

DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Biannual Meeting

April 10, 2014

PowerPoint presentations mentioned in this summary are available at the DRRP web site, <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drrp/>

Announcements: Facilitator Marsha Porter-Norton said BLM Southwest Associate District Manager Matt Azhocar will replace Jim Cagney, who is retiring, as the BLM representative on the Core Team of the DRRP.

Rusty Lloyd said the DRRP has applied for the Colorado Nonprofit Association's 2014 Colorado Collaboration Award, which recognizes outstanding collaborative and partnership work. Last year, the DRRP was one of three finalists out of about 300 applicants, so he encouraged everyone to fill out a participant endorsement form again.

Agenda: The agenda was approved with no changes.

Welcome: Lance Porter, district manager for the BLM Canyon Country District, welcomed the group.

Discussion of the draft Monitoring & Maintenance Plan

Marsha said a discussion began in March 2012 about the Partnership's direction as the project is completed. A survey of members was done before last fall's meeting in Grand Junction, and the general opinion was that the DRRP needs to focus its collective effort on protecting its investment before taking on any new projects.

Governance, goals and capacity: Peter Mueller of The Nature Conservancy gave a PowerPoint presentation. He said the DRRP's guiding document, the Dolores River Riparian Action Plan (DR-RAP) did not address what would happen to the Partnership beyond five years. Now there is a need to examine where the effort is headed as major treatments are completed at the end of 2015. The DRRP was primarily focused on activities; now it is moving from activities to outcomes. There is a need for a long-term, thoughtful transition that will likely last as long as the initial work did. He said questions include:

- How will we protect our investment (which includes ecological benefits, interagency partnerships, and opportunities for young men and women)?
- When will DRRP cease to exist?
- What will a successful transition to monitoring and maintenance look like?

Peter reviewed the Partnership's ecological, social, economic, and management goals, which were reaffirmed and updated last year. He named some of the partners who have been critical to the effort and will continue to be in the next phase:

- The BLM has been exceptional in sustaining interest and expertise of the DRRP and adapting their capacity to support this type of partnership. In the future, the agency will continue to direct restoration on their lands, track Partnership progress, and provide funds as available.
- The Tamarisk Coalition has put many resources into the effort from the beginning and has supported the Partnership in an unparalleled fashion. It will continue to coordinate implementation and maintain fundraising.

- The Nature Conservancy is in a unique position to provide financial support as well as implementation, fundraising, and contracting efforts.
- The conservation corps has been and will continue to be a valuable component of the work through labor, education, and outreach.
- Many other partners have been and will continue to be involved, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, counties and others.

Monitoring and Maintenance (M&M): Daniel Oppenheimer gave a PowerPoint presentation on “DRRP Long-Term Maintenance”. He discussed the transition from intensive project maintenance to less-intensive. Some changes may include using different equipment and smaller teams. There also may be different trainings of individuals.

When does maintenance start? The DRRP is defining when objectives have been met as follows: “Native or desirable plants are restored on a given site to the extent that assuming appropriate long-term maintenance by a private landowner or public land manager, it is reasonably foreseeable that plant succession will progress toward DR-RAP’s long-term goals.” This marks the time when a site can be moved from active management to M&M.

What does maintenance include? Daniel said it will include the following:

- Follow-up treatments on herbaceous weeds and tamarisk resprouts
- Deferring to the tamarisk beetle as biocontrol in select areas
- Continuing seeding and planting of native grasses, shrubs, and trees in select areas
- Initiating active revegetation in select areas where passive/natural recruitment was anticipated but has not materialized

How will maintenance be accomplished? Daniel said it will be achieved through the use of a number of partners, including:

- The “strike teams” of the conservation and youth corps. These have had tremendous success and will play an increasingly important role in maintenance work.
- Private landowners such as Cole Crocker-Bedford, who re-treats Russian knapweed several times a year on his property
- Agency personnel such as county weed managers and BLM staff
- Private contractors
- Volunteer groups such as the Dolores River Boating Advocates. This group may assume some long-term stewardship of a site near Bedrock, Colo. They are excited about the idea of having a level of ownership over one site.

