

DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Biannual Meeting

April 2, 2015

All PowerPoint presentations mentioned in this summary (delineated by a * next to the speaker's name) will be made available at the DRRP web site: <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drrp/>

Welcome: BLM Uncompahgre Field Office Manager Barb Sharrow welcomed the group and said long-term partnerships such as this one truly benefit the land.

Agenda: The agenda was approved with no changes.

Project Implementation and Monitoring

Peter Mueller* of The Nature Conservancy gave an overview of 2015 implementation and monitoring. He said the Partnership continues to catalyze other work and bring new resource-management questions to the forefront. There remains an enormous amount of work that will take place in 2015 and 2016 as the Partnership transitions to monitoring and maintenance.

Peter, David Graf of Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and a crew from CPW recently took part in an electroshocking effort to monitor fish in the Dolores. About 150 fish were caught over four days from four or five locations. They were tagged and returned to the river so their movements can be monitored.

Peter said changes to the rapid-monitoring protocol are being considered to move it from a piecemeal approach to a more systematic approach on a revolving basis.

Peter discussed challenges for streambank restoration to improve in-stream fish habitat. Discussions are ongoing about what activities could make restoration more focused and provide geomorphic benefits.

Overview and Update on DRRP Communications Plan and Long-Term Funding

Daniel Oppenheimer*, restoration coordinator for the Tamarisk Coalition, and Kristen Jespersen of the Tamarisk Coalition gave a PowerPoint on DRRP funding and the Communications Plan.

Kristen provided cost projections for 2015-20. In 2015, the total cost for DRRP is estimated at \$307,759, with a projected funding gap of \$42,465 (on the low end) to a maximum of \$122,494. By 2020 the cost will be \$2.15 million, with a projected funding gap of approximately \$443,000 to \$1.08 million. She said these numbers change regularly.

Costs for 2015 are largely covered. In 2016, a sizable portion of costs likely will be covered, thanks to the BLM and Bruce Rittenhouse's advocacy for the Dolores River as part of the Healthy Lands Initiative. But these funds are not secured yet. Some of the pending funds include projected in-kind contributions from the Southwest Conservation Corps, TNC and TC. In addition, the DRRP has applied for two grants but has not heard yet whether the funds will be awarded. Kristen said the Funding Subcommittee has some cushion but must be nimble in reacting to changing funding cycles.

The subcommittee is always looking for other sources of funding. The basic framework of the funding plan includes:

- Continue to work with the BLM to channel funds through the Healthy Lands Initiative and other programs.
- Work with CPW to replenish the Species Conservation Trust funding that has been received in the past.
- Continue to apply for grants.
- Identify and outreach to new foundations.
- Develop an individual-donor campaign.
- Thank current funders and take them out in the field.
- Pursue new opportunities as they surface, e.g., a new Colorado bill that Rusty Lloyd will discuss later today.
- Complete the Communications Plan.

Daniel then discussed the Communications Plan. After the need for such a plan was cited at a DRRP meeting in 2013, the Core Team has worked on the plan over the last year. The Core Team has decided much can be done in-house, including building the Communications Plan itself. It is in the draft stage and Daniel hopes to have it finished in a few weeks; it will then be sent out for feedback. DRRP can continue to do outreach to a variety of partners. The Core Team agreed that they should look to an external party such as a marketing consultant for marketing and branding help, and they are seeking recommendations. Kristen said they are trying to establish the DRRP as a legacy watershed group, so the Core Team believes hiring a marketing specialist is a justifiable expense.

The plan itself has three main sections:

- Goals and strategies
- Current language for partners to apply in their respective outreach efforts
- Target audiences and key action items for achieving these goals.

The goals are:

- Garner financial support from existing and new funders
- Establish a listing of local stewards and advocates for the Dolores River
- Share lessons learned to enhance restoration outside the Dolores River Basin
- Keep DRRP partners motivated and engaged.

Daniel discussed strategies and actions for each of the four goals.

Key successes of the DRRP (as highlighted in draft Communications Plan) include:

- 1280 acres of tamarisk initially treated
- 1510 acres of secondary weeds treated
- 236 youth hired and trained
- 400 volunteers recruited and 3029 hours of time donated
- More than 20 local contractors hired
- More than \$4 million invested in the region's economy
- 25 riverside campsites improved

Discussion:

It was asked whether the Communications Plan includes the use of social media. Daniel said the team is thinking about it but because of limited capacity they have to consider how to utilize it most effectively.

