

DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP
Biannual Meeting
Nov. 12, 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: Sara Dawson, BLM Uncompahgre Field Office Acting Manager, welcomed the group and shared photos taken of the Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area last year with members of the conservation corps clearing brush.

Agenda: The agenda was approved with no changes.

Announcements: Facilitator Marsha Porter-Norton noted that this is the first time the Partnership has met without Peter Mueller, formerly of The Nature Conservancy, who was one of DRRP's founders. TNC is to fill his position in January 2016.

Illegal Marijuana Operation

Sparky Taber of the BLM Grand Junction Field Office described an incident that occurred earlier this year, when local and federal law enforcement officers found two large illegal marijuana grow sites along the Dolores River near the Montrose-Mesa County Line. Ten people were arrested and many plants were seized.

Mike Wight of Southwest Conservation Corps said it became necessary to develop a "Plan B" so that Conservation Corps that were initially scheduled to work near the grow sites could be placed a safe distance from the illegal activity. Mike, Daniel Oppenheimer of Tamarisk Coalition, and others were able to reschedule about 10 weeks of crew work in just a couple of days. They also talked with TNC in Utah about the agreement managing funding for this project, to private landowners for backup project work, and to people in Rio Mesa.

Mike said the fact that the Partnership was able to reschedule the work so quickly shows that it is alive and thriving. It speaks to the power and flexibility of the funding sources and the DRRP. There was virtually no break in the work; at most, a day was lost. Mike thanked everyone who helped make the change in plans happen.

Sparky said it has been suggested that the Partnership should seek funding from drug-enforcement agencies. He said that is not entirely a tongue-in-cheek idea.

Matching Appropriate Resources to Partnership Goals for

New Restoration Projects, Monitoring and Maintenance, and Community Stewardship

Stacy Beagh, executive director of the Tamarisk Coalition, provided a handout on "Our Strategies for the Future". She said the DRRP needs to be more compelling and more succinct in its message in order to better plan for funding. The Partnership's original goals still stand, but have been updated. As time went on, a Monitoring and Maintenance Plan was created, and a Communications Plan has been developed to share the message with the broader public. Stacy said feedback is needed on all three of the following strategies:

- Maintain and protect the lands restored to date, through monitoring and maintenance on all the work completed so far, which consists of approximately 1,500 acres.

- Initiate new riparian restoration projects. These opportunities may come from new private landowners, NEPA processes, or other sources. Although the DRRP has technically met its original goals, it will be working on 75 new acres in 2016 and possibly additional acres in 2017. It is taking on new projects, at least in the short term.
- Create a longstanding culture of stewardship in the basin. This entails efforts such as engaging the Paradox Valley Charter School to do a monitoring project. These efforts are not guided by any overarching strategy.

Stacy said the desire is to develop a common language about what DRRP is doing in the next six months to five years.

She said the Tamarisk Coalition is one of the main partners in the funding for this effort, and the BLM is a huge contributor. The Walton Family Foundation has scaled down its funding. She said the stewardship component is somewhat of an afterthought and there isn't much funding lined up yet to engage schools and do volunteer projects. It hasn't been thought of as a specific component.

Discussion: A question was asked about how new restoration projects are initiated. Stacy said that is for the Implementation Subcommittee to decide, using criteria established in Dolores River Restoration Action Plan (DR-RAP) and the DRRP Transition Plan. She noted that members of the Partnership have said they want to protect the current investment before taking on new projects.

Daniel Oppenheimer, restoration coordinator for the Tamarisk Coalition, said new opportunities just emerge, sometimes involving things that weren't feasible in years past, so the established criteria are used.

Another question was raised concerning which metrics would be used to evaluate education and outreach outcomes. Stacy said that isn't really known yet. Some metrics are included in DR-RAP, but she thinks a logical next step would be to create the needed metrics, perhaps through the use of a survey or a committee to define what success looks like.

Betsy Bair of Sen. Cory Gardner's Office said his office has been working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to mitigate bird issues. When someone is doing a nest take, for instance, they have to pay a certain amount of money and the funds must go to a nonprofit, but it is difficult finding appropriate nonprofits to receive the money. Betsy said this could be a good crossover that could provide funds for the Partnership. She also said there are about four school districts focusing on STEM projects that are seeking work such as that done by the Partnership, and this could provide a connection for the stewardship component.