How long does it take? Daniel said the BLM Tres Rios Field Office has already entered the maintenance phase. By 2018 or 2019 it is anticipated there will be very downscaled, selective spot treatments.

Q&A: Some questions were asked about the strike teams, their abilities and their funding. It was stated that they can do maintenance and can work across field-office boundaries. Mike Wight, river-restoration director of the Southwest Conservation Corps, said funding depends on who is able to write grants. Many different funding sources have been meshed to date. He hopes there will continue to be support from the current partners. He said he would envision a

mix of funding sources in the future and said the DRRP needs to do whatever possible to leverage all potential sources to keep this work moving forward.

Julie Knudson of the Tamarisk Coalition then gave a PowerPoint presentation on monitoring titled, "2015-2019 DRRP Transition Plan". She said the DRRP is now doing five types of vegetation monitoring – three formal (watershed-wide, pilot project and rapid) and two informal (progress reporting and walkabouts/look-sees). She reviewed the different types of monitoring and how they have been utilized.

Julie said monitoring plans for 2015-19 are as follows:

- Watershed-wise monitoring is expensive, but some will be done by university partners.
- Pilot-project monitoring will be done in 2016.
- Rapid monitoring will be done annually by the conservation corps and strike teams.
- Progress reporting will be done annually during 2015-19 and will be part of rapid monitoring or will be done by BLM land managers.
- Walkabouts will continue annually and will be done by the DRRP.
- The Science and Monitoring Subcommittee will work out details.

Q&A: Sparky Taber, natural-resource specialist with the Grand Junction Field Office, said this summer when his crews are finished with spring weed treatments he plans to put them on the Dolores to do rapid monitoring on all 80 actively treated sites. He has received funding for this. He said even on sites that are recovering well, there are usually pockets that need additional treatment, he wants his personnel to walk through sites treated 2-4 years ago and record the problem areas. Then, by 2017 or 2018, the sites on these polygons that need work will be narrowed down.

Fundraising: Rusty Lloyd gave a Power Point titled, "Fundraising Plan 2015-2019". He said from 2009 to 2013 DRRP raised and expended \$3.9 million in private and public funds on on-the-ground restoration activities.

Needs for 2015-19 are:

Implementation	\$380,000
Maintenance	\$365,200
Monitoring	\$165,000
Capacity:	<u>\$347,100</u>
Total 2015-19	\$1,257,300

Rusty said this is a living document and will be adjusted as needed.

Strategies for fundraising include:

- Continuing to seek grants based on existing relationships with grantors for select work and building new relationships when possible.
- Working with community foundations in the watershed to create a stewardship fund that they would manage on behalf of the Partnership.
- Developing a campaign that leverages multiple sources of funding and major donations to establish the single fund.
- Identifying a list of viable interested donors.

- Integrating fundraising efforts with the communications initiative and discussions of governance mechanisms.

Rusty said the Funding Subcommittee will continue to meet to implement these activities. The subcommittee would like ideas and help from the Partnership. Asking for money is not easy, and outreach will be critical.

Next steps:

- Identify Partnership funders and do outreach to Partnership funders to support the next critical phase in the Partnership.
- Get involved with the ongoing work of the Funding Subcommittee. Contact Rusty or Kristen Jespersen, co-chairs of the Funding Subcommittee, at rlloyd@tamariskcoalition.org or kjespersen@tamariskcoalition.org.

Q&A: Rusty was asked about the DRRP's budget for 2014. He said the Partnership is doing fairly well for 2014.

Communications: Marsha said the DRRP needs to start communicating not just better, but differently. This is a message that came out of many of the small groups at the DRRP's Grand Junction meeting last November. Peter Mueller and Sue Bellagama of The Nature Conservancy have put the Outreach and Education Subcommittee in touch with some public-relations experts with TNC, and they have made some suggestions. The subcommittee is going to develop a communications strategy to disseminate what the Partnership has done and why people should care. The goal is to give the members of DRRP the tools they need when talking to their supervisors, county commissioners, potential donors, irrigators or landowners, wildlife managers, and others. One tool could be a video to be viewed by potential donors. Marsha said the communications plan is an emerging project, but the subcommittee hopes have it in place soon. Marsha said the subcommittee would be meeting after the Partnership meeting today and people were welcome to join.