Other comments included:

- This is really good and captures it.
- Numbers are the best way to tell a story. People can understand a dollar figure. Quantitative values are good.
- There is huge power in being able to match numbers with work on the ground. The more the Partnership can get people on the ground to see the work being done, the better.
- The Partnership itself is a success because of its diversity, involving private, state, county, and federal lands and partners.
- Tours are very motivating.
- Coordination and cooperation among all the different partners isn't really captured in these numbers but it's one of the greatest accomplishments of the group.
- It's important to remember DRRP's four goals, which are not just ecologic.
- There are probably 256 different stories just involving the youth hired and trained.
- The \$4 million represents only what is spent and doesn't represent the Partnership's true footprint, which would be much higher.
- Getting some private landowners involved in an environmental effort has been one success.
- These are nonpartisan issues that different people can get behind.
- Are there measures of acre-feet of water saved or changes in salinity levels because of tamarisk removal? Look at salinity treatments/injection wells as a funding source.
- The Partnership itself, the number of meetings and subcommittees, and the fact it is still active is a success.
- Keep growing the story of the youth and conservation corps. It's part of the conservation legacy. Tell those stories, preferably through videos as well as other means. A promotional video of youths' stories would be a good project for the marketing firm.

Mike said the Canyon Country Youth Corps has a VISTA volunteer who is creating a video for them.

Daniel said the Core Team will be meeting in a couple of weeks and will review this feedback. They will provide an update and send it to everyone by early May and see if there is additional feedback. They will also look for a marketing group to help create communications tools.

Daniel said he welcomes feedback on how to keep people motivated and engaged. The Partnership has already agreed that its work will not be completed in 2015; the majority of members have said there is five to six years of shared work still ahead.

Bird Monitoring on the Dolores: A New Opportunity

John Toolen*, ecologist with the BLM Uncompahgre Field Office, said 80 to 90 percent of bird species in the West depend on riparian areas at one time or another in their life cycle. He discussed the possibility of bird monitoring on the Dolores.

He said an effective monitoring program can:

- Provide an understanding of how management actions affect populations.
- Provide basic information on species distribution.
- Provide information on bird response to habitat-enhancement projects associated with tamarisk removal. Such information is essential and will require monitoring.

John said there is a longstanding assumption that “if we build it (through removing tamarisk and restoring native vegetation) they will come”, but the degree to which they do, and which ones, is unknown. He noted that monitoring is part of the DRRP’s agreements and MOUs.

He said the BLM Moab and Grand Junction field offices did bird monitoring in 2011 and 2013 along with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and that information is going into one database.

John said a logical way to conduct the monitoring would be to contract with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory because this has been done in the past. Funding is available through existing assistance agreements between the DRRP and BLM. The proposal would be to employ monitoring methods that follow “Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions” protocols. This would be a six-year project with population counts done annually. Combined with existing regional data and recent local data, the project should:

- Increase the number of species for which there are reasonable population estimates;
- Improve the precision of estimates.

Costs would include RMBO full-time staff, seasonal staff, travel, supplies, etc., plus two workshops by RMBO in 2017 and 2020. One would be to show data-collection techniques and bird identification; the second one would be to summarize results.

With adjustment for inflation, the total cost would be an estimated \$323,205.

Discussion:

It was asked whether the monitoring would be done in DRRP’s actively treated areas. John said the work done so far has looked at treated and untreated areas, so the work would continue in the same fashion. There would be Before and After information to ascertain how the birds are responding. He said three types of area would be studied: untreated, treated but not planted, and treated and planted with native vegetation. John said birds respond fairly quickly to vegetation changes.

Another question was whether an entity such as the Audubon Society would be brought in to do long-term monitoring. John said yes. This monitoring sets a baseline; down the road it would be desirable to do this again. He said bird populations in riparian areas tend to be a bit more stable than in other areas and don’t fluctuate as much from year to year.

Other comments included:

- Bird monitoring is another component to show the benefits of the Partnership’s work. How to provide the funding is the question.

- Monitoring has been done to examine the impact of the tamarisk beetle on birds. This new monitoring could provide good information on that as well, and it would be important for other partnerships.
- Birds are a good tool to pique people's interest and draw them into the project.
- A graduate student should be sought to help.
- It might be possible to tweak the proposal to reduce costs. It must be decided what questions the monitoring is trying to answer. Birds are an indicator species for ecosystem health.

