Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program Newsletter February 2018

Letter from the Program Manager

Dear Collaborative Program participants, partners, and friends-

Welcome to the first Program newsletter of 2018. Over the next year the Program's Executive Committee will work through this transitional phase, and there should be more certainty on the Program's direction, structure, and operational space.

While the formal side of things is being developed, I also want to make sure we don't neglect the informal. Relationship-building best happens in informal settings, and there should be ample opportunities for the Program outside of meeting rooms. You'll notice there is an item in this newsletter from Kathy Lang at the BioPark asking for volunteers for egg collection. If there are other volunteer opportunities, please let us know and we can include them in future newsletters or in an email to the Program.

My team is also planning some gatherings, such as brown bag discussions, a seminar series, site visits, barbecues, and other social events. If you have any suggestions, or would like to host an event, please let us know. My hope is to use these venues to build relationships so that we can operate more productively and efficiently, while having some fun at the same time.

I anticipate much progress this year, and look forward to seeing what 2018 brings.

Sincerely,

Debbie Lee
Program Manager

If you missed sending us an update there will be another opportunity to submit your update for the next newsletter. In the meantime, if you have any important updates or comments on the newsletter feel free to send them to Lana Mitchell at lmitchell@west-inc.com.

In This Issue

Volunteers Needed

Collection of RGSM eggs will be a major focus of conservation efforts this year. As such, the Albuquerque BioPark's egg collection team will be coordinating with anyone interested in helping to collect eggs from the river. If you are interested in participating, please forward your best contact information (day and night) and what gear you have available (waders, Moore egg collectors, etc.) to Kathy Lang at klang@cabq.gov. Please note that egg collections can occur at any time of day (possibly for long hours) and any day of the week.

Riparian Mapping

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) has partnered with Natural Heritage New Mexico and the U.S. Forest Service Region 3 to develop a statewide New Mexico Riparian Habitat Map. This map will outline the location and extent of riparian corridors across the state. Riparian ecosystems will be characterized by vegetation composition, cover, and structure, with an emphasis on native versus non-native vegetation (i.e., tamarisk and Russian olive). A map legend will be developed based on the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) Standard (usnvc.org).

Map development will occur over multiple years on a watershed-by-watershed basis. A map of the Upper Rio Grande basin will be completed in summer 2018, followed by the Middle Rio Grande (MRG) in 2019, Canadian and Upper Pecos in 2020, Lower Pecos in 2021, and Gila and San Juan in 2022. Map products will be publicly available upon completion. Riparian habitat information from mapping efforts will be incorporated in the forthcoming NMDGF Environmental Review Tool (nmert.org).

The map will be a comprehensive resource for guiding the conservation and management of riparian ecosystems in New Mexico. Applications of the map include the following:

- Provide a baseline for future monitoring to detect changes in the condition of riparian habitats.
- Identify priority locations where riparian restoration is most needed.
- Delineate the location and extent of non-native riparian plants, including tamarisk and Russian olive, to help inform control efforts and follow-up restoration.
- Predict future riparian habitat loss due to the tamarisk biocontrol beetle.
- Identify important refugia and migration corridors for wildlife.
- Identify areas where riparian connectivity could be improved to benefit wildlife.

Contact: Chuck Hayes (chuck.hayes@state.nm.us)

Upcoming Dates

Executive Committee Meeting:
Wednesday, February 21, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,
4101 Jefferson Plaza NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109

Science/Habitat Restoration Work Group Meeting:
Tuesday, February 27
1:00pm - 3:00pm
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services
2105 Osuna Rd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87113

Crawford Symposium:
Tuesday, March 6
3:30pm - 7:30pm
University of New Mexico

Adaptive Management Work Group Meeting:
Wednesday, March 21
9:00am - 4:00pm

Rio Grande Basin Study

The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) has worked with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and a consortium of cost-share partners to secure funding to develop a basin study for the Rio Grande in New Mexico. This study will be a collaborative effort that builds on existing and ongoing studies within the Rio Grande Basin from the Colorado state line to Elephant Butte Reservoir. An understanding of water supply and demand trends will inform an analysis of challenges expected in meeting demand with available supply over the course of the 21st century, as increasing temperatures lead to significant changes in the Rio Grande New Mexico Basin's hydrology. The study will develop adaptation and mitigation strategies to address the projected gap between supply and demand and a cost-benefit analysis of each identified strategy.

The study is funded through Reclamation's WaterSMART Basin Study Program. This program was designed as a cost match between Reclamation and the non-federal cost-share partners. The MRGCD is expecting to kick-off the study this spring and is actively encouraging additional non-federal partners to join the Rio Grande Basin Study in New Mexico to ensure that the study is inclusive of a diverse set of interests within the basin.

