



National Fire Plan

Reclaiming the Rio Grande by Removing Salt Cedar

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge - New Mexico

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico was named for the Native Americans who once camped in the riverside forests along the majestic Rio Grande River. Now, the “woods of the Apache” are under siege from salt cedar – also known as tamarisk – a small, invasive tree introduced from Asia early last century. Highly fire-adapted and flammable, the plant has taken hold in vast areas of the Southwest, becoming a severe fire hazard to both human and ecological communities. The refuge is leading the fight against the invasion.

A large-scale fuels reduction study will determine the best methods for removing invasive species from the Rio Grande Valley and restoring native cottonwoods and willows. Salt cedar is a major fire hazard along the Rio Grande corridor and has fueled several major fires in recent years. So far, the project has eradicated almost 350 acres of salt cedar using machinery and prescribed fires. Some of the treated areas will be seeded with cottonwood, black willow, and shrubs to restore native habitat.

Other research plots are being cleared on the refuge and flood-irrigated to see if native species will return without replanting. So far, revegetation has occurred on two plots and the results are encouraging, with salt cedar and other weed growth staying under control. Grasslands that were cleared and burned also are regenerating.



Employees of the U.S. Forest Service and the University of New Mexico are assisting refuge staff with ongoing monitoring of this project and will help refine future treatments. Monitoring the treatments’ effects on wildlife will continue for several years. Partners in the fuels reduction project include the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, U.S. Geological Survey, the Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Land Department, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, the City of Albuquerque, and other local state and federal partners.