Jason Beason of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory said with this funding a considerable amount of data could be collected. RMBO is doing hours of transects throughout western Colorado and would be able to tie that in to this data. Questions could include: Are species overall declining? Will we see an increase because of native vegetation? Jason said many native species are declining, but it is expected that bird populations will increase as native vegetation is restored. To be able to show whether that is happening in the Dolores vs. other regions will be very valuable. The Rocky Mountain Avian Data Center has a single large database that would be available to anyone. RMBO staff are doing a quick assessment of the trees and shrub species that are present at monitoring sites. They are also using nets to look for tamarisk beetles and estimating the amount of defoliation. Additionally, they can train their technicians to look for kochia, etc.

There was consensus to explore the birding option.

Next steps:

→Marsha said this project involves the Science and Monitoring, Implementation, and Funding subcommittees, so it can be turned over to these subcommittees to consider.

→Anyone with input, ideas, or concerns should contact Daniel Oppenheimer.

Announcement: Mike Wight of the Southwest Conservation Corps said Peter Mueller has received a well-deserved award from the Partnership for the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps. Peter was one of just three people nationwide named as a 2015 "21CSC Champion of the Year".

Legislative and Other Updates

Rusty Lloyd*, programs director of the Tamarisk Coalition, discussed the following bills:

HB 15-1006: (Management of Invasive Phreatophytes). This bill, originated by Don Coram, R-58th District, would create a statewide program aimed at woody plants such as tamarisk, Russian olive, Siberian elm, and others. It would be for five years at \$5 million per year within the Department of Agriculture. There is a similar existing program under the Colorado Department of Natural Resources and CWCB, so this could impact one of DRRP's current partners, so the bill would have both positive and negative impacts. The program is to be funded from the Severance Tax Operational Fund. The bill has passed the House Agriculture and Senate Finance committees but its future is uncertain because of activity happening around the severance-tax fund; money is being taken from it for other purposes.

Rusty said this bill could be good for DRRP.

SB 15-119: This bill would continue the regulation of pesticide applicators by the Department of Agriculture. It was commented that there is a group that opposes the renewal of this regulatory mechanism and wants to put pesticide use in the hands of local governments and remove pesticides from retail stores.

It was noted that the Partnership has not supported specific legislation in the past. Marsha said the question as to whether DRRP takes policy positions could be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

State tax checkoff program: Ron Mabry, weed manager for San Miguel County, said the Colorado Weed Management Association is No. 1 on the waiting list to be put on the state tax checkoff list, which gives taxpayers options for donating portions of their refunds to various entities. In order to stay on the checkoff list, each entity has to garner at least \$75,000 annually. If one of the current entities fails to do so, the weed-management association would replace it. Funds from the checkoff, which would be listed as “Colorado Native Landscapes”, would be used for education.

Instream-flow proposal on the Dolores: Peter Mueller discussed the state’s 2013 instream-flow (ISF) proposal, which is for a variable flow on approximately 25 miles of the Dolores from below the San Miguel River confluence to near Gateway. The proposal was presented to this group by Roy Smith of the state BLM office at a previous DRRP meeting. There is an existing ISF of 78 cfs on the Dolores River but that is rarely met. Peter said one of the key issues when looking at the Dolores below the San Miguel River is hydrology: Is there sufficient hydrology at present, and could a proposed ISF help preserve the environment to a reasonable degree? The hearing for the proposed ISF will take place at the September meeting of the Colorado Water Conservation Board. The deadline to file objections was March 31.

David Graf said four notices were filed in protest and a number of water rights were filed for as well.

National Conservation Area (NCA) legislation: Peter said the idea for an NCA on the Lower Dolores came from a group organized to develop alternatives to Wild and Scenic River status on the river. That group’s Legislative Subcommittee recently released a discussion draft of the legislation, and communities, counties, and other entities are just starting to look at that language.

Next steps:

→ Anyone who would like a copy of the draft legislation should email Peter or Marsha.

Breakout groups

The attendees split into breakout groups for informal discussions, then reported on the highlights of their talks as follows:

Outreach and Communication: Mike Wight said the Communications Plan will identify tasks for the subcommittee. Roles might shift. Local stewardship can be a role. With the development of a committee the plan is looking at more specific goals and audiences. The existing committee

may need to be revitalized. The committee structure may be needed to take advantage of opportunities.

The breakout group said as things develop more capacity will be needed, perhaps through Americorps/Vista.

Daniel said some of the goals could be taken on by other parts of the team.

Gunnison sage grouse: Bruce Rittenhouse reported for the breakout group. He said they learned from Evan Phillips, a biologist with CPW, that the bird was listed as threatened last November after having been identified as a distinct species in 2000. There are approximately 4,000 birds in the main population, which is in the Gunnison Basin and is stable; there are also a half-dozen satellite populations with much smaller counts that are in decline. Numerous threats to the birds have been identified and these vary from site to site. There is not much overlap between sage-grouse habitat and riparian habitat, so the Gunnison sage grouse listing will not likely have much impact on the Partnership's work.

