

Draft CVPIA Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Work Plan, Habitat Restoration Program, CVPIA Section 3406 (b)(1) “other”

Responsible Entities:

Staff Name	Agency	Role
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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) jointly implement the Habitat Restoration Program (HRP). The HRP implements Section 3406 (b)(1) “other,” which directs and authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to: *“make all reasonable efforts consistent with the requirements of this section to address other identified adverse environmental impacts of the Central Valley Project [CVP] not specifically enumerated in this section.”*

Program Goals and Objectives for FY 2015:

The main goal of the HRP is to support activities that protect, restore, stabilize, and improve native habitats that are critical to the protection and recovery of populations of federally listed species by funding four categories of conservation actions:

1. Land Acquisition: Protection of CVP-impacted species and/or their habitats by assisting conservation-oriented organizations and agencies to purchase lands in fee title or through conservation easements, where threats to these lands are significant. In FY 2015, land acquisition projects will have the highest priority over the other three actions.
2. Habitat Restoration: Restoration of CVP-impacted habitats where restoration actions will markedly improve conditions for federally listed and other special status CVP-impacted species.
3. Research: Research that is correlated to and supports land acquisition and/or habitat restoration projects to benefit CVP-impacted species and facilitate species recovery. Research may include studies or surveys.

4. Captive Propagation and Reintroduction: Captive breeding of federally listed species, and subsequent reintroduction to their habitats, to assist with recovery of species populations.

To achieve this main goal, the program has three specific objectives for FY 2015: (1) protecting and restoring native habitats; (2) stabilizing and improving populations of native species; and (3) increasing program effectiveness. Meeting these objectives is accomplished through on-going management of the program, and through funding effective projects based on the four types of conservation actions described above. Descriptions of Program objectives for FY 2015 are as follows:

1. Protect and restore habitats impacted by the CVP that are not specifically addressed in the Fish and Wildlife Restoration Activities section of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA).

The focus of the HRP in FY 2015, as in years past, will be on protecting (through fee title or conservation easement actions) and restoring habitats known to have experienced the greatest percentage decline in quantity and quality since construction of the CVP (excluding those for fish), where such decline could be attributed to the CVP (based on direct and indirect losses of habitat from CVP facilities and use of CVP water). Habitat loss and fragmentation due to urbanization and agricultural conversion (i.e., conversion of native lands to agriculture) are the primary impacts of CVP construction, as analyzed and documented in biological opinions related to CVP water operations, as well as the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the CVPIA. These include alkali sink and scrub, valley grassland, vernal pools, and serpentine soil habitats.

2. Stabilize and improve populations of species impacted by the CVP that are not specifically addressed in the Fish and Wildlife Restoration Activities section of the CVPIA.

Activities associated with stabilization and improvement of species include protection and restoration of habitat, research on species that is linked to restoration and/or acquisition actions, and captive propagation and reintroduction of listed species. In FY 2015, focus will be given to federally listed species associated with the habitat types listed above. Examples include plant and animal species found on riverine dunes; invertebrate, amphibian, and plant species that depend on vernal pools and other wetlands; and numerous mammal species that use upland and alkali sink and scrub habitats for breeding, raising young, and foraging. The source documents that support this objective include the *Biological Opinion on Implementation of the CVPIA and Continued Operation and Maintenance of the CVP*, and various water contract renewals including *Implementation of the CVPIA and Continued Operation and Maintenance of the CVP* with the USFWS.

3. Increase Program Effectiveness.

- Program Managers for the HRP, and the interagency technical team which provides technical input and support to the Program, continually work to increase efficiencies in identification of program priorities. They continue to focus on efficiencies in project selection, management, and monitoring to improve program effectiveness that maximizes the value of the water and power users' investments through the HRP. Strategies for improving Program effectiveness in FY 2015 include: When submitting proposals for FY 2015, applicants will continue to be asked to explicitly state how and where program dollars would be expended if their projects are funded. This is, in part, because each year the scrutiny on funds being requested intensifies. Applicants will be asked to provide specific budget justifications, including monetary partnering and demonstrations of cost-effectiveness, and to explain how program funds would be maximized on-the-ground to most effectively achieve project goals.
- Program managers will continue to emphasize the importance of partnering on project costs in FY 2015, and greatly encourage applicants to seek other sources of funding in addition to the HRP. Working with public and private partners is a key to the success of the HRP through leveraging funds and maximizing the use of program resources. The level of project partnering is carefully considered during the proposal scoring and selection process. One of the scoring criteria that applicants will be asked to address in project proposals is "Partners" for which, in part, applicants must name the project funding partner(s), and describe all financial contributions to the project that are being pursued. The higher the commitment from other funding sources, the more points are given to the proposal for that scoring criterion. Since the establishment of the Program, 90 percent or more of HRP projects have received substantial funding from more than 150 conservation partners including The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, River Partners, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, local land trusts, and State and Federal agencies.
- A new requirement for FY 2014, that will be continued in FY 2015, is that applicants must provide evidence that partnering dollars are genuinely and wholly committed, by substantiating those dollars through a letter of confirmation from the partnering entity(ies) that are named with the submission of the proposal. This means that not only must the funding partners be identified, but the financial commitment must be supported through documentation. This is required in order for the applicant to receive credit towards numerical points during the scoring of the "Partners" criterion by the CVPCP/HRP Technical Team. In order for acquisition and restoration projects to be eligible for funding in FY 2015, proposal applicants must specifically identify the parcel(s) to be acquired or restored and confirm

landowner support. The parcel(s) must be specifically identified in the proposal, and the landowner supporting the project must be identified in a letter of support. This requirement was established so that valuable time is not misspent pursuing properties that ultimately cannot be acquired or restored because of the lack of a willing seller or landowner support.

