

**Contact**

Doug Burt, (623) 236-7215
Public Information Officer,
AGFD

Arizona Game and Fish Department**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Backwater site selection continues
for Lower Colorado River native fish conservation**

Effort is to select areas with the lowest impact to recreational users

PHOENIX - Federal and state agencies are continuing the process of selecting appropriate backwater sites to create habitat for three native fish species as part of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP), a 50-year, \$626 million¹ program that aims 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 current backwater site selection effort includes areas along the Colorado River, from the Reclamation Cibola Gage (River Mile 87.3) to the Northerly International Boundary (River Mile 23.1), which is known as LCR MSCP Reaches 5 and 6. A future effort will be made to conduct backwater site selection for LCR MSCP Reaches 3 and 4, which span from Davis Dam (River Mile 276) to the Reclamation Cibola Gage (River Mile 87.3).

The program is one of the nation's largest partnerships for the restoration of riparian, marsh and backwater habitats and has a steering committee consisting of more than 20 state and federal agencies (including the Arizona Game and Fish Department), cities,

¹ Based on 2003 dollars, indexed for inflation over the life of the program.

water districts and other affected parties in Arizona. The Bureau of Reclamation is the lead implementing agency for the program.

As part of the LCR MSCP, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is tasked with creating or restoring a total of 360 acres of backwater habitat along the Lower Colorado River, between the Davis Dam and the Mexico Border, to provide refuge for three native and endangered fish - razorback sucker, bonytail, and flannelmouth sucker. The program has a priority of designating approximately half of the backwater acreage (180 acres) on the California side of the river, with the remaining acreage on the Arizona or Nevada sides.

In an effort to provide a voice for Arizonans and at the request of Reclamation, the Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) met with and solicited initial input from civic leaders, angling groups, and hunting clubs to assist Reclamation in selecting potential candidate sites that would result in minimum conflict and impact. The recommendations from those public meetings are available at the Department's Web site at www.azgfd.gov/lcrmscp. Additional informational meetings with potentially affected parties are anticipated, as the selection process proceeds.

Although Department recommendations will be considered by Reclamation, backwater site selection is still predicated on the biological needs of meeting the overall goal of the recovery of endangered species as required under the Endangered Species Act. To the extent practicable, priority in selecting backwaters will be given to choosing sites which minimize conflicts with recreational uses.

To date, the establishment of Imperial Ponds backwaters on the Imperial National Wildlife Refuge represents approximately 80 of the 180 acres for Arizona. The project area is within a portion of the refuge known as the Intensive Management Area. The entire area has been restricted from public access for many years and will have no effect on recreational users or sport fishing opportunity.

The next backwater being considered in the conceptual habitat creation planning is Headquarters Lake (A59.7), approximately 18.2 acres. This backwater is also within a portion of the refuge which is closed to the public, and therefore would have no effect on recreational uses. The current conceptual planning efforts involve significant expansion of this backwater, which would result in 25-40+ acres of backwater acreage for the program.

Additional potential candidate backwater selections include an unnamed lake (A49.2 - approximately 10.1 acres) and Secret Lake (A62.3 - approximately 11.2 acres), commonly referred to as "Clear Lake" by local anglers. However, no work beyond the conceptual habitat creation plan has been committed to Secret Lake pending further analysis. Reclamation is currently seeking two additional sites within Reaches 5 & 6 to add to this process.

The LCR MSCP anticipates a draft final report of the conceptual plans for the enhancement of Headquarters Lake (A59.7) and Secret Lake (A62.3) available for public review and comments by early December. The public will have 30 days to comment on this draft report. The report will be available at:
www.lcrmscp.gov/worktasks/conservationareas/E15/index.html.

For complete history and report information about the LCR MSCP, visit the Bureau of Reclamation's Web site at www.lcrmscp.gov.

To keep up to date on Arizona-specific LCR MSCP issues, visit the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Web site at www.azgfd.gov/lcrmscp.