Bruce said it might be valuable to emphasize the benefits of the Partnership's proactive work in improving habitat before a species gets to this point of an endangered listing or some other regulatory mechanism. For example, DRRP was putting out the tamarisk beetle and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said that might affect the southwestern willow flycatcher, which is utilizing that habitat, so there was a concern about a short-term negative impact despite long-term gains. There is a perception among landowners: Why should I care about and invest in restoration if the feds will do whatever they want?

David Graf said when Fish and Wildlife mapped critical habitat for the sage grouse, landowners with existing candidate conservation agreements with assurances (CCAAs) were excluded from the critical habitat.

Treating kochia: Julie said kochia is not on the Colorado Noxious Weed List, but DRRP crews are seeing it on a lot of treatment sites. They used to ignore it but some sites are now dominated by kochia, so conversations are taking place about whether and how aggressively to manage it. One key question is whether it will diminish on its own after a few years.

Julie said people have reported that some kochia is resistant to treatment, but she wonders whether other factors might be involved. Perhaps multiple generations of kochia are coming up and people think the weed was herbicide-resistant when actually the plants they are seeing are the second or third generation. It's also possible people are not treating it at the optimum time. Hitting kochia when it is 4-6 inches high seems to be a critical time for the best kill. It's also possible that it is sometimes being confused with five-hook bassia, which looks like kochia.

Julie said Round-Up, 2, 4-D and MSO are the best agents to use against kochia. She said it is difficult to treat kochia on sites where it is a monoculture; results are better on mixed sites. Better success has also been reported on sites that can be irrigated after re-seeding.

Future research questions include:

- Will thick patches choke themselves out over time?
- More information about pre-emergence

- Herbicides that don't seem to have resistance

Reviewing Restoration Work Done to Date

Mike Wight* gave a presentation on the DRRP geodatabase. He said when DR-RAP was being developed, everyone knew it would be necessary to track restoration treatments. Each field office had a slightly different way of tracking treatments, but a cohesive approach was needed. The Walton Family Foundation also wanted to see a comparison of treatments in one place.

Mike said about a year ago the Partnership began working with IT specialist Doug Diekman from the BLM Grand Junction Field Office to develop this database. It offers a look at the entire watershed with many different layer options, including:

- watershed boundary
- ultimate target (if no limitations) – where treatment would be done
- river segments (there are 15 in DR-RAP)
- current treatments in DR-RAP
- treatment polygons within DR-RAP (what treatments have been done, etc.)
- report polygons (this is larger than treatment polygons)

Mike said this is a very beneficial tool for DRRP and the public.

Updates: Bruce said the Colorado BLM identified the Dolores River as one of four Healthy Lands Focal Areas in Colorado. Last week he learned of a new funding opportunity available from the Interior Department's Office of Wildland Fire. The funds are for FY 2015; the money must be spent or obligated this year and the recipient must have the ability to start implementation this fiscal year. This opportunity is being pursued.

Bruce also said Southwest District Manager Lori Armstrong and Northwest District Manager Joe Meyers have developed a proposal seeking \$300,000 to \$500,000 for weed treatment in and out of riparian areas on lands that include Gunnison sage grouse and Dolores River focal areas. Two to five proposals will be selected for funding in 2016 from among all Interior lands.

Julie discussed upcoming workshops:

- A DRRP Plant Identification Workshop has been scheduled May 29 near Bedrock. This is free but participants must register at tamariskcoalition.wildapricot.org or tamariskcoalition.org.
- A Field Weed Identification Workshop will be held May 1 from 9 to 3 at a couple of different sites near Grand Junction. It includes a tour of the insectary. This is also free but participants must register at the websites mentioned above.
- A Weeds 101 Workshop will take place on Wednesday, April 29, in Montrose. This is primarily a classroom course that is good for training crews. It is put on by the Colorado Weed Management Association (cwma.org) and is not free.

Julie also mentioned some available webinars:

- "Tamarisk Invasion and Fire," Southwestern Desert Ecosystems, today (April 2)
- "Are We In a Megadrought?" by High Country News, April 8 at 6 p.m. Go to KVNF.org to livestream this.

- Colorado Mesa Water Center has many trainings on their website:
www.coloradomesa.edu/watercenter/events.html

She also said the Grand Valley Audubon Society starts its spring bird walks this month.

Next steps:

→ Anyone with ideas for future discussion topics should email Daniel.