

## Briefing Statement

**Date:** April 22, 2004

**Title:** Riparian Restoration Initiative

### **Background:**

Riparian habitats are rare in the California Desert. These habitats, however, are extremely important because of the diversity and abundance of both the plant and animal life they support. Many of these valuable, rare habitats contain exotic vegetation that nearly always contains large amounts of saltcedar. Once salt cedar invades a riparian area, it can choke out the native vegetation and form a monoculture that is so thick animals cannot penetrate it to reach the associated water sources. It also tends to channelize river systems, which eliminates biologically productive backwater habitats used by fish, waterfowl, wading birds, shore birds, and amphibians. Channelization also prevents scouring floods, which deposit nutrients and provides suitable conditions for native plant reproduction and growth. Salt cedar uses such massive amounts of water that often surface water will dry up or the ground water table will lower.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in coordination with the National Park Service (NPS) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), recently submitted a preliminary proposal and funding request to the Wildlife Conservation Board of the State of California (WCB) to restore important riparian zones by removing exotic plants, primarily saltcedar. The preliminary proposal describes a coordinated exotic plant control effort over a period of twelve years with an estimated cost of approximately \$5.6 million. The WCB expressed an interest in the project but suggest that additional partners and funding sources should be identified.

In March, John Hamill and Russell Scofield visited the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in San Francisco and presented the concept of a watershed based, multi-agency, California desert tamarisk control grant. NFWF expressed an interest and asked that we further develop the proposal. Currently, a proposal is being developed that prioritizes and annualizes projects.

In April, Russell Scofield attended the *Team Tamarisk- Cooperating for Results* Conference in Albuquerque. There is currently broad support for tamarisk control through the southwest (including California) and additional sources of federal funding might become available in the near future.

### **Next Steps:**

1. A *DMG Strategy for Coordinated Riparian Exotic Vegetation Management in the California Desert* will be prepared. The document will be used to market the program and to show potential funders how DMG agencies are working in partnership on a watershed basis. By creating such a document, DMG will show that we are “ready to go” and just need funding. New Mexico’s *Strategy for Long-Term Management of Exotic Trees in Riparian Areas...* will be used as a

model. The draft will be sent out for review by Val Page (MWMA), Jeff Aardahl (RIFO), Jim Dice (ABDSP), Earl Andress (USDA-APHIS), Steve Schoenig (CDFA) and resource staff from DEVA, BAFO, PSFO, and ECFO. The strategy will be presented to the DMG for approval in July 2004.

2. Hold a meeting in either Sacramento or San Francisco between WCB and NFWF staff to develop a coordinated grant request.
3. Complete the agreement between ECFO, CDFG, and ABDSP for work in the San Sebastian- San Felipe Creek watershed. The agreement is critical for selling the project as multi-jurisdictional and obtaining non-federal, in kind matches.

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