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Rio Salado, Salt River, Phoenix, Arizona - An Metropolitan Miracle in the Making

Kathleen Bergmann

United States Army Corps of Engineers

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Kathleen Bergmann

Physical Sciences Study Manager
US Army Corps of Engineers
3636 N Central Avenue, suite 900
Phoenix AZ 85012-1939
Ph : (602) 640-2003
Fax : (602) 640-5382

Kathleen.M.Bergmann@usace.army.mil

Mike Turnak

US Army Corps of Engineers
Mike.Turnak@usace.army.mil

The Salt River through Phoenix was once an oasis in the Lower Sonoran Desert region of Arizona. It has been a site of human occupation for centuries. The mysterious Hohokam Indians settled there in pre-Columbian times and disappeared leaving a system of canals for early European settlers to begin building the metropolitan area we see today. However, the need for water resources and the desire to minimize flooding in the region resulted in the construction of a series of dams for water storage and eventually flood storage. The oasis in the desert that was once the Salt River became a wasteland and an eyesore that was blight to the region.

Many solutions were proposed and rejected until the Cities of Phoenix and Tempe turned to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and began the Rio Salado Project. This project is a result of the Corp's newest ecosystem restoration mission, and is nearing completion of construction. The Corps of Engineers does not participate in economic development projects, but this project should lead to economic development as well as provide a restored ecosystem through the center of this highly urbanized area.

The project stretches through 5.5 miles of downtown Phoenix and includes restoration of the Salt above, below Town Lake, and at confluence of the Salt and Indian Bend Wash in Tempe. It includes opening of new wells, a water delivery system, wetlands, a flowing stream, and riparian areas. Recreation and interpretive educational facilities will be a part of the plan as well. The benefits of this partnership include habitat for plants and wildlife as well as a low flow channel to pass flood flows quickly through the metropolitan area. The ability of this project to withstand a flood event has recently been demonstrated and there are many "lessons learned" for future restoration projects.