

## Floods, Riparian Restoration and History

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Ecological restoration, like politics, is an “art of the possible”. Our desires to reconstitute past conditions encounter permanently revised soils, hydrology, climate, biota, and an array of stakeholders with clashing interests. Each, in its own way, is an “elephant in the room” that can neither be ignored nor simply forced to submit. The hydrology elephant offers a case in point. Although we are prone to think of ‘natural’ (i.e., prehistoric) southwestern riparian ecosystems as having escaped the basic water *supply* limitations of upland deserts, they were water limited in another important way. Southwestern riparian biota assembled around and developed tight phenological couplings to floodplains structured and regularly revised by high-energy spring flooding. Since those spring floodwaters are the prime object of Reclamation-era storage and flood control dams, southwestern floodplain geomorphology has been fundamentally altered for the foreseeable future. Absent the process of spring flooding, “there is no ‘there’, there” for plants that depended on it, or animals that depended on those plants. As a result, riparian restoration in the region will necessarily require working in concert with processes now in place, under prevailing conditions. It must be a matter of creative negotiation toward an unprecedented condition rather than an attempt to force “living history” to persist in an uncooperative environment.