# RIVERSEDGE WEST

2019 ANNUAL REPORT







# RUSTY & JAY

Dear Friends,

It is with great pleasure that we present the 2019 RiversEdge West (REW) Annual Report. This year was filled with transitions and opportunities as we integrated new staff and board members who bring new skills and passions to our work. Among these transitions we managed to fulfill our mission, grow our programs, engage our members and communities, and have fun while working to improve the health of our rivers.

We remain faithfully committed to accomplishing the goals and objectives outlined in our <u>2018 –</u> <u>2022 Strategic Plan</u>. In doing so, we strive to make long-lasting and sustainable impacts on riparian areas across the West. REW continues to build durable relationships to enact those positive changes on rivers that are so important to the well-being of our communities.

As 2020 is upon us, we realize there are ecological, social and economic challenges ahead. Through the power of partnerships, science, and education, we hope to overcome these challenges and pave the way for future generations. Our work is devoted to ensuring future generations will have the wild places they need to thrive and river systems that support humans and wildlife alike.

Our team is enthusiastic about creating solid education and restoration programs for the benefit of watersheds and local communities. Part of our mission is to effectively communicate what we have learned and present the current science in restoration to our partners and the public. We are grateful for the people working on the ground, the landowners, the managers, the non-profit organizations, the researchers, and the individuals like you who are supporting this work. This collaborative effort is safeguarding the integrity and health of our rivers.

Thank you for your continued support and please stay engaged with us as we forge ahead!





RUSTY LLOYD

Sincerely,

**RUSTY LLOYD** 

Executive Director

JAY WILCOX

President, Board of Directors

## 2019 IMPACT



\$2,461,295 RAISED FOR RIVER RESTORATION







**593** PROFESSIONALS TRAINED & EDUCATED



**109** JOBS CREATED FOR YOUNG ADULTS & LOCAL CONTRACTORS



**1,728** YOUTH AND ADULTS ENGAGED IN RIVER RESTORATION

# RESTORE RIVERS?

The benefits of restoring riparian areas span far beyond providing food and habitat for fish and wildlife into economic, recreational, and agricultural prosperity.

Rivers are the foundation of life in the arid Southwest. One of the most important features of a river is the riparian area; where the water meets the land. These areas are often referred to as "ribbons of life" because of their ability to sustain enormous amounts of biodiversity.

Since 1999, RiversEdge West has been working with partners across the Southwest to restore riparian ecosystems that have been adversely impacted by a variety of stressors, including invasive plants.

Invasive plants like tamarisk (salt cedar) and Russian olive crowd out cottonwoods, willows and other native plants and reduce biodiversity and resources available for native wildlife, fish, pollinators, and birds. The spread of invasive plants also impacts humans by restricting recreational access, reducing the productivity of agricultural lands, and increasing the frequency and severity of wildfire.

RiversEdge West's goal is to restore riparian ecosystems for the benefit of both fish and wildlife as well as the economic, social, and cultural well-being of communities in the American West.

Read on to explore how, with support from individuals like you, RiversEdge West is making an impact.



## WHERE WE WORK

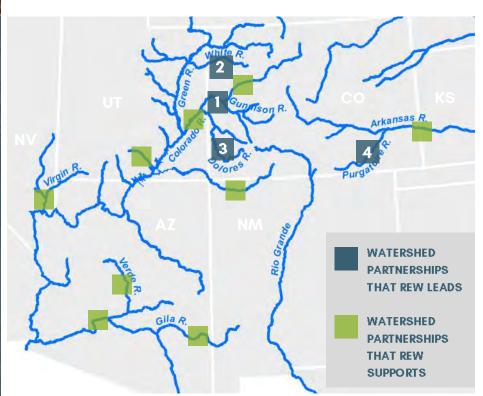
Rivers and invasive plants know no boundaries, so our work does not either. By working across jurisdictional lines and with hundreds of unique partners, we leverage resources and work collectively towards a common goal: to improve the health of rivers. Throughout a six-state area, RiversEdge West leads and supports 12 partnerships working to combat invasive plant infestations and restore riparian ecosystems.

### LEADING PARTNERSHIPS

RiversEdge West employs Restoration Coordinators that guide four partnerships; serving as the fiscal agent as well as driving the planning, fundraising and riparian restoration work that keeps these partnerships functioning effectively and efficiently.

### SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIPS

RiversEdge West supports nine partnerships throughout the West by providing groups with technical assistance, fundraising support, and facilitation and planning guidance.



## LEADING

#### FOUR RIPARIAN RESTORATION PARTNERSHIPS

RiversEdge West is leading four riparian restoration partnerships that are returning damaged riparian corridors to diverse and resilient ecosystems:

### THE DESERT RIVERS COLLABORATIVE

The <u>Desert Rivers Collaborative</u> (DRC) revitalizes and restores the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers in Mesa and Delta Counties of western Colorado and provides fundraising opportunities, technical support, and education for land managers and landowners.

