



News Release

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office
2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103
Phoenix, Arizona 85021
602/242-0210
602/242-2513 (Fax)

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>

For Release: April 22, 2008

Contacts: Mike Martinez (602/242-0210 x 224) and Jeff Humphrey (602/242-0210 x 222)
Nancy Ryan (480/350-8096) Rio Salado Manager

City of Tempe Agrees to Manage Rio Salado to Aid Endangered Species

Earth Day is more than an annual event at Tempe's Rio Salado Project. The City of Tempe is developing habitat that could be suitable for three endangered birds on its portion of the Rio Salado Environmental Restoration Project. The City has committed to maintain 159 acres of native wetland and riparian vegetation on a portion of the Salt River that could attract endangered southwestern willow flycatchers and Yuma clapper rails and threatened bald eagles.

The City completed a Safe Harbor Agreement and on Earth Day the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved an endangered species enhancement of survival permit. The Safe Harbor Agreement spells out how habitat will be restored and maintained.

"Tempe should be commended for establishing habitat and assisting in endangered species recovery here in a major metropolitan area," said Mike Martinez, fish and wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Rio Salado offers us urban-dwellers a quiet, natural retreat and will hopefully provide a safe harbor to bald eagles, flycatchers and clapper rails in the near future."

Because many endangered and threatened species occur primarily or exclusively on private land – including land held by municipalities like the Tempe's Rio Salado Project – it is critical to involve private landowners in their conservation and recovery. Many landowners want to take action to help conserve these species on their property, but are concerned about potential land use restrictions that may occur if listed species begin to colonize or expand their numbers as a result of conservation actions. Due to these concerns, some landowners may limit land and water management practices that could enhance and maintain habitat for listed species.

To allay those concerns and provide landowners with both management flexibility and regulatory certainty, the Service developed the Safe Harbor program. Under this program, the Service initiates Safe Harbor Agreements with willing landowners who agree to provide habitat for listed species. The Service first establishes a "baseline" status for the species on the property, and develops an agreement under which the landowner agrees to undertake management actions that, directly or indirectly, will contribute to the recovery of the species.

In return for these efforts, the Service issues an "enhancement of survival" permit that provides assurances that, when the agreement's term ends, the participating landowner may use the property in any otherwise legal manner that ensures that it stays at or above the baseline conditions established when the agreement began. As part of the agreement, the Service issues a permit allowing incidental take of individual plants or animals and habitat modifications that could return the property to conditions agreed upon as baseline.

Prior to Tempe's efforts, the Salt River bottom provided no southwestern willow flycatcher nesting habitat or bald eagle roost sites and cattail stands were not adequate to support Yuma clappers rails. The City started with a baseline of "zero" threatened and endangered species. However, it is hoped that on-going cottonwood and willow planting programs and marshland development will someday attract nesting flycatchers and clapper rails and invite roosting bald eagles.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

###