



A PUBLIC - PRIVATE COLLABORATION

2014 ANNUAL REPORT



A public-private collaboration, the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) is working across two states, four Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Field Offices, five counties, more than 20 participating private lands, and nearly 200 miles of the Dolores River to restore an impaired riparian corridor to a healthier system. Based on collective efforts to date, more than 1,140 acres of the riparian corridor are now dominated by native plant species, providing better habitat for wildlife, forage for livestock, and accessible river-side areas for people to recreate in Colorado and Utah.

In 2014, the DRRP built upon an important recognition: that we needed to protect our shared restoration investment of dollars, time, and good working relationships. To do so, we developed and approved the DRRP Transition Plan for Long-Term Monitoring and Maintenance.

This Transition Plan sets forth the direction for long-term fundraising, strategic communications, streamlined governance, and on-the-ground monitoring and maintenance practices needed to bolster the resilience, diversity, and health of the Dolores River's riparian corridor from 2015 - 2019. As you will see in the coming pages, we have already taken key steps towards implementing the DRRP Transition Plan.

And as anyone who attended a partnership meeting or drove along Highway 141 in Colorado can attest, this was another big year for on-the-ground work. We saw new restoration projects initiated on public and private lands. We also saw other project sites—after years of intense restoration and monitoring efforts—restored to a healthy composition of native vegetation.

It was also a big year beyond the restoration projects: the DRRP installed an educational interpretive trail, received the Colorado Collaboration Award, and published a manuscript that will share our lessons learned with an international community of restoration practitioners. Thanks for all your earnest efforts and support!

2014 Recipients of the Colorado Collaboration Award

On October 6th, several DRRP partners attended the Colorado Nonprofit Association's annual conference in Denver to receive the 2014 Colorado Collaboration Award. Administered by the Colorado Nonprofit Association, the state-wide award "recognizes an outstanding collaboration" based on the following six criteria: depth of collaboration; significant impact and community benefits; innovative responsiveness to a specific challenge or opportunity; serves as a model that can be replicated; effective community engagement; and collaborative and nonprofit best practices.

The Colorado Collaboration Award includes an impressive \$50,000 award, which the partnership will leverage to support long-term stewardship of the Dolores River. After receiving the award in front of 800 members of Colorado's non-profit community, these partners held a workshop at the conference to discuss the challenges, successes, and lessons learned from initiating and sustaining effective collaboration.

During the fall partnership meeting at the Tres Rios BLM Field Office, the DRRP celebrated the award with sparkling cider and a hearty toast.

"The Dolores River Restoration Partnership is an outstanding example of how nonprofits, businesses, and government agencies are working together. Collaborating isn't always easy. It takes a lot of work and commitment, but when we get together and identify our common goals, we can accomplish remarkable things." — Renny Fagan, President & CEO of the Colorado Nonprofit Association



From left to right:

Harry Bruell of Conservation Legacy, Bruce Rittenhouse of BLM's Colorado State Office, Mike Wight of Southwest Conservation Corps, Daniel Oppenheimer of Tamarisk Coalition, Lori Armstrong of BLM's Colorado SW District, Rusty Lloyd of Tamarisk Coalition, and Peter Mueller of The Nature Conservancy receive the 2014 Colorado Collaboration Award on behalf of the partnership.

Special thanks to our 2014 funders:

AmeriCorps, Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Desert Ecosystem Analysis & Restoration, Hendricks Charitable Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Species Conservation Trust, Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, and the Walton Family Foundation.

Without your support, this collaborative effort simply would not be possible.

Ecological Goals: Increasing Healthy Riparian Plant Communities

Completing our sixth year of intensive implementation, the DRRP had many skilled hands working throughout the year to enhance riverside habitat. Starting in January with the Cottonwood Suitability Assessment, two Southwest Conservation Corps interns worked with a local contractor, Stan Young, and his Kubota excavator to test soil and water conditions at more than 20 sites to identify suitable places to plant cottonwood poles—together, they planted 116 trees and installed 7 groundwater monitoring wells along the way.

As the temperatures warmed, our restoration efforts moved into full swing. Five Conservation Corps crews and two strike teams of interns, eight local contractors, dozens of dedicated private landowners and public land managers, and 97 volunteers embarked on what was one of our most productive years, completing restoration treatments totaling a combined **1,382** acres. Just a few years ago, this enormous sum would have been inconceivable. As our partnership has matured, so too has our ability to deploy a variety of work forces to complete a myriad of restoration treatments.

