

Mitigation in riparian areas: Questions, concerns and recommendations

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Abstract.-The management of seven thousand acres in the Rio Grande Valley State Park presents a unique management challenge and opportunity. The Open Space Division defines a riparian area as “any area of land influenced directly by permanent water”. The influence of permanent water or water flows produces visible vegetation and visible vegetative characteristics on the affected land. The Open Space Division management practices are designed to avoid adverse and negative impacts as much as possible. Mitigation measures such as creating wetland, land donation (including beneficial land exchanges and monetary/compensatory measures) are encouraged. This paper addresses questions about mitigation procedures.

The Management of seven thousand acres in the Rio Grande Valley State Park presents a unique management challenge and opportunity. The Open Space Division defines Riparian areas as “any area of land influenced directly by permanent water.” The influence of this permanent water or water flows produces visible vegetation and visible vegetative characteristics on the affected land by this water influence or presence.

Our riparian areas yield a lush green bosque bordering the great Rio Grande River and are some of the most valued areas entrusted to the Open Space Division to manage.

In order for the Open Space Division to achieve their goals and objectives, funding, support and agency co-operation are necessary. Among our major management goals is the protection of Riparian Areas. We attempt to avoid or keep to a minimum negative, and costly impacts using mitigation agreements or other compensatory actions.

The Open Space Division management practices are designed to avoid adverse and negative impacts as much as possible. Unavoidable impacts are common and must be minimized and mitigated appropriately. Mitigation measures such as creating wetlands, land donations including beneficial land exchanges and monetary, compensatory measures are encouraged.

When established trees and vegetation are removed, they must be replaced satisfactorily. Replacement of trees and vegetation should include a minimum of three years of monitoring. This monitoring documents the success rate and the success of the mitigation agreements.

Question: Can 40 or 50 year old trees be mitigated with planting 3, 5, or 10 dormant stock cuttings without any monitoring efforts?

Answer: Due to the extensive established root system and age, the older tree will live longer as conditions exist. Newly planted poles or cuttings must be monitored to document their survival rates. Protection must be provided from beaver other possible infestations.

The re-establishment of the desired plant community is also needed and should be included in

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the mitigation process. Inventories should be performed by a Project and/or Resource Manager.

Monetary values should be assigned to trees based on a standardized appraisal method. Shrubs and other vegetation can be replaced using 2:1, 3:1 or applicable replacement ratios. Monetary values should also be assigned.

After monetary values are established to satisfy mitigation issues, negotiations for an agreeable

dollar amount can be achieved. The negotiated amount should cover replacement, support, maintenance, initial project costs and an ongoing monitoring program for a three year period.

Agencies involved in the mitigation process should incorporate funding in their planning process to provide ongoing maintenance to the re-established and recovering mitigated areas prior to the termination of the mitigation agreement.