In 2018 and 2019, multiple wildfires plagued riparian areas across Mesa County and damaged cottonwood galleries. In response to these devastating wildfires, the DRC took an active role in 2019 to restore these areas by raising funds to purchase native plants and seed to help restore the affected areas. The DRC also coordinated two-person strike teams, youth conservation corps, and local contractors to complete tamarisk and Russian olive removal, secondary weed treatments, and long-term restoration planning.

LOOKING AHEAD: The DRC will monitor sites that have previously been treated. Monitoring data will help the DRC prioritize sites for future restoration. THE

### WHITE RIVER partnership

Since its initial meeting in 2016, REW has led the <u>White River Partnership</u> (WRP), expanding both the diversity and the geographic extent of its stakeholder group in northeastern Utah and northwestern Colorado.

Strategic tamarisk and Russian olive treatments continued in 2019 on federal, state, and private lands with the goal of reducing wildfire danger, improving fish and wildlife habitat, enhancing agricultural productivity, and engaging youth in conservation work. The partnership also took initial steps toward formalization, working towards a Memorandum of Understanding and developing a restoration plan.

LOOKING AHEAD: The WRP will focus on continuing restoration treatments, monitoring previously treated sites, and identifying new areas for restoration.

### THE DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

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To date, the <u>Dolores River Restoration Partnership</u> (DRRP) has treated 1,700 acres along the Dolores River and is taking the lead to monitor and maintain over 400 acres each year.

In 2019, this public-private partnership celebrated a decade of collaboration, restoration, and on-theground work between two states, six counties, four Bureau of Land Management Field Offices, and many private landowners.

The DRRP engaged students, volunteers, private landowners, and other land managers during four volunteer events and workshops throughout the watershed. Youth conservation corps crews rafted into remote locations to remove tamarisk along the Dolores River and horse-packed into the Dolores River Wilderness Study Area to begin removal where invasive plant treatments had not yet occurred.

LOOKING AHEAD: The DRRP is collecting and standardizing its monitoring data to determine areas of the River that are better suited for revegetation as well as incorporating fish, avian, and geomorphological monitoring.

### PURGATOIRE watershed weed management collaborative

THE

In 2016, REW began working with the Spanish Peaks – Purgatoire River Conservation District (SPPRCD) to establish the Purgatoire Watershed Weed Management Collaborative (PWWMC), which coordinates restoration work along the Purgatoire River. Since then, the PWWMC has:

- Created, and now manages, five innovative private landowner programs;
- > Worked with over 70 private landowners;
- $\rangle$  Treated more than 3,000 acres; and
- Made an impressive economic impact, with over \$470K put directly back into the local economy through the hiring of private contractors and by providing landowner cost-share dollars to implement conservation work.

Additionally, PWWMC and SPPRCD strengthened their relationship with Las Animas County by entering into another annual Intergovernmental Agreement in 2019 that focuses on noxious weed management and bolsters the capacity of organizations across the County.

LOOKING AHEAD: We are excited to announce that the coordinator position will be transferred to SPPRCD in June of 2020. REW will continue to support and work with this innovative program.

## SUPPORTING

### NINE RIPARIAN RESTORATION PARTNERSHIPS

RiversEdge West helps watershed partnerships build their organizational and fundraising capacity, and provides technical and scientific information to help them succeed on the ground.

In 2019, RiversEdge West provided support to the following partnerships:

#### Arkansas Partners

Arkansas River, CO & KS

Escalante River Watershed Partnership Escalante River, UT

Gila Watershed Partnership Gila River, AZ

Lower Gila River Partners Gila River, AZ

**Middle Colorado Watershed Council** Colorado River, CO

San Juan Watershed Group San Juan River, CO, UT, & NM

Southeast Utah Riparian Partnership Colorado River, UT

Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition Verde River, AZ

Virgin River Coalition Virgin River, NV, UT & AZ



Below are a few examples of how REW is providing ongoing support to partnerships:



### VERDE RIVER

## GILA RIVER

On the Verde River, a watershed just northeast of Phoenix, Arizona, REW is working with <u>Friends of the Verde River</u> (Friends) and a collection of other partners to protect and restore this vital tributary of the Salt River. Specifically, REW is working with Friends on finalizing their strategic plan, implementing restoration actions, monitoring and evaluation, and rolling out their watershed report card.