Riparian Restoration by the Numbers:

174 acres of tamarisk stands initially treated by Corps crews and volunteers

576 acres of tamarisk resprouts treated by agency staff and strike teams of interns

83 acres where private landowners, volunteers, agency staff, and Corps crews planted and seeded native grasses, forbs, shrubs, and trees

549 acres of secondary weeds (e.g. Russian knapweed) treated by strike teams, private landowners, private contractors, and agency staff

1,146 acres on public and private lands where native or desirable plants have been restored to a healthy composition



Working with the Moab BLM and Wildland Scapes LLC, Canyon Country Youth Corps plants 2,000 native shrubs and grass plugs at Roberts Bottom in Utah.

Altogether, since 2010, the DRRP has planted and seeded native and desirable species on nearly 350 acres of public and private lands along the Dolores River.

"This sort of conservation work is something that I can be proud of in the future. To be able to bring my kids back in two decades and see the impact that we had restoring the balance of the Dolores River is priceless." – Mark Ahlijanian, 2014 Canyon Country Youth Corp Crew Leader

Social Goals: Supporting Youth, Enhancing Public Safety and Aesthetics

Consistent with our commitment to the next generation of stewards, we created 49 opportunities for youth and young adults through 8-person Conservation Corps crews as well as small strike teams comprised of interns. These teams were paired with BLM land managers, who provided project oversight, mentoring, and advanced training.

13,400 the number of hours these 49 young individuals contributed to restoring the Dolores River

130 the average number of hours of training that each Corps member received

\$64,985 the total amount of AmeriCorps education awards that 35 of these individuals garnered

542 the number of hours of service that volunteers manually treated tamarisk, hand-pulled kochia, and planted native grasses and shrubs

To date, we have reduced tamarisk fuel loads and associated risks of wildfire around more than a dozen structures ranging from homes to a water treatment plant to a developed camp site at the Rio Mesa Center. This year, we extended fuels reduction by three more miles along the Unaweep-Tabeguache Scenic and Historic Byway. Restoration work along this Scenic Byway has, in turn, significantly enhanced the aesthetics for out-of-state tourists and locals by revealing the river and scenic vistas previously concealed by dense stands of tamarisk.

“Reflecting on the areas where tamarisk has been cleared along the byway, I envision native plants and wildflowers filling in these sites, adding new value to the landscape and vistas.” – Chris Miller, Executive Director, Interpretive Association of Western Colorado



A Western Colorado Conservation Corps crew plans their approach for treating tamarisk near the town of Bedrock, Colorado. To date, 1,280 acres of tamarisk have been removed along the Dolores River and several of its tributaries. Much of this can be attributed to the hard working youth conservation corps programs. From 2009 to 2014, the DRRP has created 238 job opportunities for young stewards.

Economic Goals: Connecting to Local Investment and Recreational Opportunities

In addition to creating 49 jobs for Conservation Corps crew members, interns, and strike teams, an additional 14 projects were sourced to local contractors for activities ranging from website maintenance and partnership facilitation to oversight of planting projects and mechanical removal of dense stands of tamarisk.

\$1,182,800 represents our 2014 economic footprint in terms of the expenditures and partnership in-kind resources invested in the region's economies on the western slope of Colorado and in eastern Utah.

Creating local jobs and investing in regional economies are two key components of our economic goal. The third is improving recreational opportunities along the Dolores River to enhance local enjoyment and encourage tourism.

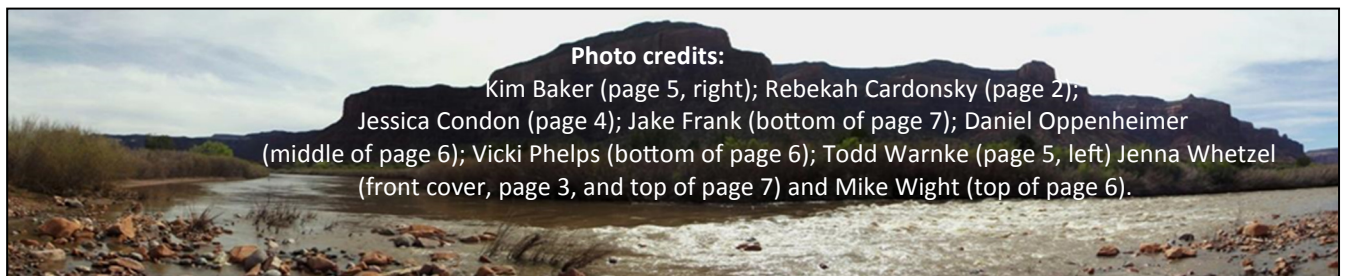


The Dolores River Interpretive Trail, installed and dedicated in October 2014, is now open to the public! Featuring a series of interpretive signs, the trail traces past the Palisade formation and through beautiful stands of cottonwoods in the town of Gateway.

