



ANNUAL REPORT 2015



DOLORES-RIVER
RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

LETTER FROM DANIEL DRRP COORDINATOR



Photo credit: Gateway Canyon Resort,
(cover) Peter Mueller

Since its inception in 2009, the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) has worked ambitiously across two states, four Bureau of Land Management field offices, five counties, dozens of participating private lands, and nearly 200 miles of the Dolores River and its tributaries to restore the river's riparian corridor to a healthier system.

Looking back, partners can recall years before the DRRP, a public-private collaborative, was created: scratching their heads, they wondered what, if anything, could be done. The Dolores River's banks were overtaken by tamarisk, Russian knapweed, and other non-native invasive plants that had degraded habitat for fish and wildlife, decreased forage for livestock, obscured camp-sites for river recreationists, and increased wildfire threats around infrastructure such as homes and a water treatment plant.

As we wrap up 2015 and step back from seven years of collaborative restoration, we are seeing positive trends along this iconic, desert river:

- Monitoring crews and private landowners have documented native plant species such as coyote willow, three-leaf sumac, New Mexico privet, and cottonwoods filling in reaches where non-native plants such as tamarisk once dominated
- Young adults hired through Conservation Corps programs to work a season along the Dolores River have secured natural resource management jobs with local companies, county departments, and federal agencies while others have transitioned to higher education programs at Colorado Mesa University and Fort Lewis College
- Community members from Nucla, Naturita, Bedrock, and Gateway are excited to once again see the Dolores River, which was previously masked by tamarisk and Siberian elm, during their drive along Highway 141 (Unaweep-Tabogauche Scenic and Historic Byway)
- Land managers are transitioning from active, intensive implementation to less intensive but steadfast maintenance methods at many sites that are now dominated by diverse and healthy stands of native grasses, shrubs, and trees

This path has not been an easy one. We have experienced droughts—of diminished precipitation and grant funding—along with abrupt blows: the sudden passing of partners such as Jim Boyd, flash floods that washed out roads, criminal drug activity discovered by law enforcement amidst tamarisk that halted nearby restoration work, and even a beaver that ran off with willow bundles in the middle of the night.

**“Thank you for
your modesty,
good humor,
resourcefulness,
and commitment to
the Dolores River.”**

What has sustained the restoration work through these and many other challenges has been the partnership itself: over thirty organizations and agencies, dozens of private landowners, and hundreds of community volunteers committed to problem-solving, sharing resources, and a vision of an increasingly self-sustaining and resilient Dolores River. In 2015, thirty of these partners signed a new Memorandum of Understanding, affirming their commitment to continued collaborative restoration through 2020. To all of our partners, thank you for your modesty, good humor, resourcefulness, and commitment to the Dolores River.

Many thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Oppenheimer", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel Oppenheimer
Tamarisk Coalition
DRRP Coordinator



Daniel Oppenheimer (left)
looking for tamarisk leaf beetles
with fellow Core Team member,
Rusty Lloyd (right).

Photo credit: Kaard Bombe

TIMELINE

A BRIEF HISTORY

2008

— The Nature Conservancy (TNC), BLM, several private landowners and Conservation Corps programs complete a tamarisk control project along the San Miguel River, a major tributary of the Dolores River.

2009

— A grant from the Packard Foundation provided TNC and Tamarisk Coalition the opportunity to build on efforts from the San Miguel River to initiate a two-year collaborative planning process that resulted in the Dolores River Riparian Action Plan (DR-RAP) and a Memorandum of Understanding signed by 20 partners committed to implementing DR-RAP.

2010

— This represents the first year of watershed-wide monitoring and large-scale restoration, where projects on public and private lands span across all five counties and four BLM field offices in Southwestern Colorado and eastern Utah.

2011

— The Public Lands Foundation recognizes the DRRP for our collaborative approach to restoration with the 2011 Landscape Stewardship Certificate of Appreciation.

2012

— A maturing public-private collaborative, the DRRP gains the national spotlight when the U.S. Department of Interior highlights the partnership as one of the country's America's Great Outdoors River Initiatives, for restoring a key river, expanding outdoor recreational opportunities, and supporting jobs in local communities.

