

The riparian species recovery plan: A status report

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Abstract.—Several Federal and State agencies in Arizona and New Mexico are collaborating on the development of a strategy for the restoration of riparian systems. The strategy that is taking shape is the development of a package of formats, methods and information that can guide local groups in developing and implementing local riparian restoration plans. The major elements of the preliminary strategy are described.

INTRODUCTION

The proposed listing of the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) as an endangered species (USFWS 1993) had implications and repercussions that may seem out of proportion to proposed protection of a single bird subspecies. The flycatcher is a riparian-dependent species found primarily in Arizona, New Mexico, and California, with peripheral populations in some neighboring states. The proposed listing of a relatively widespread, riparian-dependent species was of great concern to Federal and State agencies that for several years had been carrying out riparian enhancement programs and recovery actions for previously listed endangered and threatened species. If the flycatcher could be proposed for protection, what additional riparian-dependent species may eventually need Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections?

Federal agencies in Arizona and New Mexico responded by exploring how they could accelerate the restoration of riparian habitats to achieve recovery of listed species and obviate the need to list additional species. It was immediately recognized that successful implementation would require the participation of private interests and should not stop at the boundaries of federal lands. Participation of state game and fish agencies was also seen as essential. With the encouragement of

the Southwestern Region of the USDA Forest Service and the Arizona and New Mexico State Offices of the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service appointed a Riparian Species Recovery Team to develop a comprehensive recovery strategy, or Riparian Species Recovery Plan, for riparian-dependent species through the restoration of riparian systems. The following team members were appointed to represent their respective agencies in the development of the plan: Douglas W. Shaw (Forest Service), Andy Dimas (New Mexico State Office of the BLM), Ron Hooper (Arizona State Office of the BLM), Michael Hatch (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish), and Lawrence M. Riley (Arizona Game and Fish Department). The author is serving as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's liaison to the Team.

Development of the strategy by the team is still in progress. This paper is a preliminary report on the possible content of the strategy and describes some of the major elements that are now being considered for inclusion in the strategy. This list of elements should be considered preliminary and subject to deletions, additions, or changes in emphasis as the Team continues its work.

TEAM MISSION STATEMENT

In their earliest deliberations, the Team developed the following mission statement to guide their development of a riparian strategy.

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Mission: Provide guidance and coordination to help restore ecological processes and native biodiversity for the recovery of sustainable riparian ecosystems and thereby:

- Build commitment and support from stakeholders for the protection of threatened and endangered species.
- Relieve regulatory requirements associated with the protection of threatened and endangered species.
- Obviate the need to list riparian-dependent species in the future.
- Promote socioeconomic health and sustainable use and enjoyment.

This mission will be accomplished through development of a strategy that will:

- Identify flexible, creative options under Endangered Species Act that may relieve regulatory requirements.
- Provide a framework for action that will promote synergy between diverse public and private efforts towards the common goal of riparian restoration.
- Provide tools for assessment and analysis of riparian conditions, implementation of recovery actions, and for periodic &/or continuous evaluation of the outcome of recovery actions.
- Foster commitment on the part of agencies, individuals, and private groups toward restoration activities.
- Improve communication to narrow the perceived gap between public and private sector interests, and to develop cooperation towards a common vision of riparian health.

ELEMENTS OF THE STRATEGY

1. Summary assessment of riparian in the Southwest

This preliminary section will describe in general terms the basis and need for a strategy to cover riparian systems. Prominent features would be the history of use of riparian areas, and the special features of Southwestern riparian that need to be

considered, such as the complex pattern of habitats in any riparian system and the dynamic nature of these systems. These features make it impossible to formulate a single standard for riparian habitat conditions and provide management prescriptions to achieve it. These complexities can only be addressed at local planning units, where history and the dynamics of these systems can be assessed in the context of current land use.

2. Public-driven approach

The participating agencies immediately recognized that riparian restoration and recovery cannot be achieved only within the boundaries of agency lands. Because the processes that determine the health of riparian habitats do not cease to operate at administrative boundaries, restoration efforts must occur with participation of the affected public. The level of participation will always be significant, but will also depend on the extent of private lands in a planning area. Areas with primarily private lands will require private leadership of the effort, and not simple participation.

Some may question the willingness of private groups to lead a process to benefit endangered and threatened species in the current, anti-regulatory environment. The basis for the Team's optimism is the expectation that many riparian users, if their concerns about regulation and property rights can be set aside, have a vision of riparian quality that is consistent with recovery of riparian habitat. Restoration of riparian health can also have economic benefits to users. In addition, a comprehensive management plan can simplify regulatory compliance and review; in the place of multiple users applying individually and project-by-project for permits or clearances to carry out actions, a single, comprehensive plan can undergo a single review that will cover all foreseeable actions within the planning area.

