) was suggested to carry these efforts forward.

The SAMC, therefore, recommends the following next steps in support of collaborative planning and management of vegetated islands and bars in the Middle Rio Grande:

* Develop common definitions for relevant technical terms and relationships relating to vegetated islands and bars.
* Summarize in a report the research, planning and management needs identified during the workshop, particularly all currently available, relevant data sets and data gaps.
* Determine the desired ecosystem functions and physical river conditions of interest and develop management goals around these (e.g., functional wetlands).