Next steps:

- Anyone who has input about the communications plan or a suggested tag line is urged to contact Marsha.

Q&A: Peter was asked about a DRRP MOU completed in 2010 that was referenced on Page 12 of the draft M&M plan. Peter explained that it was a document the Partnership worked on five years ago that enlisted the support of all the partners. Peter said an MOU often takes place after it's decided what the next phase looks like. A revised MOU can be used to catalyze that transition.

Marsha agreed and said form follows function. Once it's decided what the Partnership's function is to be in this next phase, then everyone can decide whether the MOU is the form that the new function takes.

It was noted that there are also cooperative agreements through which funds can be transferred to support on-the-ground work on BLM lands. Rusty said the agreements have been powerful tools to encumber and disburse funds, and he agrees these need to be revisited and rejuvenated as necessary. Marsha said MOUs are broader than cooperative agreements.

Several people commented that the M&M strategy appears solid. Amanda Clements of the Uncompahgre Field Office said she had been concerned the Partnership was going to wither and leave the agencies holding the bag. This plan addressed some of her concerns.

Bruce Rittenhouse, resource group supervisor with the Colorado BLM, said the draft M&M plan is very good. He suggested it include a summary statement of what the Dolores River is expected to look like at the end of 2019 because the BLM's Washington, D.C., office is asking what the result of this project will be in five years. He said the BLM's Healthy Lands Initiative, now called Healthy Lands, is looking to identify focal areas. When it began in 2007 or 2008, the BLM simply picked projects here and there for "random acts of restoration". Now the agency wants to move away from that scattered approach, and the Washington office is asking each of the states to present focal areas to be in a five-year plan. In Colorado, the agency is pushing for four focal areas and Bruce said he hopes one will be the Dolores River. This would mean the effort would likely receive some funding during the five-year period. The BLM is looking at a funding plan for 2015-19, so that dovetails nicely with DRRP's plans. Bruce said he wants to talk to Utah personnel about this because he doesn't want the effort to stop at the state border. In Colorado there is approximately \$650,000 in Healthy Lands monies.

Lisa Bryant of the Moab Field Office said the work that the field office has done has come from Healthy Lands monies.

A question was asked about the impacts of tamarisk reduction on water conservation. Rusty said some studies are being done but no one can give a definitive answer to that question yet. Lisa said there has been research on that issue in other states and it has been difficult to show a direct correlation between reduction of non-native species and increases in water flows or water quality, even on a watershed scale. There is much anecdotal evidence but actual science support is lacking, and many questions remain.

How do we affirm/renew our respective commitments to advancing the DRRP M&M Plan?

Daniel said the Core Team has had several conversations that are articulated in the M&M Plan, and the roles the various partners will play are starting to be identified. Some are the same as those defined in DR-RAP, but in other cases the realities and constraints have changed, so some roles must continue to be refined.

Daniel suggested signing a new MOU that would extend through the M&M phase. The current MOU expires in 2015.

It was suggested that amending and updating the existing MOU would suffice because there have not been many changes to the Partnership's functions. Other suggestions were:

- In the first paragraph of the MOU, highlight how much money has been raised and spent by the Partnership as part of the accomplishments.
- Make sure the message is put forward to management. When people are signing the MOU, that is a good time to make sure they understand that this is a commitment to providing time and people to support this effort. Even if it's just an amendment to an MOU, partners should be encouraged to read it and re-sign it.
- Emphasize that there is an equal or greater number of participants at this time and communicate that this phase is about protecting an investment.

- Look at the next five years as a new project.
- Be sure to capture the fact that there have been changes in organizations over the last five years. Capture the capacities that are available, to assess how to move forward together.

