

Pecos 2nd Restoration Project Meeting – AAO Reclamation – July 14, 2010

Attendees:

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1. Introductions

Introductions were made by each individual attending the meeting. Gary Dean read a message from Chris Canavan of the NMED who could not attend. Chris noted that of the two sites he had visited, the BLM site was preferred.

2. Site Visit Presentation

Yvette Paroz briefed the group on site visits and presented a power point presentation on possible restoration locations that she had been looking into. Potential sites were discussed in the order from north to south.

BLM Property South of Bottomless Lakes State Park

This is the northernmost site under consideration and thus is closest to the Bitter Lake restoration site. It is one of the few locations along the river on public land. The river is not too entrenched so restoration work would not require as much earthmoving as other locations. The channel is fairly functional. Existing habitat could be enhanced by removing a dike on northeast side of the river, lowering banks and removing salt cedar. Site is at a gage location. There is a fish barrier protecting BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) overflow wetlands. This ACEC is fed by Lea Lake, and contains the majority of Pecos pupfish. Lea Lake does not contain a large population of pupfish.

Length of reach is at least ¼ mile, but could extend further to the north. The concern is that restoration will encroach on fish barriers that were constructed to keep a non-native species of fish from entering the wetlands (not the lake) and hybridizing with Pecos pupfish. The barriers can easily be reconstructed farther upstream on the outlet channels that flow from the wetlands to the river. Restoration should provide more shallow water habitat and reduce energy during flood flows.

Hagerman Sluiceway Confluence with Pecos River

This site was not visited. It is on private land and ownership is unknown. It is a potential area for doing backwater construction.

Dexter Bridge Site

The aerial shows that this is a very dynamic site. Ownership is mixed with at least two private landowners and BLM leased property. Its location is just upstream of the Dexter Bridge. Habitat is already relatively good when compared with other reaches. There are disconnected oxbows and opportunities to do some minimal actions such as plug removal, vegetation control or maintenance to enhance habitat. A major issue would be concerns that actions may affect the bridge.

Grassey Property

This site is on private land south of Dexter. It is diverse area with dynamic river movement already occurring. It has been sprayed and there is some native vegetation. Nearby agricultural fields are not in production. Habitat is already good and small actions may help to maintain and improve conditions.

Rio Felix Confluence

This site was not visited. It is on private land and ownership is unknown. Just above the confluence is a potential area for doing backwater construction. However, below the confluence the river is narrow and very entrenched. There are also predator fish species present.

Langenegger Property

The site is privately owned, but ISC owns the water. Good diversity with dynamic river movement, some confinement from cap rock on east side of river. Incision is not as deep as Karr Farms. Habitat diversity could be maintained with minor measures such as vegetation control, bank lowering and clearing oxbow openings.

Lake Arthur Falls

Location suggested by Dick Smith to restore old falls. It is on private land with an unknown owner. The small falls on the north side of the river are actually creating good backwater habitat. Collections include adults and a large number of juveniles. Habitat is diverse and the river is dynamic currently. Work there might be counterproductive and cause a fish passage problem. Area is also subject to trespassing.

Karr Farm

Karr Farms is the furthest south potential site. It is owned by Reclamation and managed by New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. It is a large tract with several potential projects that would improve the habitat involving vegetation removal, levee removal, oxbow reconnections and channel widening. Adult Pecos bluntnose shiner have been found in the area. Ownership and water rights, and maintenance staff on site would simplify many aspects of the projects. Because of deeply incised channels, work there would be more expensive than other locations. It is also unclear whether work here would benefit the shiner throughout the reach since it is so far south and not near other good habitat.

3. Discussion on the Benefit to Species

Susan discussed some of the biological goals of the restoration work. The Service would hope to develop habitat to create a meta-population in the southern reach of the Pecos of all age ranges, that would bolster the total population, interact with others and migrate upstream. They are open to the idea of modifying the BO to do what makes the most sense and provides the most benefit to the fish. So there is flexibility to consider multiple sites, a matrix of sites with smaller projects and different lengths than were called for in the BO.

Issues raised and comments from participants included:

- The BLM site is attractive as a site because of the proximity to Bitter Lake, it is on public land, lower cost and possible shared maintenance.
- Gary expressed concern about legal issues with work on private land and the cost of maintenance for several sites. He will follow up with Reclamation counsel.
- Karr Farms is attractive as a Reclamation property with NMDGF staff onsite for long-term improvements and maintenance. All age classes of fish are present and it is already the last refuge for the shiner before Brantley. On the other hand it is far from other habitat and may not be an optimal to put all the resources there.
- We have learned that there are some places in the reach where good habitat still exists, perhaps focus on providing stepping stones between good habitat and sustaining these areas. Reclamation will not be able to do it all. Service Partners program may allow a way work with private landowners.
- The level of needed maintenance was discussed. The BLM site would need new fish barriers and monitoring. Mike McGee said that BLM does spray resprouts at the overflow wetlands already. Respraying of sprouts essential; replanting is also helpful.
- Paul Tashjian discussed the presence at Bitter Lake of cottonwoods that have seemed to have adapted to the higher salinity levels. Coyote willow from a local source (Bosque Draw) may be available.
- The lack of a sandbed in the reach between Highway 380 and Brantley is an unknown factor in restoration success. Sediment dams prevent recharge, but removal is unlikely.

4. Screening Matrix for Alternative Sites.

Based on the discussion Yvette, filled in the site matrix. See attached

Tentatively the Dexter Bridge, Rio Felix Confluence, Langenegger Property, and Lake Arthur Falls were dropped. The BLM site, Hagerman Sluiceway, Grasse Property and Karr Farms were retained.

5. Next Meeting.

Tentatively the next meeting will be held at Bitter Lake (9/21/10) and combined with a site visit (9/22/10).