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**NEW CONSERVATION AREA PROVIDES HABITAT TO PROTECT
ENDANGERED FISH AND WILDLIFE ALONG COLORADO RIVER
*635 acres added to Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program***

BLYTHE, CALIF. – A wide swath of former farmland next to the Colorado River is being transformed into a natural habitat of cottonwood, willow and honey mesquite trees as part of a broad program to protect threatened and endangered species that once thrived in the river’s floodplains.

The Bureau of Reclamation and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California formally dedicated the 635-acre site in the Palo Verde Valley today as the Dennis Underwood Conservation Area, named after the former Reclamation commissioner and Metropolitan general manager.

The area was created through an easement granted by Metropolitan, which owns the land, to Reclamation for the development and management of the habitat in perpetuity. Restoration and planting work has begun and is expected to be completed in 2021.

“We’ve been working hard to help ensure the reliability of the Colorado River for the 40 million people across the Southwest who depend on its waters, while working to ensure the health of the river’s diverse ecosystems and wildlife,” said Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman. “It’s fitting that we’re naming this valuable habitat after Dennis Underwood since he contributed so much to the Colorado River and western water over his more than 30-year career. Dennis Underwood’s legacy of partnerships and problem-solving will be remembered as the conservation area is protected in perpetuity.”

The area is the latest addition to the [Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program](#), a historic federal/state partnership launched in 2005 to work toward the recovery of endangered and threatened fish and wildlife along 400 miles of the Lower Colorado. The 50-year

program will ultimately create more than 8,100 acres of new natural habitat, including riparian, marsh and backwaters, to protect more than 27 fish, bird, mammal, amphibian and reptile species.

To date, 17 conservation areas totaling more than 6,000 acres have been established along the river, from Lake Mead to the Mexican border.

The Dennis Underwood Conservation Area is expected to attract numerous species, such as the yellow-billed cuckoo, vermilion flycatcher, Arizona Bell's vireo, western red bat and Colorado River cotton rat.

The cost of the \$626 million program is split 50/50 between the federal government and the Lower Basin states, with California contributing half of the states' portion and Arizona and Nevada each contributing 25 percent. Program participants consist of six federal agencies and 51 non-federal agencies, including state and federal resource agencies, water and power users, Native American tribes, municipalities and conservation organizations.

“We are all partners in this effort. For the Colorado River to continue supplying water to the people, farms and economies of seven states and Mexico, we also must ensure the river continues supporting the diverse species who call it home, from the razorback sucker fish, to the desert pocket mouse,” Metropolitan General Manager Jeffrey Kightlinger said. “We must balance many urban, agricultural and ecological needs.”

The Dennis Underwood Conservation Area was named in honor of Underwood, who worked in the water industry for more than 30 years, including serving as Reclamation commissioner from 1989 to 1993 and at Metropolitan from 1999 until his passing in 2005, when he was general manager. Underwood also served the nation as a commissioned officer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from 1966 to 1969. He brought a unique and creative approach to the challenges of western water, and many of his approaches serve as the cornerstone of water management today, particularly on the Colorado River.

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