There was consensus that Stacy's outlined proposal was acceptable.

Next steps:

→ Anyone with feedback on this effort should send it to Stacy. Anyone interested in working on the education component should contact her.

**Status of Implementing the 2015 DRRP Communications Plan and
Introducing the Regional Watershed Partnership Fund**

- Kristen Jespersen* of the Tamarisk Coalition gave a PowerPoint presentation on “Funding and Communications Updates”.

She said total funding needs for 2016 are projected to be \$858,673, of which \$506,664 is pending. That leaves a shortfall of \$352,009. A few grants are pending. The Partnership is also coordinating with TNC to bring in private money.

Kristen said capacity work is the more-challenging line item to fund. It has a shortfall of \$39,508. It has been suggested that the Partnership use some of the \$50,000 Colorado Collaboration Award it received in 2014 from the Colorado Nonprofit Association, all of which is discretionary funding, to cover some of the capacity costs, which include time for certain personnel. The money has not been touched yet.

Fundraising strategies are:

- Apply for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Developing the Next Generation grant and a Utah Partners for Conservation and Development Watershed Restoration Initiative grant
- Update the 2017-2020 BLM Healthy Lands Initiative request
- Identify and court private foundations
- Develop a strategy for identifying and doing outreach to private individuals and businesses.

Communications Plan goals are:

- Garner financial support from existing and new funders
- Bolster a lasting constituency of local stewards and advocates
- Share lessons learned to enhance restoration outside the basin
- Keep DRRP partners motivated and engaged.

Efforts in progress are:

- Get the MOU signed
- Sent the annual report and thank-yous to all past funders
- Host a volunteer project with the Paradox Valley Charter School
- Have a briefing with the Utah BLM State Office
- Share lessons learned at a USGS restoration workshop
- Hire and work with a marketing consultant to develop branding and marketing tools.

Upcoming tasks are:

- Develop and initiate a private donor campaign. This includes developing a list of potential donors; sending them the newsletter; providing an online giving opportunity; and a site visit in Gateway.
- Develop a new assistance agreement between BLM, TC and Southwest Conservation Corps.
- Schedule a meeting with Gateway Canyon Resorts (to seek donations from people that visit)
- Explore the potential for additional capacity to bolster communication efforts.
- Enhance the geodatabase and update the Partnership website.
- Conduct a Core Team retreat to evaluate the communications plan.

Discussion: A comment was made that a VISTA volunteer doing economic development has been placed in the Nucla/Naturita community, and maybe such people should be communicated with.

It was asked what kind of language people like to hear. Kristen said the way the Partnership is framed is: *We have a proven record of success; we are a functioning, dynamic, multi-stakeholder partnership, and to ensure this is preserved and successful, we need ongoing funding.* That is the message. What is needed is a strong, catchy message for the average person; that typically requires good imagery and slogans.

A question was asked about attracting the interest of schools. Daniel Oppenheimer said each school the Partnership works with is different. The Paradox Valley Charter School is in the Dolores River Basin and values outdoor experience and learning. The University of Utah has a research center on the Utah portion of the Dolores River; the center's mission involves education, science and research. The third-graders in the Dove Creek School have a year-long focus on the Dolores River.

Interpretive kiosks at Gateway were suggested as a way to attract tourists' interest. Kristen said there are interpretive signs already in place on a trail at Gateway and the Partnership definitely wants to use those and to put informational material in hotel rooms.

Betsy said Sen. Gardner's office has a grant reviewer and offers support for those seeking federal grants, and so does Sen. Michael Bennet's office. As the Partnership seeks federal funding, it might be helpful to obtain letters of support from the senators and others.

Kristen continued with her presentation. Foreseeable challenges are:

- Funder fatigue
- A greater need for discretionary funding
- Dwindling TC/SCC/TNC capacity to implement the Monitoring and Maintenance Plan and an increased need for capacity to do fundraising and communications
- The Dormant Outreach and Education Committee
- Competition with other watersheds for private and corporate money.

