

NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service begins removal of Cambalache Dam to aid conservation of Río Grande de Arecibo

Arecibo, Puerto Rico – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service), along with the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (PRDNER) and other partners, today began the removal of the Cambalache Dam.

The removal of the low-rise dam will connect and restore 25 kilometers of riverine habitat to a more natural state, as well as provide fish and other aquatic species with a healthier, free-flowing stream. It will also rid the river of a safety hazard, decrease erosion and boost recreational opportunities upstream of Arecibo.

“Removal of the Cambalache Dam is a critical step towards connecting and restoring the natural flow, beauty and aquatic biodiversity of the Río Grande de Arecibo,” said Leopoldo Miranda, Regional Director for the Service’s Southeast Region. “This project is in line with the Department of Interior’s Secretarial priorities to foster partnerships to achieve balanced stewardship and use of our public lands, and promotes the conservation of our land and water resources.”

The dam, 44 meters long and made of rocks, was built to provide access to potable water, but is no longer functional. A sugar mill once stood nearby, but closed in 1981.

Removal of the dam will allow migratory fish and crustaceans, including the Sirajo goby and the American eel that are considered Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the U.S. Caribbean, to travel further upstream.

The project should take up to four days. Biological samples will later be taken upstream and down to determine the impact of the dam's removal on the river's inhabitants and ecology. The Cambalache Dam is the first in a series of river restoration projects for the Service and partners. Next up: the Margarita Dam along the Culebrinas River where a fish ladder will be redesigned to help fish migrate upstream.

Partners in the *Stream Connectivity Restoration Initiative* include the Service, the PRDNER, Protectores de Cuencas, Inc., the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez, and the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

(Note: All photo credits U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, except drone photo taken by William Hernández , University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez.