

When harmful substances enter the environment, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources are often injured. The Department of the Interior, along with State, Tribal and other Federal Partners, act as “trustees” for these resources. Trustees seek to identify the natural resources injured and determine the extent of the injuries, to recover damages from the polluters, and to plan and to carry out natural resource restoration activities. These efforts are possible under the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program, whose goal is to restore natural resources lost to contamination. The Department, along with other trustees, is accomplishing this goal along the Jordan River in northern Utah, bringing a cleaner, healthier environment to the people of the area.

The Jordan River

A riparian ecosystem is a complex community of plants and animals found along the banks of a natural watercourse (such as a river). These ecosystems make up less than three percent of Utah’s land surface but support the largest variety and greatest concentrations of birds of any habitat type in the State. Originating at Utah Lake and flowing north, through urban Salt Lake City and its surrounding suburbs, to the Great Salt Lake’s Farmington Bay some 55 miles away, the Jordan River is one of Utah’s most wounded rivers. Over the years, pollution, channelization, dredging, grazing, and urban encroachment have altered the river’s once rich riparian habitats. Historically, this river was an important migration route and breeding location for neotropical

Restoring Our Resources

Utah’s Jordan River– Sharon Steel and Midvale Slag



The Sharon Steel and Midvale Slag sites are located just south of Salt Lake City, Utah.

migratory songbirds, such as warblers and flycatchers, as well as many species of waterfowl, wading birds, and raptors. Today, a number of bird species such as tree swallows, kingbirds, and great blue herons, which are still common in riparian areas throughout Utah, are rare or absent along the Jordan River.

The Problem

The Sharon Steel and Midvale Slag Superfund sites are located a short distance from each other along the Jordan River in Midvale, Utah, approximately 12 miles south of Salt Lake City. Sharon Steel operated as an ore milling facility from 1906 to 1971. The processed ore was provided to various smelters, including Midvale Slag. Mine tailings and smelting waste were spread throughout the two sites, burying hundreds of acres of riverine wetlands. The piles of fine-grained tailings often reached heights up to 60 feet and were said to resemble sand dunes. Tailings were also dumped directly into the Jordan River contaminating river sediments down stream from the sites, killing fish and injuring migratory birds. In addition, nearly 600 acres of a nearby residential community were



Sharon Steel began operations in 1906. By the time the plant closed in 1971, hundred of acres of riverine habitat had been buried.

contaminated by windblown tailings. The contaminants of greatest concern are lead and arsenic. Both contaminants are harmful or toxic to humans and most other living creatures and can accumulate in the tissue of plants and animals. Lead is known to affect survival, growth, learning, reproduction, behavior and development in most living organisms. Arsenic can cause fetal death and malformations in many types of mammals and even small amounts are known to be toxic to humans.

Restoring the Resources

In 1991, a \$2.3 million damage settlement was awarded to the U.S. Department of Interior as compensation for injuries to natural resources caused by Sharon Steel and Midvale Slag. Settlement money will be used to fund restoration projects developed in a cooperative planning effort by the Department, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acting as the lead, and the State of Utah. The Restoration Plan developed by these co-trustees, entails the acquisition of approximately 274 acres of land containing large areas of high-value wetland and riparian habitat and the restoration of these areas.



Volunteers helping to restore wildlife habitat by planting trees.



The Jordan River - As part of the Restoration Plan, approximately 274 acres of wetland and riparian habitat will be acquired and restored.

Restoration activities include: restoration of a natural river channel to allow the establishment of natural shoreline vegetation; stabilization of river banks; replacement of non-native plants with native species; modification of site hydrology to enhance wetlands; and, elimination of grazing. These restoration activities will revitalize native wetland and riparian habitats and accelerate the rate of recovery for wildlife. Numerous Jordan River bird species, including the Federally listed endangered peregrine falcon and threatened bald eagle, will benefit from these efforts. In addition, improved management and increased education will help prevent future degradation.

To meet the restoration plan goals, funds far greater than those provided by the settlement were needed. So, several Federal, state and local agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private individuals and businesses came together to create a partnership; each making a financial or service contribution. With all of the resources pooled, a total of four times the settlement amount was made available to acquire and restore approximately 270 acres of riparian habitat on the Jordan River.

Restoration of the natural resources associated with the Jordan River will

benefit not only the birds, fish, and other wildlife that rely on the river, but it will make the human environment a better, healthier place to live.

A Partnership of Success

The Jordan River restoration effort has required immense planning, negotiating, and vision and is a perfect example of what can be achieved when Federal, state and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and private organizations and individuals work together to secure a healthier ecosystem for fish and wildlife, and a cleaner environment for people. Cooperative efforts such as this will continue as the agencies and organizations entrusted with the care of our natural resources seek similar success throughout the state of Utah.

For more information, contact:
US Fish and Wildlife Service, Utah Field Office, Lincoln Plaza Suite 404, 145 East 1300 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84115; 801-524-5001. Also, visit the USFWS's home page at <http://www.fws.gov> and the USFWS's Jordan River web site at <http://www.r6.fws.gov/jordan>.

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