Although incentives may exist for developing such plans, the knowledge on how to do so may not be available. The strategy will identify sources of information, such as Bolling's (1994) book, *How to Save a River*, to help local groups initiate and gain support for a local riparian plan. Many of the following sections of the plan will provide additional access to tools for the development of a local riparian plan.

3.Format for a local assessment

The strategy will include a standard format to guide local groups in their assessment of the current status of the planning area and the objectives of their plan. The objective of this assessment is to give the group direction on how to efficiently achieve their ends by identifying essential information needs. Because the format is intended to facilitate, and not to regulate, the development of local plans, it will also have sufficient flexibility to allow special conditions of a given planning area to be considered. The objective in proposing a standard but flexible format is to promote consistency from plan-to-plan, while allowing modifications to fit local conditions.

4. Higer-level assessments

The size of local planning units will depend on a variety of conditions, including common uses, resources, and interest. A higher-level assessment, at a sub-basin or basin level, could be important in coordinating the local plans and ensuring their compatibility within the basin. Higher-level assessments would be primarily the responsibility of governmental agencies. Because they will require the commitment of fiscal resources, these assessments for all areas are unlikely to be done immediately for all areas. The lack of a higher-level assessment should not be seen as a barrier to immediate action, and local efforts should be encouraged to commence even without a formal higher-level assessment.

5. Resource planning procedures

The strategy will only briefly outline a sample procedure for developing, implementing, and evaluating local plans. Detailed planning processes have already been developed by agencies for their own use and can be easily adapted by local planning groups. Sources of detailed guidance to planning, such as the USDA Forest Service's (1993) Integrated Resource Management, will be referenced along with a source for local groups to obtain copies.

6. Riparian assessment and monitoring techniques

The strategy document will give an abbreviated outline or checklist of techniques and sources of

assessment and monitoring techniques. For example, BLM's Riparian Areas Management: Process for Assessing Proper Function Condition (Prichard et al. 1993) is a good general guide to these techniques that can be recommended in the strategy.

7. Riparian management techniques

This section would be in the form of an annotated list of proven management techniques, and would include references to sources of information and technical assistance.

8. Simplifying compliance with regulatory standards

A major incentive for participating in a local plan is to greatly simplify and reduce the burden of regulatory requirements. This section will review the regulatory standards, such as for the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act, and provide advice on how the plan can be designed to satisfy regulatory requirements and avoid the need for further permits and regulatory reviews. Information would also be provided on the ranges and general habitat needs of species that may need to be addressed in the local plan.

9. Conservation agreements

This section would provide format and guidance on developing cooperative conservation agreements, which are useful in documenting how parties, both private and governmental, will cooperate in implementing the local plan. These agreements can also form the basis of gaining regulatory clearance of actions under the plan.

10. Sources of funding and technical assistance

Although most funding may be locally generated, possible sources of governmental and foundation grant support will be listed. Additional lists will provide sources of technical services that agencies may be willing to provide as their in-kind contribution to the local plan. A checklist of types of bibliographical information that would be of value, such as Environmental Impact Statements

prepared for earlier projects in the area, could also be included. Existing compilations of sources, such as the *Riparian/Wetland Research Expertise Directory* (Tellman and Jemison 1995) will also be cited.

11. Other local planning efforts

Local groups will find it helpful to contact other groups involved in similar plans. This section will identify ongoing efforts and contacts so that local groups can coordinate and share experiences as they develop their plans. The New Mexico Riparian Council's compendium of riparian restoration activities will be a valuable reference in this section, as will the directory compiled by Tellman and Jemison (1995).

12. Interagency agreements

Cooperating Federal and State agencies would develop and sign agreements committing themselves to the high priority of riparian management on lands that they manage. The agencies would also express the intent to provide technical assistance to the local planning efforts. This technical assistance would advise local efforts in strictly technical areas, such as hydrology or fisheries biology, and in regulatory areas so that the eventual plan will achieve both resource and regulatory objectives.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the strategy is to provide a package of information to local planning groups to encourage them to undertake riparian restoration

and provide guidance for the development of their plan. The package should minimize the effort expended by planning groups on decisions about formats and in locating sources of information and assistance. In developing these materials, the Team has sought to avoid duplicating efforts by directing planners to existing formats and procedures and using checklists of possible sources whenever possible. The intent is to facilitate the planning process for local planning groups so that they can focus on actual planning and resolution of issues.

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