

COCOPAH COLORADO RIVER LIMITROPHE RESTORATION PROJECT



Credit: Julia Morton, Audubon

WHAT THIS PROJECT DOES

The Cocopah Indian Tribe is bringing new life to 430 acres of severely degraded floodplain along the Colorado River where it flows through the Tribe's reservation lands in southwestern Arizona. For decades, the river in this area has been disconnected from its floodplain, and at the southern end of the reservation it has ceased flowing entirely near the border with Mexico, degrading this once lush landscape relied upon by the Tribe for food, clean water, well-being, and cultural traditions. This project will transform the area by removing invasive species and planting native vegetation that can be used for the Tribe's rituals while creating hundreds of acres of accessible green space. The Tribe will also construct a new riverside park with a walking path, beach access to the River, overlooks, and other community amenities that will turn this underutilized riverside into an oasis for Tribal members and visitors alike. The Tribe will use their Colorado River water rights and treated wastewater from the City of Yuma to support these restoration efforts now and into the future. Phase one construction and revegetation will take place from Oct. 2025 to spring 2026. Phase two will be completed by spring 2027.

PROJECT BENEFITS

This project will have a disproportionately large impact on this stretch of the Colorado River and the Tribe. The Cocopah are known as 'people of the river' and the newly constructed riverside amenities will offer Tribal members an opportunity to reconnect with the River, supporting their spiritual, mental, and physical health and offering them and visitors a chance to relax and recreate. The restored native vegetation will allow the Tribe to source materials for their cultural rituals and traditions from their own lands rather than traveling off-reservation, and provide members of a new Tribal Youth Corps with tangible skills in landscape restoration that they can use on and off the reservation. Additionally, the project will make the reservation, which already has an RV park and entertainment enterprises, more attractive to visitors, encouraging local tourism and boosting the Tribe's economy. This project complements aligned restoration efforts in the Colorado River Delta under Minute 323 and in the Lower Colorado River under the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program that, cumulatively, will increase the resiliency of these landscapes to hotter and drier weather while supporting dependent birds, fish, and other wildlife.

PROJECT DETAILS

Project Location: AZ-7

Project Cost: \$10.9 million

Funding Awarded to Date:
\$8.77 million

Project Funding: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation - America's Ecosystem Restoration Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Tribal Wildlife Grant, Bureau of Indian Affairs - Tribal Climate Resilience Program, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, and Bonneville Environmental Foundation

Partners: Cocopah Indian Tribe, National Audubon Society

PROTECTING THE COLORADO RIVER AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT DEPEND ON IT

The Colorado River is a resource for 40 million people. It provides drinking water, as well as critical food and energy production. It's an engine for local economies, an irreplaceable habitat for native birds, fish, and wildlife, and an essential part of the Western way of life. But it's on the brink of collapse.

The river is over-allocated, and its two largest reservoirs have fallen to roughly one-third capacity. Decades of drought and rising temperatures threaten the reliability of future water supplies in Colorado River Basin states, putting crucial infrastructure in jeopardy and increasing risks to communities from natural disasters like wildfires and floods.

INVESTING IN THE COLORADO RIVER BASIN'S FUTURE

In order to ensure that the Colorado River can continue to be a reliable source of clean water for communities and agriculture throughout the Basin, we need long-term, sustainable state and federal funding for strategies that make the river more resilient, conserve water, and protect communities from increasingly severe fires, floods, and drought.

HOW TO CREATE A MORE RESILIENT COLORADO RIVER BASIN



Improve forest health using management and restoration strategies designed to protect the forested areas in the Colorado River Basin, such as thinning overgrown areas, removing invasive plant species, and conducting prescribed burns.



Restore wetlands, high-elevation mountain meadows, and riverside habitat to help improve the health of rivers and streams across the Basin, reduce sediment in downstream reservoirs and water infrastructure, improve water security, and enhance forage. Strategies include implementing wood and rock structures to slow river flows, reestablishing native plants, and replenishing groundwater to help protect clean water supplies and restore degraded rivers and streams.



Increase agricultural efficiency and enable farmers to develop strategies that work for them, like supporting on-farm water conservation methods, alternative crops that use less water, and investing in infrastructure upgrades like lining canals.



Boost municipal water conservation by expanding what is already working, like water-efficient plumbing and appliances, leak detection systems, water reuse, replacing thirsty lawns with drought-tolerant landscaping, and incorporating water planning into urban development and growth decisions.

Contact: Julia Morton
Julia.Morton@audubon.org



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