



MEXICO: RESTORING A DESERT LIFELINE



© WWF-Canon/Edward PARKER

WWF aims to ensure the flow of the Rio Conchos to sustain and refresh the Rio Grande and its exceptional web of life.

Protecting an exceptional web of life

The Rio Grande (known as the Rio Bravo in Mexico) is the fifth longest river in North America, running along the border through the semi-arid yet biologically rich Chihuahuan desert. The river runs dry for some 400km before the Rio Conchos tributary restores its flow. With its tributary, the Rio Grande supports an exceptional web of life including more than 250 species of bird, hundreds of native mammals and more than nine million people.

However, the health of the Rio Grande ecosystem is failing, due to pollution and over-use of the water to irrigate fields and supply the towns. With HSBC's funding, WWF aims to ensure the flow of the Rio Conchos to sustain and refresh the Rio Grande.

Towards better water management

To conserve the upper Rio Conchos Basin, a region where virtually all varieties of Chihuahuan wildlife, plants and habitat are represented, it is vital that the five protected areas of the basin are managed as a unified landscape. Historically they have been managed as separate entities, with differing visions. A new integrated approach to the management of the river basin is required, combining forest and water conservation.

The path to unifying the management of protected areas in Texas and northern Mexico has started with a project to remove the exotic and thirsty salt cedar shrub from the riverbank and replace it with native flora. This will help restore the riverside to its natural state.

Legislation to ensure that water is valued

To ensure that water is valued in Mexico and the US, WWF is focusing on three policy goals.

As a result of WWF's successful lobbying, Mexico's 1992 water law has been reformed, leading to more efficient use of water and ensuring that planning decisions respect the needs of the environment. In the US, we will be lobbying strongly for a bill that will introduce fees for water users in New Mexico. This will create an important state-wide source of funding for water conservation. We will also be driving forward the formation of a legally empowered Water Trust in Texas that can acquire water rights for the environment.



Demonstrating best practice for the future

As the agriculture sector is a large consumer of water, WWF is working on two irrigation projects – in the Delicias Irrigation District in Mexico and across the border in the Elephant Butte Irrigation District, New Mexico. Water-efficient irrigation will be introduced and evaluated so as to encourage good practice elsewhere in the Rio Grande Basin.

With the support of a media and public campaign on the theme of “more water for wildlife, habitat and people”, WWF is also working to influence the US government and state governments of Colorado, New Mexico and Texas to establish a task force to champion the restoration of the Rio Grande Basin in cooperation with Mexico. Within five years, we are looking for the US government to start funding the restoration of the basin, thereby forming a solid foundation for future Rio Grande conservation.



www.wwf.org.uk
for a living planet®

HSBC 
The world's local bank