## COLORADO RIVER

On the Lower Colorado River (LCR), from just upstream of Lake Havasu to San Luis, Mexico, REW is working on the Lower Colorado River Non-native Vegetation Management Needs & Feasibility Assessment. This assessment will provide a road map to guide future research, non-native vegetation management, and native riparian restoration efforts along the LCR. To realize the objectives of this study, REW staff are visiting with public land managers and evaluating results of past riparian restoration efforts and current conditions on key reaches of the LCR. On the upper Gila River in Arizona, which we define as downstream of the San Francisco River to San Carlos Reservoir, REW works with the <u>Gila Watershed Partnership</u> (GWP) on a range of activities to help them realize their long-term river restoration goals. REW's Arizona Restoration Coordinator sits on the GWP's technical committee as well as provides them direct technical guidance on strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation, and proposal preparation.

## GILA RIVER

On the lower Gila River, the river's reach through Phoenix to Gila Bend, REW is working with the Lower Gila River Collaborative (LGRC) to help them plan their restoration response. REW's Arizona-based Restoration Coordinator sits on their Engagement and Outreach and Restoration Technical Committees and focuses on helping the collaborative identify priority restoration sites and develop restoration designs and actions.

## EDUCATING

### **RIPARIAN RESTORATION PROFESSIONALS**

RiversEdge West's annual conference and workshops connected and educated 593 people from across the Southwest U.S. in 2019. Attendees shared evolving practices in riparian restoration that bridge science and practice.



"The Riparian Restoration Conference is one of the most informative and useful conferences I have ever attended in my career in that it brings together scientists, resource managers, and practitioners with ample opportunity to share and discuss information, goals, and methods across a broad range of relevant topics."

/ 2019 CONFERENCE ATTENDEE /

Photo by Bob Wick

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE

#### CONNECT | INSPIRE | INNOVATE

REW's <u>Annual Riparian Restoration Conference</u> provides a collaborative venue for hundreds of riparian restoration practitioners from across the U.S. to learn about and strategize next steps for addressing the multitude of challenges facing our rivers.

Our annual gathering is also a valuable networking opportunity where attendees build lasting relationships that inspire innovation, collaboration, new projects, and advance research.

In 2019, over 210 scientists, land and water managers, researchers, tribal, state, and federal government representatives, students, watershed groups, and consultants from 15 states and 2 countries attended our sold-out conference in Phoenix, Arizona.

## CONNECTING

### YOUTH & COMMUNITY TO RIVERS

RiversEdge West's Education Program brings experiential, river-focused programming to youth and adults in order to foster a deeper connection between people and rivers, to raise awareness about the issues that rivers face, and to inspire individuals to become lifelong river stewards.



## INSPIRING YOUTH

Our <u>classroom visits and field trips</u> in 2019 presented standards-based river curriculum to classrooms throughout District 51 schools, across Colorado Mesa University's campus, to the Collbran Job Corps, and at partner-hosted events such as Ute Water's Children's Water Festival. New to our youth curriculum in 2019 was a field component where students used bug nets to monitor tamarisk beetles along the Colorado River.

### ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Regardless of their age, participants of our education program learn a foundational lesson: that individual actions make an impact. Along with our youth programs, we are connecting community members to rivers through our:

- > Annual <u>Raft the River</u> float trip and dinner along the Colorado River, where 50 adults and children experience the river first-hand.
- Lunch and Learn events, where community members join us for a free lunch while learning about rivers and how they can get involved in this effort.
- > Presentations to local groups and service clubs.

In 2019, our river education program engaged 1,728 youth and adults.

LOOKING AHEAD: In 2020, we look forward to connecting more students and adults with rivers and are creating a citizen-science tamarisk beetle monitoring program. We are also developing a teacher resource kit to help teachers provide their students with quality environmental education experiences in the classroom or in the field.



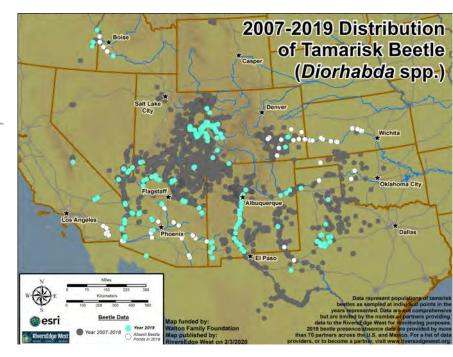
## MONITORING AND EDUCATING ABOUT THE TAMARISK BEETLE

RiversEdge West's Tamarisk Beetle Program monitors and tracks the beetles' expansion across the Southwest and educates policy-makers, land managers, and the public about what effects the beetle might have on river systems.

In 2019, REW worked with over 40 partners across the Western U.S. to create its annual distribution map and presented information at workshops in Arizona, Nevada, and California on population movement and restoration with beetles in the ecosystem. To get involved in the tamarisk beetle monitoring program, <u>visit our website</u>.

