

Arizona Game and Fish Department Informational Summary: The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program's Backwater Site Selection Process

This Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) is presenting the following informational summary, which is intended to:

- answer questions regarding the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program's (LCR MSCP) backwater site selection process for the lower Colorado River (LCR),
- clarify the Department's role in the process, and
- identify opportunities for the public to provide comments and input in the process

LCR MSCP Background

The Bureau of Reclamation is the implementing agency for the LCR MSCP, a 50-year coordinated, comprehensive, multi-agency effort to conserve and work towards the recovery of endangered species, and protect and maintain wildlife habitat on the lower Colorado River. The purposes of the LCR MSCP are to:

- protect the lower Colorado River environment while ensuring the certainty of existing river water and power operations,
- address the needs of threatened and endangered wildlife under the Endangered Species Act, and
- reduce the likelihood of listing additional species along the lower Colorado River.

The LCR MSCP Steering Committee is an unincorporated association of water and power users, and other state, federal, and local entities. The Steering Committee works with the Bureau of Reclamation to coordinate the implementation of the LCR MSCP. The Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) is a member of the Steering Committee, along with more than 20 state and federal agencies, cities, water districts, and other affected parties in Arizona.

Backwater Site Selection in Arizona

As part of the LCR MSCP, the Bureau of Reclamation is tasked with creating a total of 360 acres of backwater habitat along the LCR as refugia for three native fishes: razorback sucker, bonytail chub, and flannelmouth sucker. The LCR MSCP is required to select backwaters in reaches 3 & 4 (from Davis Dam at River Mile 276 to the Cibola Gage at River Mile 87.3) and in reaches 5 & 6 (from the Cibola Gage at River Mile 87.3 to the Northern International Boundary at River Mile 23.1). Approximately ½ of the backwater acreage selected (180 acres) will be on the Arizona side and ½ on the California side of the LCR.

To date, the LCR MSCP has already established the "Imperial Ponds" backwaters on the Imperial National Wildlife Refuge. These ponds count toward approximately 80 backwater acres in Arizona. That leaves approximately 100 backwater acres required to be selected on the Arizona side of the LCR.

Department and Public Involvement

The LCR MSCP's short-term backwater selection goal is to identify approximately 5 backwater sites in reaches 5 & 6 of the LCR to undergo further evaluation, and to implement one site in FY 2010 or 2011. In the coming years, the LCR MSCP will follow this selection process to select and implement backwaters in reaches 3 & 4 for LCR MSCP purposes.

The LCR MSCP is working with the Department, the California Department of Fish and Game, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Service to identify and select appropriate backwaters for implementation into the program. The Department is cooperating with the LCR MSCP to help identify and select backwaters that will result in low environmental and human impacts (for example, minimal conflicts with hunting, angling, etc.).

The Department has also met with and solicited input from local hunting and angling club representatives and civic leaders in order to provide the LCR MSCP with information regarding public use and potential conflicts at Arizona backwaters in reaches 5 & 6 of the LCR. And, we anticipate additional opportunities for the public to provide comments and input on the backwater site selection process, including:

- The LCR MSCP anticipates releasing a draft final report for two backwater conceptual plans in November 2008. The Steering Committee and the public will have 30 days to comment on this draft report.
- The LCR MSCP plans to release draft final reports for Steering Committee and public comment in 2009 and/or 2010 for additional backwater conceptual plans.
- In 2009 or 2010, the Department plans to host or attend one or more public meetings to solicit input regarding public use and other potential impacts at Arizona backwaters being evaluated in reaches 3 & 4 of the LCR.
- Backwater inventory documents for reaches 3 & 4 will be posted on the LCR MSCP website as they are produced, and will be available for public comment.
- The development and implementation of specific backwaters for LCR MSCP purposes will require site-specific National Environmental Policy Act compliance, which will likely include public comment periods.

Additional Information

If you have questions, please contact Troy Smith of the Arizona Game and Fish Department at (928) 341-4068.

For more information on the LCR MSCP, go to: <http://www.lcrmscp.gov/>

For specific information regarding the LCR MSCP backwater site selection process, go to: <http://www.lcrmscp.gov/technicalrepts.html> and review the E-15 documents:

- [Reaches 5&6 Backwater Inventory - Steps 2-3: Screening and Evaluation](#) (4/29/08)
- [Reaches 5&6 Backwater Inventory - Step 1: Identification of Backwaters for Screening and Evaluation](#) (9/6/07)
- [Colorado River Backwaters Restoration - Final Model Evaluation Report](#) (2/27/07)