- Research projects supported by the HRP will again be highly focused in FY 2015. Only research proposals that address the specific Priority Actions in the Program's FY 2015 Funding Opportunity Application will be eligible for funding, i.e., there will not be an "other" research Priority Action to which any research can be proposed. And as in FY 2014, projects suitable for funding must help HRP managers to: (a) determine which habitats should be acquired and/or restored; (b) identify specific properties to be acquired and/or restored; (c) determine how habitats should be restored; and/or (d) help gauge biological responses to restoration projects. This more targeted approach of tying research actions to acquisition or restoration actions will help increase program effectiveness by providing more immediate and direct species and habitat benefits, so that the goals and objectives of the HRP can be achieved more quickly and efficiently.
- As described above, one of the HRP's objectives for FY 2015 is to stabilize and improve populations of federally listed species impacted by the CVP. To help program managers prioritize projects that most benefit those species, a spreadsheet was developed containing information on species most impacted by the CVP. It is available at the HRP website at:
http://www.usbr.gov/mp/cvpcp/species/docs/CPHRP_priority_species_2006_draft.pdf

On that spreadsheet, species are given a priority rating based on (1) the recovery priority assigned to the species, and (2) the extent to which the species is, or has been, impacted by the CVP. Ratings of "Very High," "High," "Medium," and "Low" are assigned to each species, i.e., a species ranked "Very High" has been greatly impacted by the CVP and may be imminently threatened with extinction; a species ranked "Low" is one for which CVP actions have made minor contributions towards the decline of the species. For FY 2015, only CVP priority species ranked "High" or "Very High" will be considered when evaluating projects for funding, so as to focus on species most impacted by the CVP.

- Program Managers will continue to improve and refine the focus of the HRP. For example, Program Managers have developed a GIS-based, "Project Priority Area Map" available via the HRP website to proposal applicants at:
<http://www.usbr.gov/mp/cvpcp/map/index.html>. This map helps direct conservation actions into high priority areas, while also assisting applicants to develop a competitive proposal.

- A GIS-based database for the HRP is available through which the public, including proposal applicants, may query data on past and current projects. Through use of the database, users can obtain information on program activities such as the number and type of projects funded by county, projects funded which benefit certain species or habitat types, and locations of HRP projects. This database underwent extensive upgrades and renovations in FY 2013 in order to substantially improve user capabilities for uploading, downloading, storing, printing, and reporting data so as to be more effective and useful to Program Managers, the public, and other interested parties. The database may be found at: http://www.usbr.gov/mp/cvpcp/cvpcp_query.cfm.
- The Program's website continues to be refined and updated. The Program Managers continue to strive to make the site comprehensive, user-friendly, and informative. In addition to the updated database, final reports from past-funded projects may be downloaded for use and reference by the public. The website may be found at: <http://www.usbr.gov/mp/cvpcp/reports.html>
- Monitoring of previously-funded land acquisition and habitat restoration project sites will continue in FY 2015. Sites to be monitored are prioritized by when they have last been visited, and site visits are conducted by the Program Managers to verify that the project properties are being managed properly, i.e., according to previously-approved management plans. Photos are taken and photo points are recorded on property location maps. A Project Site Monitoring Form is used to document data such as natural communities observed and their conditions; animal and plant species seen; and any problems or concerns discovered such as use of improper grazing regimes, or invasive species issues. Follow-up visits are conducted if needed to assess if problems identified during the first visit have been resolved.

Status of the Program:

Since 1996, the HRP has funded 122 actions toward the goals. Through FY 2014, HRP funds have helped protect almost 121,500 acres, of habitat for federally listed, proposed, and candidate species and species of special concern, through **acquisition** of fee title or conservation easements. Through contributions to **restoration** projects, HRP funds have helped restore over 8,000 acres of habitat for listed, proposed, and candidate species and species of special concern, including alkali sink/scrub and valley grassland habitats to benefit San Joaquin kit fox and other listed San Joaquin Valley upland species. With contributions to **research** projects, HRP helped implement projects such as surveys for numerous listed species; vernal pool mapping; developing control methods for invasive species; assessing the potential for species reintroductions; and documenting and predicting the presence of listed vernal pool plants. And by contributing to

captive propagation and reintroduction projects, HRP funds have been used to implement projects that benefitted two critically endangered species as well as other federally listed species. In FY 2014, two land acquisition projects were funded by the HRP.

For more information, see the HRP website at:

<http://www.usbr.gov/mp/cvpcp/>