Towards this end, the DRRP completed an educational interpretive trail located at the Gateway Canyons Resort. With help from a Southwest Conservation Corp crew, the Resort, and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, this multi-year project was completed in fall 2014.

Open to the public, the interpretive trail traces the Dolores River and features seven educational signs with artwork by local artist Paul Gray that highlight the region's plants, wildlife, geology, land use, history, river restoration efforts, and more! On October 25th, community members attended the trail dedication and participated in a guided walk with multiple partners. The trail head is located on C.R. 4.1, just off Hwy. 141 in Gateway, Colorado.

In addition to the interpretive trail, the DRRP also enhanced four river-side campsites by clearing out weeds to make these assets once again accessible and inviting to outdoor enthusiasts.



Many Thanks!

A public-private partnership as successful as the DRRP fundamentally relies on trust, reciprocity, and good working relationships to achieve shared goals. For this annual report, we wanted to especially thank the 2014 DRRP interns and strike teams; these sharp, highly capable young professionals proved to be great problem solvers, playing invaluable roles in advancing and monitoring restoration projects.



Left: Cara Arpino, Katie Birch, and Kristin Maier spent the fall season as the Tres Rios BLM Strike Team.

Katie, center, received her Qualified Supervisor license for pesticide application and led the team of interns in treating Russian knapweed and tamarisk resprouts. She also worked with fellow intern, Marlee Canada (not pictured), to conduct rapid monitoring throughout the watershed.

Right: Kyle Goddard and Lewis Hotchkiss, interns through the Western Colorado Conservation Corps and BLM-Grand Junction Field Office, cut through large stands of tamarisk with sharp chains, modesty, and a steadfast sense of good humor.

Living on a participating landowner's ranch along the Dolores River for multiple seasons, these guys have seen it all: hungry black bears seeking out fruiting New Mexico Privet, startled pack rats roused by chain saws, and even two curious mountain goats that had wandered down from the La Salle Mountains.



Left: Theresa Ruswick and Kelly O'Neill, interns with Southwest Conservation Corps, test soil and water conditions to identify suitable sites for planting over 100 cottonwood trees along the Dolores River.

The protocol that they implemented for assessing suitability for planting cottonwoods has already been widely shared and generated lots of interest from restoration practitioners in several other watersheds.



To learn more and get involved, visit the DRRP website <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drrp/> or contact Daniel Oppenheimer, Restoration Coordinator, at doppenheimer@tamariskcoalition.org.

Management Goals: Learning, Sharing, and Improving

Building on lessons learned is the essence of the DRRP's management goal, to improve the likelihood of long-term, large-scale success. We have pursued this process-based goal in a variety of ways. Some highlights from this year include:

- Held annual Implementation Subcommittee meeting for 23 practitioners to share lessons learned
- Organized six site visits for partners to conduct collaborative planning and problem solving
- Seven partners co-authored a peer-reviewed manuscript in the Society for Ecological Restoration's journal, *Restoration Ecology*, on lessons learned around planning, governance, monitoring, and collective learning to inform collaborative restoration in other watersheds
- Hosted a Plant Identification workshop in Bedrock, Colorado for 30 community members
- Participated in two workshops of the Cross-Watershed Network, sharing our lessons learned with other watershed partnerships



At the fall 2014 biannual meeting in Dolores, Colorado, partners are all smiles after celebrating the year's accomplishments and opportunities that lie ahead.

Looking to the Future

In 2015, here are a few items to anticipate:

- Many restoration sites will transition from highly intensive project implementation to less intensive monitoring and maintenance, paving the way for highly mobile strike teams.
- A new Memorandum of Understanding will be signed to affirm partners' commitments to supporting the DRRP Transition Plan for Monitoring and Maintenance.
- Work with several new volunteering private landowners will be initiated.
- A communications plan will be completed to enhance long-term funding strategies, bolster local stewardship programs, keep the partnership motivated, and share lessons learned beyond the Dolores River Basin.
- Several partners will explore the potential for a pilot project to enhance in-stream fish habitat by modifying channel structure where tamarisk has been removed to increase floodplain connectivity.



Visit the DRRP website at <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drrp/> to learn more, engage, and support this collaborative effort.