2013

— Southwest Conservation Corps strike team conducts the third year of project monitoring across the riparian corridor to inform project planning and DRRP initiates a two-year strategic planning process that will ultimately lead to the creation of the DRRP Transition Plan for Monitoring & Maintenance, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by 30 partners, and a communications plan.

2014

— DRRP wins the Colorado Collaboration Award and initiates a cottonwood suitability assessment that results in the planting of over 110 cottonwood trees and recording of important soil and water information that will inform future planting activities across the project area.

2015

— DRRP has cumulatively removed 1,430 acres of tamarisk and publishes a manuscript in *Restoration Ecology*, sharing lessons learned about planning, governance, monitoring, and shared collaborative learning with an international audience of restoration professionals.



While DRRP has made significant strides towards restoring the riparian corridor, the partnership has recognized for several years two things: first, our need to improve how we are telling our story and, secondly, that we needed external support and skill sets to do so effectively. Working with Third Principle, a marketing firm based in Denver, the DRRP has developed a new brand promise and communications tools that will help sustain partnership support and share our lessons learned with restoration practitioners across the West.

The partnership also unveiled an updated DRRP logo. The new logo is reminiscent of the original (see below), but with a more streamlined and modernized look and feel.



BRAND PROMISE

The Brand Promise, a tool for internal decision-making, comes in four pieces and anchors future branding efforts by giving direction for the partnership at-large, moving forward.

BRAND VISION

Inspire collaborative watershed restoration.

BRAND POSITIONING

To people who care about rivers, the Dolores River Restoration Partnership is a public-private collaborative that provides a repeatable and scalable model for large-scale riparian restoration.

BRAND PERSONALITY

Credible | Dedicated | Resourceful | Humble | Transparent

BRAND AFFILIATION

Hardworking, committed people taking initiative to ensure healthier natural resources for future generations, together.





Marilyn Kastens

STORIES OF IMPACT

“Live, running water is a rare and unique feature in the arid west. Coming upon the Dolores is like coming upon a live spring in the Sahara Desert. I work outdoors throughout much of the summer in dry, dusty conditions. When my work takes me near the Dolores River, the first thing I notice is how much cooler it is next to the river. The next thing I notice is the sound of moving water, which immediately calms me. Let’s face it: where would you want to have a picnic lunch? Beneath a sagebrush on the dry open plains or under a cottonwood listening to the music of flowing water?”

“Working on the Dolores River has been extremely rewarding because we frequently get told by boaters and hikers how much they appreciate the work we’re doing. That is the best motivation a crew can ask for. It makes all of the hard work worth it.”

CRAIG MARTIN

CANYON COUNTRY YOUTH CORPS

Working with the DRRP, I’m especially proud to see native plant species increasing in areas formerly dominated by noxious weed species. Seeing these trends, I am continually motivated by this work and its legacy of a healthy landscape that my daughter and granddaughter will be able to enjoy.”

MARILYN KASTENS

NAVARRO RESEARCH & ENGINEERING, INC.

“I looked around, at the end of our second hitch at Disappointment Creek, feeling satisfied. Hiking down the trail to the work site, I was last in line today. From up on the hill that overlooks our site one can see the work we’ve accomplished by the shape of the landscape. That visual confirmation of our achievement recharged me every day, as the completed section grew. I remember walking down the same hill on the first day of this project and feeling so daunted and it seems safe to say that we all doubted our ability, as brand new sawyers, to remove all of the tamarisk that dominated the scenery.



Craig Martin

By the end it became comforting to look down the hill and see the crew, saws-over-shoulders, heading in for another day of tamarisk removal.”

HANNA DESALVO

SOUTHWEST CONSERVATION CORPS
DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION CREW



Photo credit: Four Corner Schools of Outdoor Education

INCREASING HEALTHY RIPARIAN PLANT COMMUNITIES

Completing our seventh year of project implementation, the DRRP had many skilled hands working throughout the calendar year to enhance riverside habitat. Altogether, partners completed 1,610 acres of restoration treatments to shift the riparian corridor to a thriving, healthy system.

