



News Release

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Arizona Ecological Services Field Office

www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/

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Plan Drafted to Restore Habitat Burned by Diesel Spill and Fire at Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking input on a draft plan for the restoration of natural resource injuries that occurred as a result of a diesel spill and the resulting fire at Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge. Once finalized and implemented, the plan will restore injured wildlife and fisheries habitat and the ecological function of lost environmental services. The draft plan lays out a number of immediate and long-term projects and identifies a preferred combination of alternatives to facilitate habitat restoration and offset losses.

On July 28, 2006, a Texmo Oil Company Jobbers tanker truck crashed on the State Highway 95 bridge over the Bill Williams River, where the river joins Lake Havasu, 20 miles north of Parker, Ariz. 7,600-7,800 gallons of diesel spilled and then ignited, burning 348 acres of marsh, riparian and upland desert vegetation.

The Texmo spill and fire injured some of the rarest habitats left on the lower Colorado River basin, including the lower river's most intact community of riparian-dependent species. The affected habitat supports two endangered birds – the southwestern willow flycatcher and Yuma clapper rail, two endangered fishes – the razorback sucker and bonytail, and the candidate yellow-billed cuckoo. Over 300 species of migratory or nesting bird species are known to use the area.

Shortly after the spill and fire, emergency seeding of native grasses and forbs was conducted to prevent soil erosion and the invasion of non-native plants into the riparian woodlands and desert washes impacted by the fire. The anticipated natural recovery period, without additional action, for the riparian woodlands is approximately 40 years and recovery for desert wash habitat is 75 years. The emergency restoration prevented further harm but did not fully compensate for the injuries.

On Sept. 12, 2007, Texmo Oil Jobbers, Inc. entered into a negotiated settlement and consent decree to compensate the public for damages. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received \$1.2 million in the settlement for restoration, rehabilitation, or replacement of injured natural resources and/or acquisition of equivalent natural resources. The preferred alternatives may include habitat acquisition and restoration at off-site locations as well as within the burned area.

The plan and alternatives are presented in a draft environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act. The draft plan and environmental assessment is available the Internet at www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/, or by contacting Arizona Ecological Services Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021-4951, or calling (602) 242-0210. Comments can be mailed to the above address or e-mailed to carrie_marr@fws.gov. Comments must be received by Sept. 23, 2011.

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. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

Video and still photos of the 2006 fire and photos of affected wildlife species are available by contacting Jeff Humphrey (602-242-0210 x222).