There was consensus to do an addendum to the original MOU. There was also consensus to support the draft M&M plan in general, recognizing that this does not mean concurring with every word in the plan.

Next steps:

→ The Core Team will determine the details of the revised addendum and the assistance agreements would follow that. The Core Team will check with everyone to see if this is an accurate characterization of their roles so the language can be refined to accurately capture what everyone is bringing to the table. By the DRRP's fall meeting the legal work will have been done to have an MOU to kick off the effort in 2015 when the initial agreement expires.

→ Anyone with comments on the M&M plan should send them to Daniel by Thursday, April 24. He will synthesize the suggested changes into a revised plan and will have a final document by early May.

Potential funders who might support the DRRP in its M&M phase: Rusty said the Funding Subcommittee is asking for leads regarding potential funders and does not intend to rely on any one source. Some ideas have been:

- Oil and gas companies Congressional representatives – Rusty said the subcommittee has met with several of them. There is a need for constant outreach.
- Counties

It was noted that county funding is limited and there may be a problem using local tax money to fund a program on federal lands.

Next steps:

→ Marsha and Daniel asked everyone to keep the donor-suggestion forms and use them to suggest possible donors, or contact Rusty with donor suggestions.

Award

Peter said The Nature Conservancy has presented this year's Phil James Conservation Award to Mike Wight and the Southwest, Western Colorado, and Canyon Country conservation corps. The award is given to individuals or organizations for extraordinary contributions or achievements that further the mission of TNC. Peter said Mike is the ultimate "can-do" person.

Outreach and education update

Mike said interpretive signs for the Gateway Canyons Dolores River Interpretive Trail on the Gateway Canyons Resort have been sent to the printer and will be put up when ready. There will be a dedication ceremony.

Subcommittee structure and other key DRRP questions

Core Team: The Core Team now consists of Daniel Oppenheimer, Julie Knudson, Rusty Lloyd, Kristen Jespersen, Sue Bellagama, Peter Mueller, Mike Wight and Matt Azhocar. They meet two

or three times a year and usually call every month. **There was consensus that that structure should continue.**

Implementation Subcommittee and Science & Monitoring Subcommittee: A question was raised about whether there is a need to shift the capacity in the Implementation and the Science and Monitoring subcommittees as the Partnership moves from implementation to M&M.

Daniel said the working assumption is the Implementation Subcommittee is the land managers, private landowners and nonprofit folks providing technical assistance. That subcommittee would continue to exist and share lessons learned annually. The Science & Monitoring Subcommittee (SMS) would continue too. These two subcommittees have been coordinating for years but he thinks it is worth seeing whether and how those forms of communication need to be changed in terms of how the two subcommittees work.

Julie said SSM has had a great core of people and needs to continue. They would love to have additional engagement.

Lisa asked whether the two should become one committee. The idea was discussed. **It was agreed to flag the question for the future:** Is there a need to have an Implementation Subcommittee that is doing M&M as well as the Science & Monitoring Subcommittee? Maybe it is one team.

Daniel said the DRRP's web site should identify the key function of each subgroup.

Outreach and Education Subcommittee: Mike said they are still working with volunteer organizations, though a bit less than in the past. The Gateway interpretive trail will be a big component of getting something on the ground. As they develop the communications plan they're deciding what is needed in terms of outreach. Marsha said maybe once the communications plan starts to take form, it can be assessed whether there is a continuing need for this subcommittee is needed.

Number of Partnership meetings: After brief discussion, there was general agreement that starting in 2015 the DRRP meetings could be reduced to one a year instead of the current two. It was agreed that it is still important to get together but, given declining budgets, the more money that can be saved to put toward M&M, the better. If there is a need to make a decision at another time there could be a conference call.

Web site: Marsha said the site is not expensive to maintain. Daniel said a survey last fall found that a number of people who can't attend the DRRP meetings said they would like to see more content and updates on the web site. Marsha said the minutes from subcommittee meetings aren't always available on the site and they are password-protected, so anyone who wants to see them should email her. The minutes of the full meetings can be seen by anyone.