Contact: Anne Marken (anne@mrgcd.us)

Hydrology Update

A 57% allocation was made to San Juan - Chama (SJC) contractors on January 1, 2018. This allocation was possible because of the extremely high Project inflow in 2017. The prediction for 2018 SJC Project inflow is for 40,000 to 50,000 acre-feet (ac-ft), about 50% of average.

In November and December of 2017, 13,933 ac-ft of unused Prior & Paramount water was released from El Vado. A total of 39,366 ac-ft of native water stored out of Article VII restrictions in spring 2017 was released at MRGCD's request to meet New Mexico's Compact obligation.

Because of these releases and storm inflow in late September and early October, combined Rio Grande Project storage in Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs rose above 400,000 ac-ft on December 6, and Article VII storage restrictions were lifted on December 7, 2017. Bypass of native water at El Vado continued until January 1, 2018, when storage of all native inflow began.

Winter releases from El Vado were about 125 cubic feet per second (cfs) from that date to February 8, when they were reduced to 100 cfs. These winter releases are made up of SJC water from Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (ABCWUA), MRGCD, and Reclamation moved into storage in Abiquiu Reservoir. Releases from Abiquiu in 2018 began at 100 cfs, but have decreased to 32 cfs of SJC outflow for ABCWUA and Santa Fe, and a small amount of native inflow.

Spring 2017 water operations could prove challenging, with March to July El Vado Inflow predicted to be 50,000 ac-ft or less, 20 to 25% of average. The 50% exceedance forecast for Otowi is 150,000 ac-ft, 21% of average.

Contact: Carolyn Donnelly (cdonnelly@usbr.gov)

Listed Species Update

Rio Grande Silvery Minnow (RGSM): On behalf of Reclamation, the RGSM Population Monitoring (PopMon) Program staff uses standardized seining techniques to catch RGSM along the Rio Grande during seven months per year (Dudley et. al. 2017). The PopMon Program monitoring reported an overall density of 21.6 RGSM per 100 square meters during October 2017 at 19 of 20 sites. This was the third highest density recorded in 24 years of similar monitoring (density provided by Reclamation) and reflected the elevated amount of spring runoff in the MRG. In wide channels, elevated spring runoff (and high base flow) generally creates more slow velocity habitat that favors RGSM recruitment and survival.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (SWFL): There were 302 SWFL territories based on preliminary data from Reclamation surveys on the MRG (from Isleta Pueblo south boundary to Elephant Butte). Fifteen SWFL territories were detected within Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) (west of the levee). Surveys were also completed near Albuquerque, Corrales, Bandelier, and Taos and yielded some migratory flycatchers of unknown subspecies, but no territories.

(*Bosque del Apache territories within the figure do not include territories west of the levee.)

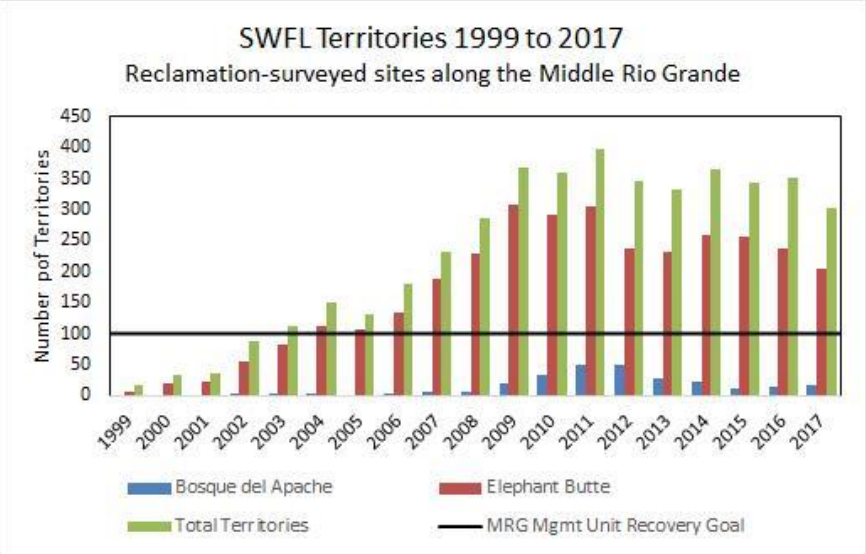

Figure source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (YBCU): There were 412 YBCU detections, of which 98 of those are estimated to be breeding territories from Reclamation surveys on the MRG (from Isleta Pueblo south boundary to

Elephant Butte). Additional surveys conducted outside of the active floodway in Bosque del Apache NWR resulted in four detections, but no estimated breeding territories. Surveys near Albuquerque resulted in one detection and no estimated territories.

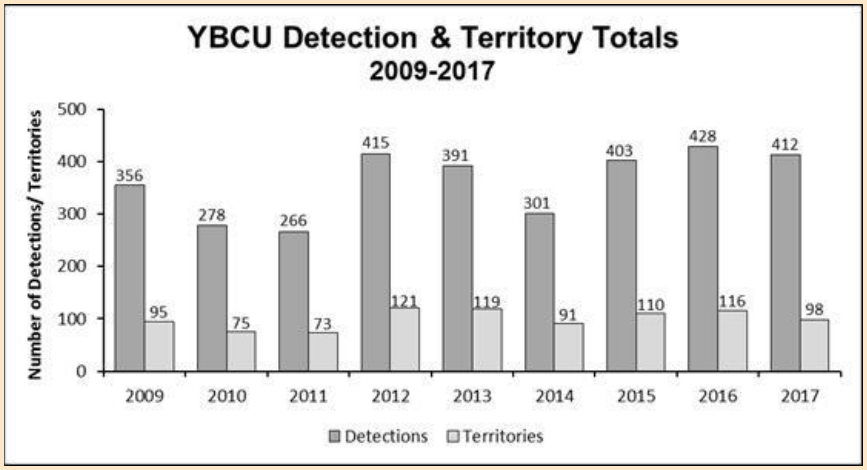

Figure source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse (NMMJM): The mouse was detected within 82 photographs from 26 visits (defined as the same species photographed at a location within the same hour) taken at 18 locations on Bosque del Apache NWR from May 22 to October 27.

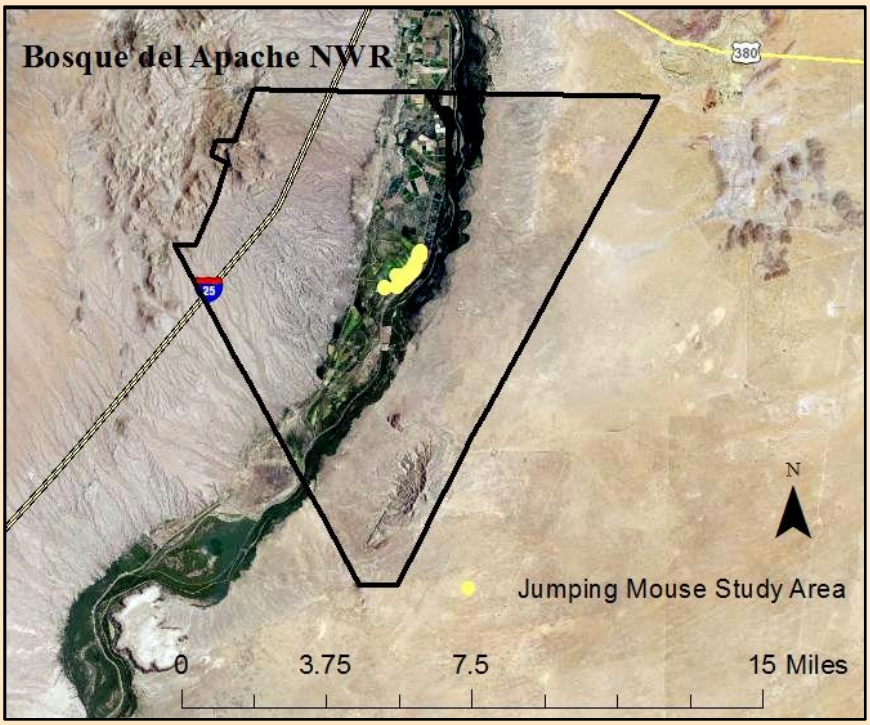

Figure source: I&M Program at Bosque del Apache NWR

Contact: Vicky Ryan (vicky_ryan@fws.gov)

Program Signatory Spotlight: Lieutenant Colonel James Booth

Lieutenant Colonel James (Jamie) Booth assumed command of the USACE, Albuquerque District on May 12, 2016.

As Commander, Jamie leads a civilian and military workforce of more than 350 personnel in executing the Corps diverse mission of providing military construction, civil works, and interagency support throughout New Mexico, southern Colorado, and far west Texas. The Albuquerque District performs design and construction services for all three Air Force installations in New Mexico and operations and maintenance of nine lake projects throughout the area. Prior to assuming command of the Albuquerque District, Lt. Col. Booth served as Deputy District Commander of the Detroit District.

Jamie earned a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Florida Tech and a Master's Degree in Engineer Management from the University of Missouri-Rolla. He is a graduate of the Ranger Course and Airborne School. Jamie is also a graduate of the Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the Engineer Officer Basic and Advanced courses, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Jamie is married to the former Melissa Harrell of Sarasota, Florida, and they have three children: Evan, Cali, and Alex. He grew up in north Florida with three brothers and one sister and is an identical twin to Lt. Col. William (Bill). Jamie enjoys spending time with his family, hunting, swimming, and the never-ending maintenance of his 1992 Jeep Cherokee.

WEST, Inc. | (505) 554-3708 | lmitchell@west-inc.com
8500 Menaul Blvd. NE, Suite 342
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87112