Discussion: A BLM official said she is trying to get commitment from BLM managers for continued funding for DRRP. She said it's important to reiterate the message that this is an important partnership that is aligned with many goals of the agency. Money will always be the limiting factor but there are creative work-arounds that can be done to make sure the work continues. She doesn't think there will be a drop-off in commitment from the agency.

Regional Watershed Partnership Fund

Kristen* gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Regional Watershed Partnership Fund Campaign. She said the Tamarisk Coalition is taking the lead in raising corporate and private funds for multiple watersheds through a two-year campaign, from January 2016 through December 2017. TC staff and board members will coordinate and implement the campaign and hire a contracted campaign coordinator. Money will be put into a single fund and can be raised with non-state, non-federal money to use as a match. The goal is to raise \$2 million, about \$700,000 in 2016 and the remainder in 2017. Kristen said this is ambitious and will require a

team effort involving the partnerships TC is working with. Testimonials are needed from people out in the field, people who restoration work on a daily basis.

Kristen said 70 percent of the \$2 million will go to directly to watersheds. The remainder will support costs incurred by TC and go to the reserves. Watersheds in Utah, Colorado, Nevada, and Arizona are being evaluated as potential partners. The idea is to hone in on 8-10 specific watersheds.

Objectives of the campaign are to:

- Improve quality of life in the watersheds and their surrounding communities
- Grow the sustainability of the TC
- Increase public awareness about riparian restoration.

We need from you:

- Agreement to commit resources and time to raise money
- Assistance identifying individuals and businesses that might support the fund (even small contributors)
- Help organizing events (field trips, dinners)
- Help collecting success stories (probably biggest)
- Help thanking donors
- Testimonials
- Being an ambassador for the campaign
- Complete a pre-application

Kristen said the proposed timeline is: Finish the campaign plan by December 2015, hire a campaign coordinator in January; have partnership pre-applications due in January; identify prospective watersheds in February; launch the campaign in March; have a field trip on the river in May.

Discussion: It was asked whether an effort had been made to reach out to journalism organizations or students. Daniel said the Partnership has made a number of such contacts over the years, especially in the Nucla/Naturita area, for press coverage of volunteer projects. He said it's easier to generate interest in communities that are located on the Dolores but more difficult in communities that are farther away, such as Grand Junction, Montrose or even Denver or Salt Lake City. Daniel said approaching university journalism programs is a new idea.

Stacy said this is part of the Communications Plan.

The possibility of tying the effort with the release of the Colorado Water Plan was raised. Kristen said the timing does coincide and that connection should be made.

A question was raised about using the interest raised on the fund. Kristen said it could be used however the Partnership needs it. There are components of the project work that are more difficult to fund and the idea is to attract funding that is flexible.

Next steps:

→Everyone who has good “before and after” imagery related to restoration work should send it to Kristen and Daniel.

→Start thinking about stories of accomplishment.

→Think about who is in the inner circle.

▪ Daniel Oppenheimer* gave a PowerPoint on “2016 Implementation, Maintenance and Monitoring”. He discussed work being done on land managed by the different BLM Field Offices and on private land as follows:

▪ *Tres Rios*: A strike team is doing Russian knapweed treatments.

A strike team is doing tamarisk resprout treatments.

The Dove Creek School is doing a planting project.

▪ *Uncompahgre*: Different people are doing herbaceous weed treatments.

Work is integrating the knapweed gall midge with Palisade insectary.

Volunteers are removing tamarisk, planting native trees, shrubs, and grasses.

▪ *Grand Junction*: Contractors and conservation corps are removing tamarisk.

The county, a contractor and strike teams are doing herbaceous weed treatments.

▪ *Moab*: Herbaceous weed treatments are being done.

The conservation corps is removing tamarisk (when the NEPA process is finished the corps can treat new areas).

There is a possible berm removal being considered.

▪ *Private*: DRRP works with more than 20 landowners and has many partners working with them as well.

Daniel said the Science and Monitoring Subcommittee will meet this winter. Watershed-wide, rapid, pilot-project and bird monitoring are all being done.

Discussion: A question was asked about work to aid native fish. Daniel said the berm project in Moab will look at the potential to improve fish habitat there and there are one or two sites in Colorado where DRRP hopes to regrade channelized banks, but these types of projects are still in early discussion.

Julie Knudson of the Tamarisk Coalition said results and reports related to monitoring, which formerly were in different places, have been combined on one site linked to the main DRRP web page. Click on “Science and Monitoring” to reach the information.

Award

Daniel said the Core Team realized some time ago that it needed to do a better job of expressing gratitude, so in the past couple years DRRP has recognized special people who have contributed to the Partnership. Most recently, the Core Team decided to express gratitude to Jim Johnson, a private landowner at the west end of Montrose who owns property on the Dolores River and has been working with the Colorado Department of Agriculture Palisade Insectary. He was one of several volunteers that worked in the heat this summer to broadcast 7-8 acres with native grass seed. Jim volunteered to cook dinner for a Western Conservation Corps crew doing work

near Rock Creek. He has also cooked for strike teams, and helps distribute fliers about events in Nucla and Naturita. Daniel said Jim has been a tremendous asset to the Partnership.

Jim was presented with a cutting board made from tamarisk by Mike Wight of the Southwest Conservation Corps.

Creating a Dolores River Scrapbook

Marsha said a scrapbook of photos and illustrations related to the Dolores River restoration work is being prepared. The information will go to the communications consultants. There will be both an electronic version and a roving scrapbook.

People in the room posted pictures on the walls and described them for the group as follows:

- A rainbow that appeared two years ago during an epic storm, after corps training, in one of the most remote areas
- Natural beauty along the corridor
- A group looking at a restoration site during a field trip with the Partnership
- An aerial view from an overflight
- A Partnership member's 3-year-old daughter on her first camping trip, which was on the Dolores River. She is eager to go again.
- Linda Sheader and Danika Marshal, both with Navarro, a contractor for the Department of Energy. They have been working with DOE for years. Marilyn Kastens of Navarro said they progressed from having no noxious-weed control anywhere to having three people on staff who go to all their DOE properties to manage weeds. The best part has been the work with the DRRP on the Dolores.
- A group photo of the DRRP
- The Hanging Flume below the confluence with the San Miguel River near Uravan. It is part of the local mining legacy and history. It was an expensive project intended for mining sluice, but was little used because the gold mines proved unproductive.
- A sign on the Gateway interpretive trail
- The river in flood. Mike Wight said last year the Dolores went from 900 to 3,000 cfs in an hour. He was driving back from a volunteer event and was out of cell range for a time. He was worried the crew was in trouble, but when he got to Dove Creek he received a message from them that they had gotten out in time. He said seeing a rare event like that is very special.
- The landscape upriver on the Utah side
- Rusty Lloyd's daughter during a volunteer revegetation event in 2012 on the Utah site. Rusty, programs director of the Tamarisk Coalition, said he took his daughter so she could see what I do.
- One of Stacy's favorite sites on the Dolores. She said she had never heard of the Dolores River before she moved to Colorado. She now has fond memories of camping here.
- A Moo! sign. Angela LoSasso of the BLM Uncompahgre Field Office said she works with private landowners and grazing permittees, and this Partnership has done a good job encouraging the ranching community and private landowners. She said it's important to have their support. Grazing can help or hinder the restoration process.

- A cottonwood thriving at Rio Mesa that was planted by DRRP. Julie said she never realized how difficult it is to get one established, so every time she sees a healthy tree that the Partnership has planted, it's exciting.
- A horse in the wild-horse reserve in Disappointment Valley. Clark Bouton of the Western Conservation Corps said seeing the horses was a neat moment for the crew.
- Graffiti on a concrete bridge in Montrose County several miles below the San Miguel River confluence. Daniel said he loves how rivers attract different people. He said in this case, someone took spray paint to a remote site and painted "Yoda rules!" This fascinates him.
- A variety of people with the Dolores River Dialogue on nine rafts on a trip from Bradfield Bridge to the Dove Creek pumps. Marsha said it reminded her how people make assumptions about other people but when you're out there getting wet and having fun, sometimes façades come down.
- A group "dress-up" photo taken on the second-to-last day in the field after five nine-day hitches of cutting tamarisk.
- A drawing of the Dolores River with stumps, indicating all the restoration work done in the past five years.

Desert Bighorn Sheep in the Dolores River Basin

Brad Banulis*, a biologist with Colorado Parks and Wildlife in Montrose, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the "Dolores River Desert Bighorn Sheep Herd". He said the bighorn sheep is the state mammal and an iconic species. It occupies a large area, ranging from 4,500 to 14,000 feet in elevation. Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep live in the higher elevations, desert bighorns in the lower. At one point, desert bighorns had gone extinct in Colorado. However, artifacts and remains found in Montrose County and at a site in Colorado National Monument established that desert bighorns had once lived there. They were reintroduced beginning in the 1970s. The first transplant was into the Dominguez Canyon area along Lower Gunnison. The Dolores River and Lower Gunnison on this side of the plateau are good habitat for desert sheep. Gradually the population climbed, but there was a die-off in the 2000s due to drought and disease, especially pneumonia.

Brad said more releases were done in 2010 and 2011 along the Middle Dolores. Most of the sheep have satellite GPS collars that function for three years, then drop off. They provide data six times a day. This winter biologists will be doing a lot of data analysis. CPW also does ground and helicopter surveys to look for lambs to indicate reproductive success.

Currently there are desert bighorns along the Dolores River in GMUs S-63 and S-64. S-63 is from McIntyre Canyon to Bedrock on the Middle Dolores. S-64 is the Upper Dolores, which is farthest south. The area furthest downstream is managed as a no-sheep zone because of disease threats to domestic sheep. There are no domestic-sheep allotments in Colorado but there are in Utah.

Although the sheep spend much of their time on slopes where they can see, they are very reliant on the Dolores River. Barren ground, piñon-juniper and sagebrush are also big factors for them. Some of the sheep mortalities are occurring in the riparian corridor, where there is more cover and the sheep are therefore more susceptible to predation from mountain lions.

Brad said the population is stable to growing, with good lamb production. It is estimated at 60.

This is a hunted population.

Discussion: In answer to questions, Brad said poaching is historically a concern for bighorn sheep. Getting rid of invasive plants, particularly knapweed and cheatgrass, is probably the biggest benefit of restoration work. Weed management is one of the biggest benefits of restoration for ungulates. There is also some benefit to PJ removal for the species.

Thoughts from 2015 DRRP Interns

Mike Wight thanked the conservation corps crews for their hard work this season. He recognized those in attendance. He thanked the land managers who helped. The Partnership is really dependent on BLM folks to help and supervise. Crew will be on the ground until mid-December.

Gideon Pace* and Jessy Larsen, SCC interns, gave a PowerPoint presentation on their work. Gideon said they filled out a rapid-monitoring data sheet for the 200-plus polygons they visited. It lists different data factors such as wildlife, biocontrol, what native plants were present, treatments done, invasive species, etc. They also filled out a passive-recruitment datasheet noting willows and cottonwoods that had grown during the past five years and what conditions were causing better or worse regeneration, the presence of other species, alkalinity and salinity, and other factors.

Jessy said she started her internship at the end of September. She discussed work done spraying knapweed near the Gypsum Boat launch and at Disappointment Creek. They then started a project with Marilyn and Danika for DOE, spraying mostly knapweed and thistle. They plan to go through the treated areas again to work on tamarisk resprouts. She and Gideon are studying for their Colorado pesticide applicators' licenses.

Gideon said they have treated 424 acres since Jessy came in.

Updates and Future Meetings

Marsha noted that the DRRP is moving into the transition phase. A previous consensus of the Partnership was to meet once a year in the transition phase. She asked what would be a good time to meet in 2016.

After discussion, there was consensus to do the following:

- Have a formal Partnership meeting in the fall, prior to the end of Daylight Saving Time. The location of the next meeting will be Grand Junction.
- Have an informal gathering in the spring along the river (e.g. a field trip to the Dolores River to view mechanized work). It was suggested that Gateway might be a good site and the field trip could be open to the public.

Next steps:

- If you have input on Stacy's document, send it to Marsha or Daniel Oppenheimer.
- If you have questions about any aspect of the Partnership's work, go to the website and see whom to call.
- Look for more communications deliverables (videos, brochures, etc.)coming in the future.

Other updates:

- Three consultants are being interviewed to implement the Communications Plan.
- Implementation will be on the ground in 2016.
- The 2015 annual report will be emailed around March of next year.
- Julie said there may be a coffee-table book of “before and after” photos taken on the Tres Rios FO area.