There were comments that the site is helpful for people who haven't been to a meeting and that the site will be even more helpful if the Partnership is moving toward fewer meetings.

There was consensus to retain the site and improve the content to make sure it stays relevant.

E-newsletters: Daniel and Marsha said about three of these are issued each year at present, and they require hours of work to prepare. The Core Team usually writes one after a full meeting and whenever there seems to be enough news.

Sue said the newsletters are a good way to share news with other partnerships.

Other communications: The use of Twitter was suggested. It was agreed the communications plan should address social media.

Q&A: It was asked how the DRRP is interacting with ranchers and private landowners. Peter said he and Daniel have a short list of whom they need to contact. Daniel said some of the private landowners they have worked with are on the email list, some not. There is a need to do better outreach to landowners in the watershed and they hope to incorporate that into the communications plan.

Next steps:

- Marsha said if anyone meets an interested person such as a volunteer or county commissioner, they should get their email address and send it to Kathy or Marsha.
- Examine flagged issues to see if we need a communications subcommittee, etc.
- Meet annually.
- Improve the web site.
- If anyone has other questions about the Partnership structure, contact Daniel or Marsha.

Best practices for treating secondary weeds

Dr. Corey Ransom of Utah State University gave a PowerPoint presentation titled, “Improving Invasive Species Management Efficacy and Prioritizing Management Targets”.

Downy brome (cheatgrass): He said he was involved in conducting a trial on downy brome at Oregon State University in 2002. This involved burning or not burning different sites, then applying Plateau either before or after applying seed. They found that if they burned first, it resulted in more-effective control of downy brome across all rates of Plateau applied, and better establishment of the desirable species they were seeding. Points to keep in mind include:

- Plateau doesn't know the difference between good and bad species, so if too much is applied, it will affect desirable species.
- Although 6-8 oz. was their recommendation back then, they are now using much higher rates to get effective control.

Russian knapweed and perennial pepperweed: He also discussed the effects of herbicides and mowing on Russian knapweed and perennial pepperweed. He said he and his crews learned that if the herbicide imazapyr is applied when pepperweed is in full bloom it is largely ineffective, but if it's applied in the fall there is good suppression the following year. In a year or two the effects begin to disappear, but timing does maximize effectiveness long-term. For Russian knapweed, there is better control when herbicide is applied as late in the fall as possible before the soil is frozen.

Lessons learned include:

- Integrating fire and herbicide increases downy brome control.

- Application rate and timing affects seeded species.
- Effectiveness of herbicide applications is herbicide- and species-specific.
- Fall treatments are preferred on most knapweed.

Dr. Ransom also discussed work done in Dinosaur National Monument beginning in 2005 to reduce Russian knapweed at Josie's Ranch in the Cub Creek Watershed and to target several other species as well. A reinventory conducted in 2010 found:

- Yearly treatment over five years reduced Russian knapweed by 79%.
- In non-treated areas, Russian knapweed expanded by 14%.
- Treatments used for other targeted species were effective in reducing their overall distribution and abundance.

Dr. Ransom said he recommends applying herbicide on the soil at the base of the plant rather than on top of the plant.

Sparky commented that he had phenomenal success on a 20-acre patch of deep Russian knapweed by mowing it first, then spraying with Milestone.

In addition, trials were conducted on downy brome at Josie's Ranch and at Echo Park in spring 2010. The trials involved four sub-plots and treatments including mowing and application of glyphosate at about 4 oz. early in the year and of Plateau in the fall. He said two years later, a significant effect of the mowing could be seen at Echo Park. At Josie's Ranch, none of the early treatments proved very effective. Two applications of glyphosate reduced downy brome at both sites three years later.

Prioritizing species: Dr. Ransom also discussed a pilot project involving the National Wildlife Refuge System across a number of sites. The NWRS had to do an inventory of invasive species and Dr. Ransom and his crews went into the refuges to do the inventory. and developed a tool to help prioritize areas and species. The tool involves a program and database that allows managers to input species and units, answer a series of questions, and then obtain results that help them decide which units deserve priority. Species threat, ecological integrity, species abundance and resistance to invasion are considered, along with other factors. This results in a list of species, ranked in a list of ranked units, and then it can provide a unit-by-species ranking.