### What is the Tamarisk Beetle?

The tamarisk beetle (*Diorhabda* spp.) is a biological control strategy for managing tamarisk. First released in 2001, beetles spread rapidly across the Western U.S., where large populations can dramatically alter riparian systems by repeatedly defoliating (eating) the leaves of tamarisk.



While the tamarisk beetle does not quickly eradicate tamarisk single-handedly, it virtually eliminates flowering and significantly weakens the plant so that mechanical and chemical controls are more effective for land managers seeking to remove the plant.



## INCREASING RESTORATION ON PRIVATE LANDS

Private lands comprise over half of Colorado. Given the patchwork of private and public lands, it can be a challenge to incorporate these lands into large-scale projects and funding opportunities, both for agencies and non-profits alike. To overcome this challenge, REW teamed up with the Natural Resources Conversation Service (NRCS) under the United States Department of Agriculture in 2018 to create a Private Lands Biologist partner position.

With the goal of helping to access federally funded programs and providing increased outreach and education to landowners across Western Colorado, we are better connecting federal incentive dollars and larger grant-funded restoration projects with private landowners who are interested in conducting riparian restoration on their property.

In 2019, this partner position provided site visits and technical assistance to 82 landowners that collectively own 2,000 acres in Western Colorado. Workshops geared towards private landowners were held in Naturita, Colorado and Aztec, New Mexico in collaboration with 31 different agencies and organizations.

LOOKING AHEAD: REW continues to assist in connecting technical resources and federal funding with restoration on private lands. Learn more here.

## FUNDING

### **RIPARIAN RESTORATION**

RiversEdge West helps watershed partnerships secure funding to coordinate, plan, implement, monitor, and maintain riparian restoration by:

- Providing restoration, strategic, and fundraising planning assistance to partnerships to help them identify and communicate their funding needs
- > Identifying, tracking, and sharing relevant funding opportunities throughout the region
- Providing and/or developing fundraising capacity within partnerships
- Writing grants, developing relationships with funders, and training practitioners in fundraising best practices
- Applying for multi-partnership grants and serving as a fiscal agent for the partnerships that we lead
- Meeting with past and prospective funders to share information about restoration work and advocating for ongoing financial support
- > Informing policy at the local, state, and federal level to encourage public funding for restoration work

Helping watershed partnerships to conduct these restoration actions is essential to the long-term success of restoration. <u>Learn more here</u>.



Photo by Kamie Long

## BETTER TOGETHER

RiversEdge West is advancing collaborative networks that link scientists, landowners, practitioners, managers and others across large geographic regions to ignite cross-fertilization of restoration experiences.

Throughout various networks, the peer-to-peer learning model continues to be the most effective way of getting work done on the ground. Over the years, this model has been the central pillar of the southwest regional Cross Watershed Network (XWN) and continues to be an integral part of REW's work.

While the XWN is transforming into an online tool kit, it has set the stage for other smaller networks to emerge. Specifically, the state-based Arizona Cross Watershed Network has recently formalized and REW has been assisting with its initial development.

On a larger scale, REW provides leadership and support for the <u>Western</u> <u>Collaborative Conservation Network</u> (WCCN), serving on the network's leadership team, steering committee, and various working groups. This large, regional network of community-based conservation groups and place-based networks in the intermountain west was formalized in 2019 and continues to build momentum.

By connecting all sectors of conservation, from riparian areas to high alpine and everything in between, similar challenges can be tackled and figurative siloes can be broken down. The result is a network that works together to effectively restore damaged ecosystems.

## FINANCIALS

### INCOME \$1,089,068

Foundation Grants (35%)

State Grants (22%)

Federal Grants (19%)

Corporate and Other Grants (8%)

Education Events (7%)

Donations and Memberships (6%)

Restore Our Rivers Contributions (3%)

### EXPENSES \$1,096,352



Programs (80%)

Management and General (14%)

Fundraising (6%)



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## STAFF

Pictured below from left to right:

MARK BRIGGS Restoration Coordinator

KRISTEN JESPERSEN Funding Program Coordinator

SARAH WILSON Private Lands Biologist

RUSTY LLOYD Executive Director

SHANNON WADAS Associate Director

BEN BLOODWORTH Tamarisk Beetle Program Coordinator **RICA FULTON** Restoration Coordinator

JOHN LEARY Restoration Coordinator

CARA KUKURAITIS Outreach and Education Coordinator

SHELLY SIMMONS Restoration Coordinator (not pictured)

FORMER 2019 STAFF Melissa McMaster Shannon Hatch David Varner



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REW welcomes and appreciates contributions of any amount.

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### WWW.RIVERSEDGEWEST.ORG

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