ECOLOGICAL GOALS

2015 RIPARIAN RESTORATION BY THE NUMBERS

150 — the number of acres of tamarisk stands initially treated by Corps crews and volunteers with saws or local contractors with excavators

147 — the number of acres where private landowners, volunteers, agency staff, and Corps crews planted and seeded native grasses, forbs, shrubs, and trees

375 — the number of acres of tamarisk re-sprouts treated by agency staff and strike-teams of technicians

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

1,167 — the number of acres restored where native plants such as coyote willow and cottonwoods are re-established and self-sustaining in the riparian corridor

Photo credit: (left) Mike Wight,
(middle, right) Tamarisk Coalition



SUPPORTING YOUTH, ENHANCING PUBLIC SAFETY, & AESTHETICS

In our commitment to the next generation of stewards, we created 38 opportunities for youth and young adults through eight-person Conservation Corps crews, small strike teams, and internships.

Building off previous years' efforts, we removed over one mile of tamarisk along the Unaweep-Tabeguache Scenic and Historic Byway, improving highway sight lines and scenic vistas for tourists and locals alike.

SOCIAL GOALS

2015 RIPARIAN RESTORATION BY THE NUMBERS

21,920 — the number of hours these 38 young individuals contributed to restoring the Dolores River

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

\$31,722 — the total amount of AmeriCorps Education Awards that 22 of these individuals garnered

1,272 — the number of hours of service that volunteers manually treated tamarisk, hand-pulled kochia and planted thousands of native grasses and shrubs



Photo credit: Tamarisk Coalition

COMMITTING TO LOCAL INVESTMENT & RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to creating 38 jobs for Conservation Corps crew members, interns, and strike teams, the DRRP created an additional 10 jobs for local contractors for activities ranging from mechanical removal of dense stands of tamarisk to partnership facilitation and website maintenance.

Creating local jobs and investing in regional economies are two key components of our economic goal. The third is enhancing recreational opportunities along the Dolores River. In 2015, we improved a campsite near the Montrose-Mesa county line by clearing encroaching tamarisk as well as enhanced a campsite in Grand County, Utah by adding native shrubs to provide shade at the campground.

ECONOMIC GOALS

2015 RIPARIAN RESTORATION BY THE NUMBERS

\$1,149,502

represents our 2015 economic footprint, in terms of the expenditures and partnership in-kind resources invested in the region's economies of western Colorado and eastern Utah. For more information, please review the "Financial Overview" section found on page 11.



Photo credit: Jenna Whetzel

LEARNING, SHARING, & IMPROVING

Building on lessons learned is the essence of the DRRP's management goal, to improve the likelihood of long-term, large-scale success within and beyond the Dolores River Basin. We have pursued this process-based goal in a variety of ways.



MANAGEMENT GOALS

SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2015

- Organized seven site visits for partners to conduct collaborative planning and problem solving
- Conducted rapid monitoring on over 1,100 acres to track our ecological progress, inform project planning, and adapt our restoration techniques
- Held annual DRRP Implementation Subcommittee Meetings for 26 practitioners to share and build upon lessons learned
- Hosted annual DRRP Plant Identification Workshop in Bedrock for 40 community members
- Provided experiential learning opportunities for students from the Dove Creek Elementary School, Paradox Valley Charter School, University of Utah, and Colorado Mountain College
- Presented DRRP monitoring results and lessons learned at 12 events, ranging from the 6th World Conference in Ecological Restoration held in the United Kingdom, to the Grand Canyon Monitoring and Research Center's Restoration Workshop in Flagstaff, to a Cross-Watershed Network workshop hosted in Grand Junction, to the Colorado Plateau Native Plant Program Retreat held locally along the Dolores River at the University of Utah Rio Mesa Center



Photo credit: (above) Jenna Whetzel,
(left) Tamarisk Coalition



THE FOLLOWING
PROVIDED CASH OR
IN-KIND SUPPORT IN
2015:

AmeriCorps

Ann & Dave Brach

**Anne Yoshino & William
Grimes**

Anonymous Sources

Backcountry.com

**Bird Conservancy of the
Rockies**

**Bureau of Land
Management (Tres Rios,
Uncompahgre, Grand
Junction & Moab Field
Offices; Southwest,
Northwest Colorado, &
Canyon Country Districts;
Colorado & Utah State
Offices)**

