



FACT SHEET

Riparian Area Improvements Through Restoration Activities on the Lower San Pedro River February 2012

INTRODUCTION

In April, 2009, the Department of the Interior and the State of Arizona, acting as natural resource trustees (Trustees) received a monetary settlement and three parcels of land (San Pedro River properties), including water rights, along the San Pedro River near Dudleyville from ASARCO L.L.C. through the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) program (a part of the CERCLA statute). This settlement was sought by the Trustees to account for injuries to trust resources incurred through multiple releases of hazardous substances by ASARCO into Mineral Creek and the Gila River over the past three decades.

The Trustees have prepared a document entitled “Draft Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment for the Hazardous Substance Releases from the Hayden Smelter and Ray Mine Facilities” which details a strategy to replace, restore, or acquire the equivalent of the injured natural resources. The site of injury includes Mineral Creek, from Big Box Dam to the Gila River and from the confluence of the San Pedro and Gila Rivers near Winkelman, downstream past the Hayden Smelter Complex, to the Ashurst-Hayden Diversion Dam (Fig 1).

The proposed sites for restoration are three former ASARCO properties (995 acres) on the lower San Pedro River, near the Aravaipa Creek confluence, which were conveyed to the Arizona Game and Fish Commission as a part of the settlement agreement.

THE RESTORATION PLAN

Under the settlement, a Trustee Restoration Council was established to coordinate development and implementation of this restoration plan. The agencies on the Trustee Council are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Arizona Department of Environmental



Figure 1. The area of injury from the Hayden Smelter Complex to the Ray Mine.

Quality (ADEQ), Game and Fish Department (AGFD) and State Land Department (ASLD).

For the proposed restoration alternative, the Trustees have prioritized a series of restoration actions to be conducted on the San Pedro River properties. These activities will be implemented to restore the resources lost through the releases at the Ray Mine and the Hayden Smelter Complex, which included losses of riparian, emergent, and aquatic vegetation, as well as loss of aquatic insects and native fish. After the public review period, the Trustees will address comments and finalize the Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment. Currently, the properties consist of approximately 995 acres, of which approximately 500 acres of riparian habitat, 390 acres of uplands, and 105 acres of currently active agricultural fields exist. Approximately 20% of the riparian area is covered with nonnative vegetation, primarily salt cedar (*Tamarix spp.*).

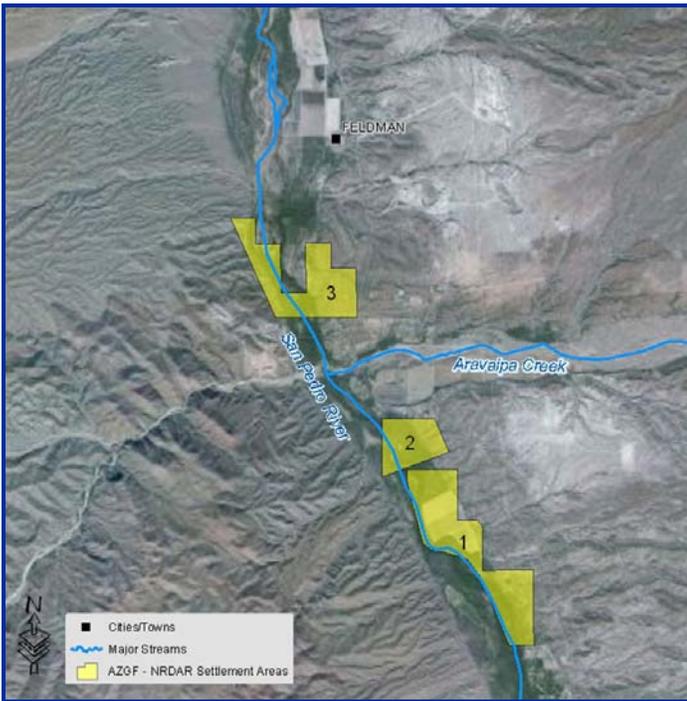


Figure 2. Three parcels of land transferred to the Trustees as part of the NRDAR settlement.

Under AGFD ownership, the San Pedro River properties will be open to limited hunting and outdoor recreation (e.g., bird watching, hiking, nature photography, etc.).

The Trustees considered a variety of potential restoration actions and selected the following actions to form the Preferred Alternative:

1. Fencing property boundaries to encourage re-growth of native vegetation
2. Land Acquisition/ Conservation Easements to make adjacent parcels contiguous for fencing purposes
3. Increase amount of emergent wetland habitat within the bankfull area of the river by encouraging beaver colonization
4. Increase the area of native riparian vegetation along the San Pedro River by planting native tree species
5. Removal of invasive vegetation, primarily salt cedar, along the river corridor in selected areas

IMPLEMENTATION

The Trustees have prepared this draft restoration plan to provide the public with information regarding the natural resource damages that have occurred, the

restoration objectives that have guided development of this plan and the Trustee's preferred approach to compensate the public for the natural resources lost. Each agency has a role in the implementation plan. The properties will be owned and managed by AGFD. ASLD also holds large tracts of State Trust lands in the area. Both USFWS and AGFD have experience in riparian restoration and ecosystem/wildlife management. ADEQ, AGFD and BLM will conduct monitoring activities to determine baseline conditions for surface water quality and quantity, groundwater levels, stream habitat conditions, riparian resources, wildlife resources and river stability. Monitoring will be intensive for the first 5 years then will be performed periodically in order to track the success of the restoration actions.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

The public review of the restoration plan began with a public notice in the *San Manuel Miner* and the *Copper Basin News* on February 8, 2012. The draft restoration plan is available for review and comment for 30 days commencing on February 8th. The draft plan is available for review at:

Central Arizona College
Aravaipa Campus Library
80440 E. Aravaipa Road
Winkelman, AZ 85192

or can be downloaded from the AGFD Web site:

<http://www.azgfd.gov/SanPedroRestorationPlan>

The Trustees also held an open house at the Central Arizona College – Aravaipa Campus on February 16, 2012 to answer any questions the public had on the draft restoration plan.

The deadline for submitting written comments is Friday, March 9, 2012. Written comments received during the comment period and the agencies' responses will be summarized in the final restoration plan. Comments should be submitted, in writing, to:

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