

**ANIMAS - LA PLATA PROJECT
WETLAND/RIPARIAN MITIGATION AND MONITORING PLAN
In The LA PLATA RIVER CORRIDOR**

La Plata River Mitigation Area

July 29, 2003



Bureau of Reclamation Mission Statement

"To manage, develop and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The construction of Ridges Basin Dam and associated project components of the Animas-La Plata (ALP) Project, and the filling of the Ridges Basin Reservoir will result in the permanent loss of 134 acres of wetland/riparian habitats as agreed upon by the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1992. As stated in the 2000 ALP Project Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS), Reclamation will protect, enhance, create or restore 1.5 acres of riparian habitat for each acre of wetland/riparian habitat negatively affected in Ridges Basin and Basin Creek as a result of actions related to the ALP Project.

Because of the potential to enhance and improve existing negatively impacted riparian habitat and the potential for willing sellers of property, Reclamation committed to make the La Plata River Basin the priority for compensating for this loss. Reclamation committed that 95% of the physical features of the riparian improvements outlined in this Mitigation and Monitoring Plan would be completed prior to beginning Ridges Basin Reservoir filling. Reclamation has acquired approximately 6000 acres in the La Plata River basin that include land along the La Plata River suitable for the wetland/riparian mitigation effort.

Reclamation will effectively mitigate, in the Mitigation Area (MA), for wetland/riparian habitats lost through ALP Project construction by the removal of livestock grazing from the riparian habitats, the control and management of noxious weeds, the introduction of desirable vegetation and the control of erosion of denuded streambanks. Reclamation will restore, enhance and create riparian functions in the MA by a combination of stream channel re-contouring in areas that had been previously channelized and by replanting native and desirable woody and herbaceous species in both restoration and weed control areas. Bank stabilization will serve to restore riparian functions related to stream energy dissipation, sediment deposition and water quality. Reclamation will ensure the protection of the newly established riparian functions and values for the life of the ALP Project by controlling access, monitoring and applying restrictions to use of the MA and other measures. Reclamation may donate or lease the water rights it owns in the La Plata River Drainage to the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) for instream flow through the MA if it determines that it would benefit the mitigation development process or in the future benefit the maintenance process.

Reclamation will continue to monitor any water development projects in the La Plata River basin which could impact the MA. In the event the required level of riparian vegetation within the MA cannot be maintained in accordance with this plan, Reclamation agrees, pursuant to Section 3.12, to develop a substitute mitigation area outside the La Plata River basin in and around the ALP Project Area to replace the wetland/riparian habitat lost in Ridges Basin.

This ALP Project Wetland/Riparian Mitigation and Monitoring Plan for the La Plata River Corridor, the major part of Reclamation's commitment to mitigate for habitat loss in a manner consistent with the 'Ecosystem Management' concept, is included in an overall program that considers all of the ALP Project mitigation objectives. Reclamation believes its wetland/riparian and upland mitigation requirements can and will be met within the acquired property.