Bureau of Reclamation

Canyon Country Youth Corps

**Cole & Kara-Lynn
Crocker-Bedford**

**Colorado Canyons
Association**

**Colorado Department of
Agriculture**

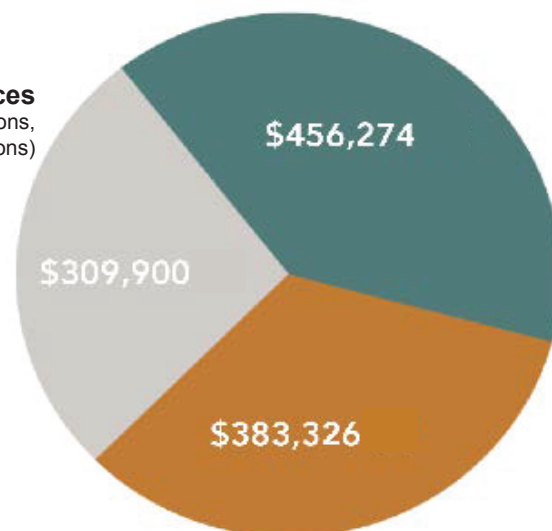
Continued on pg. 12

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

The DRRP looks to its partnering organizations and agencies to act as fiscal agents on behalf of the partnership. Working as the DRRP Funding Sub-committee, these partners raised sufficient public and private funds in 2015 to support project implementation and monitoring, outreach and education events, as well as all the coordinating capacity needed to plan, evaluate, and sustain the partnership and its prioritized activities towards achieving our shared ecological, social, economic, and management goals.

TOTAL INCOME: \$1,149,502.25

Private funding sources
(e.g. foundations,
businesses, & donations)



Public funding
(e.g. local, state,
federal sources)

In-kind support from partnering organizations,
agencies, businesses, private landowners,
& community volunteers

Colorado Department of
Transportation

Colorado Mountain College
(Leadville)

Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Colorado Water
Conservation Board

Conservation Legacy

Dolores County, CO

Dolores River Boating
Advocates

Don Coram

Doug King

Dove Creek Elementary
School

Fort Lewis College

Gateway Canyons Resort

Grand County, UT

Interpretive Association of
Western Colorado

Jim Johnston

Mesa County, CO

Montrose County, CO

Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Navarro Research &
Engineering, Inc.

Northern Arizona University

OP Ranch

Paradox Valley Charter
School

Patagonia

Randy Roper

Red Rock Ranch

Rim to Rim Restoration

Rimrocker Historical Society
of Western Montrose County

San Miguel County, CO

Serengeti Sanctuary

Shane Burton

Southwestern Water
Conservation District

Tamarisk Coalition

The Nature Conservancy

University of Denver

US Fish & Wildlife Service
Partners for Fish & Wildlife
Program

US Department of Energy

Utah Division of Wildlife
Resources

University of Utah Rio Mesa
Center

Vicki Phelps

Walton Family Foundation

Western Colorado
Conservation Corps

Wildlands Restoration
Volunteers

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the years ahead, the DRRP has three main priorities: protect our shared investment in the Dolores River by conducting long-term monitoring and maintenance; build on past efforts by expanding work into new, key stretches of the Dolores River; and sustain restoration benefits through development of a new community steward program that will engage existing and new partners.

LOOKING AHEAD

IN 2016, HERE ARE A FEW ITEMS TO ANTICIPATE:

- Creating a new DRRP Community Stewardship Program to help achieve our long-term vision for an increasingly self-sustaining, healthy and diverse Dolores River.
- Bird monitoring across Colorado and Utah that will increase our understanding of bird populations and guide future restoration efforts.
- Expand our work along the Dolores and San Miguel Rivers, with an expected removal of more than 135 new acres of tamarisk, Russian olive, and Siberian elm. By the end of 2016, we expect to have completed over 90% of our initial treatments of tamarisk on public and private lands.
- Maintaining our work along more than 1,430 acres by treating tamarisk re-sprouts and a host of secondary weeds, as well as planting and seeding native grasses, shrubs, and trees.
- Advancing plans for re-connecting multiple side channels to improve riparian and aquatic habitat.
- Conducting an inventory of existing and potential river-side campsites between the confluence with the San Miguel River and the town of Gateway to enhance recreational opportunities.

Photo credit: (left) Tamarisk Coalition, (middle) Jake Frank, (right) Kate Thompson







CONTACT

Daniel Oppenheimer
DRRP Coordinator
doppenheimer@tamariskcoalition.org

DRRP website:
<http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drrp/>

REPORT PUBLISHED MAY 2016