Some important points include:

- Not all non-natives are invasive, so not all need to be managed.
- Those that have the best chance of being successfully managed are in the first stages of invasion.
- Having too many target species can induce "green blindness" – meaning you can't stay focused. His research found that 20-25 species is about the right number.

Q&A: Dr. Ransom was asked about the availability of the tool. He said they believe it should be available to everyone, and once it is completed, it will be.

He was asked how long to wait to reseed following treatment of cheatgrass. He said in some cases they seeded the same day as the treatment. The breakdown of the herbicide depends on soil and other factors.

It was noted that some research shows fire induces cheatgrass seed to germinate readily. Dr. Ransom said that is possibly true. Germination depends on moisture and other factors.

Cottonwood suitability assessment

Kelly O'Neill and Tess Ruswick of the Southwest Conservation Corps gave a PowerPoint presentation and described their work with the cottonwood suitability assessment. It took place between February and April of this year and was just completed. The project was started in February because they were measuring groundwater depth and wanted to be sure it was at its lowest; also, they wanted to plant cottonwood poles when the plants were dormant so the plants could put their energy into their roots. Work was done from Slickrock to the Colorado River confluence.

The major component of the project was the sampling initiative, which involved two types of sampling:

- Shallow water sampling. This involved digging a 3-foot hole, sampling different ranges of the soils and testing for pH, salinity and texture. No plantings were done in these holes.
- Deep sampling (the majority of the project). It was done at about 17 sites for present and future cottonwood plantings. Using a machine with a stinger, they dug 8-foot holes and sampled groundwater (if any was found) for pH, salinity and three types of soil sampling. Any hole with good conditions (salinity under 4 dS/m, plus groundwater present and 2 feet of dry soil above the roots) would be planted with a cottonwood. Trees were then caged with wire and rebar.

They found in some places the groundwater lay just below where the stinger would reach, so if they had had a 12-foot stinger instead of an 8-foot one, they would have had more success finding places to plant. They were careful not to carry invasive species from site to site and to wash the machine between sites. Another part of the project involved the installation of groundwater wells at some sites so managers could monitor fluctuations in groundwater level and the health of the cottonwood trees. Most were 13-foot wells, made of galvanized metal to last a long time. BLM officials helped Kelly and Tess navigate the process of obtaining state well permits.

Kelly and Tess said the project was a success. It involved 125 river miles, 116 trees, 7 wells, and 231 holes sampled, with a success rate of about 50% in terms of where cottonwoods could be planted.

Q&A: Julie said this effort will be looped into rapid monitoring. She added that the wells are on both private and public land. Private landowners who received wells had to be committed to monitoring them. One of the problems with pole plantings done in the past on the Dolores was that the trees died because conditions were too salty or the water dried up, so this effort was to see first if conditions were satisfactory.

Upcoming events

Julie outlined some coming workshops:

- *Weeds 101* workshop, first week in May in Grand Junction, details TBD. Check Colorado Weed Management Association web site for more details.

- *Dolores River Plant Identification Workshop*, May 30, Bedrock, Colo. No charge; pre-registration required.
- *Sagebrush of Colorado*, May 3, Grand Junction. Charge of \$10; pre-registration required.
- *Identification of Riparian & Wetland Plants of Colorado's West Slope*, July 18, Grand Junction. Charge of \$10; pre-registration required.
- *Dryland Revegetation Techniques*, one Friday in September along the Dolores River, details TBD. No charge; pre-registration required.

Next steps:

→ People can register for these workshops at the Tamarisk Coalition's web site, <http://tamariskcoalition.wildapricot.org>.

→ Anyone with ideas for other workshops should contact the Tamarisk Coalition.

Annual progress report

Daniel said the Partnership did just one comprehensive progress report for 2009-12, but is now doing a report annually. The 2013 DRRP report will be completed in a couple of weeks. A total of 910 acres of private and public land was treated in 2013.