

**The Yuma East Wetlands:  
A transformation from wasteland to ecological gem  
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**In 1999 the Yuma East Wetlands (YEW) was a crime ridden trash dump infested with non-native plant species. This area was cut off from the life-giving flows of the Colorado River. For over four decades the Yuma community had turned its back on the YEW and as a result the people and riverfront disconnected from one another. In 1998 an effort to clean up and restore this area was initiated by the Quechan Indian Tribe, City of Yuma, private landowners and state and federal agencies. Many people, including former Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt, felt that this region of the Colorado River “could not be restored”. Despite formidable obstacles and lack of sufficient funding and political capital, the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area (HA) led the YEW partnership to restore this area back to its natural wonder and reconnect the community with the legendary Colorado River.**

**In two decades the YEW Partnership planned, designed and restored the Yuma East Wetlands. The partnership has:**

- **Raised more than 12 million dollars for project implementation**
- **Restored and protected more than 380 acres of degraded riparian and wetland habitat on the Colorado River**
- **Constructed two nature parks and 10 miles of riverfront trails and environmental education interpretation in the wetlands**
- **Created hundreds of full and part time jobs and millions of dollars in economic impact in the Yuma Community**
- **Maintained an unprecedented partnership between the Quechan Indian Tribe, City of Yuma, private landowners and state and federal agencies**
- **Served as a model of community based ecological restoration throughout the US and Mexico**
- **Reconnected a community with the river that runs through it**

**One of the most outstanding aspects of this endeavor is the resurrection of the endangered, threatened and listed wildlife species in the YEW. Today multiple pairs of endangered Yuma Clapper Rails nest in the YEW restored marshes. The restored cottonwood and willow forests are now home to a nesting pair of the threatened Yellow Bill Cuckoo. The vast areas of restored native grasslands in the YEW now host the largest known population of the Yuma hispid cotton rat, a species of special concern. Other avifauna including the endangered southwest willow flycatcher, california black rail, arizona bell's vireo, gila woodpecker, gilded flicker, summer tanager, vermilion flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, least bittern, california leaf-nosed bat, western red bat and western yellow bat occur in the YEW. The Lower Colorado River Multispecies Conservation Plan has adopted the long term maintenance and monitoring of the YEW due to the success of this ecological restoration.**

**In under two decades the YEW partnership has transformed this area from forgotten wasteland to an internationally recognized, award winning ecological gem that is cherished by community and wildlife alike. It is a treasure that will be appreciated by generations.**