

RIVERSEDGE WEST

2020
ANNUAL
REPORT



Photo by Bob Peterson

HELLO FROM RUSTY & JAY

Dear Friends,

As we look back on 2020, we continue to be amazed at the unprecedented amount of change. We know that you and your families experienced these changes right along with us. You, like us, are probably still processing some of the outcomes of the 2020 experience. We hope this letter finds you well and safe.

In the midst of the most challenging year we have experienced in modern history, RiversEdge West (REW) adapted and successfully embraced the idea of a “new normal”. We are happy to report that 2020 marked another successful year for our organization, and it is with great enthusiasm that we present the 2020 REW Annual Report.

We count ourselves fortunate for many things this past year, including:

- › An active and engaged board that provided guidance and governance to the organization
- › A stellar team of staff who implemented a multitude of projects
- › An amazing network of people who consistently supported our organization and our work
- › An unwavering commitment to our goals of science and innovation, access to information, awareness and support of riparian health

The accomplishments in this report were realized through hard work and the power of partnerships. These efforts and collaborations are the foundation for providing present and future generations a legacy of healthy rivers which support our way of life in the West.

As we look forward to 2021, you can expect robust programs and projects that benefit rivers and the wildlife and humans that depend on them. We will continue to support the stewardship of public lands along our rivers, healthy rivers that support working private lands, and all the public and private entities that are dependent on the integrity and overall health of our river systems.

We miss all our partners, supporters, and friends and look forward to the day we are able to meet face to face again. Thank you for your continued support and please stay in touch with us. Stay safe and enjoy those rivers!

Sincerely,



RUSTY LLOYD
Executive Director



JAY WILCOX
President, Board of Directors



JAY WILCOX



RUSTY LLOYD

2020 IMPACT



\$1,069,203

RAISED FOR
RIVER RESTORATION



1,492

ACRES TREATED



1,138

PROFESSIONALS
TRAINED & EDUCATED



123

JOBS CREATED FOR YOUNG
ADULTS & LOCAL CONTRACTORS



372

YOUTH AND ADULTS ENGAGED
IN RIVER RESTORATION

RESTORING RIVERS

IN THE SOUTHWESTERN U.S.

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 (REW) 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.

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



Photo by Adam McGowen

WHERE WE WORK

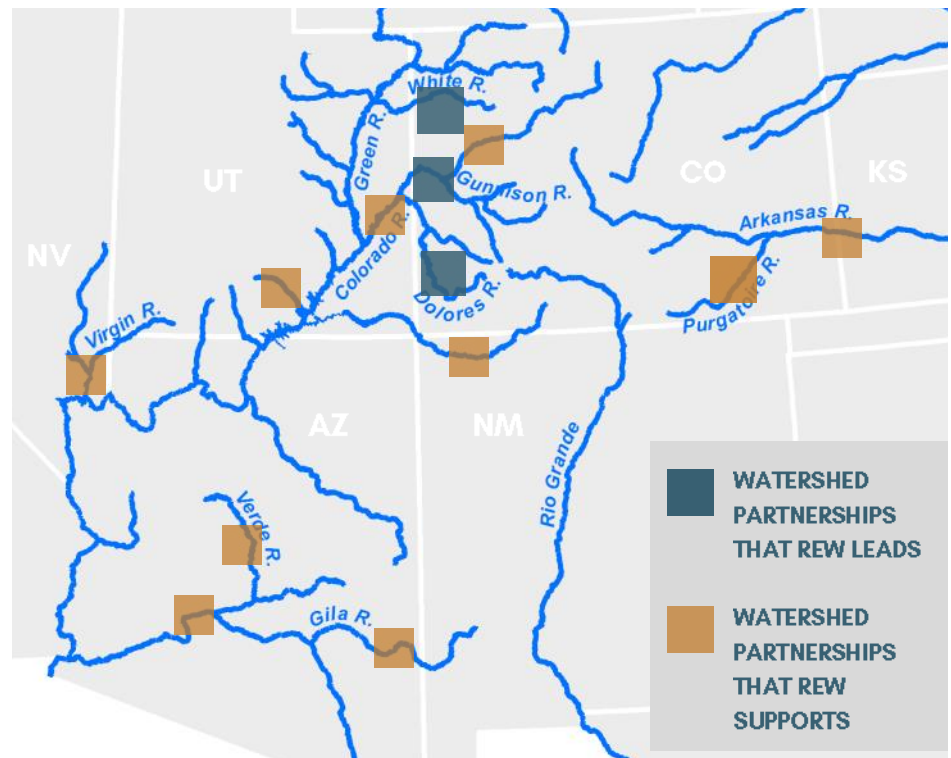
Rivers and invasive plants know no boundaries, so our work does not either. By working across jurisdictional lines and with hundreds of unique partners, we leverage resources and work collectively towards a common goal: to improve the health of rivers. Throughout a six-state area, RiversEdge West leads and supports 13 partnerships working to combat invasive plant infestations and restore riparian ecosystems.

LEADING PARTNERSHIPS

RiversEdge West employs Restoration Coordinators that guide three 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 ten partnerships throughout the West by providing groups with technical assistance, fundraising support, and facilitation and planning guidance.



LEADING RIPARIAN RESTORATION PARTNERSHIPS

RiversEdge West leads three partnerships in the West, providing the resources, capacity, and expertise to ensure restoration is carried out effectively in the long-term.



Watershed partnerships enable diverse groups to work collaboratively to restore degraded riparian vegetation back to healthy and resilient ecosystems.



DESERT RIVERS COLLABORATIVE

The Desert Rivers Collaborative (DRC) was founded by REW in 2012 to serve as a coordinated platform to address invasive riparian plant species and restoration along the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers and their tributaries. These two rivers provide myriad benefits to the surrounding communities, and therefore the DRC provides many avenues for stewardship and education surrounding riparian habitat.

In 2020, many properties were treated for tamarisk and Russian olive, secondary weeds, and revegetated with native trees, shrubs, and seed. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the DRC was able to facilitate several volunteer opportunities pulling weeds with the City of Grand Junction and building bird boxes with the Bureau of Reclamation. The DRC allows partners to share resources, work together on projects and funding opportunities, and identify best-practices.

LOOKING AHEAD:

In 2021 the DRC will continue to strategically remove tamarisk and Russian olive and maintain past projects in sites that will benefit bird and fish habitat.

Partners within the DRC are also coordinating on a Colorado River Corridor Initiative to identify possible stakeholder processes to inform future plans associated with the river corridor in the DRC area.



WHITE RIVER PARTNERSHIP

The White River Partnership (WRP) started meeting in 2017 to coordinate tamarisk and Russian olive removal efforts in the lower White River basin. Partners in 2020 included over 25 federal, tribal, state, city, and county entities, private landowners, universities, and non-profit organizations.

REW planned and led in-person and virtual meetings throughout 2020 to bring White River partners from Utah and Colorado together to work towards formalizing the White River Partnership (WRP) and developing a plan to restore the White River's riparian vegetation. Youth crews navigated COVID-19 difficulties to continue restoration work on 3 sites in Utah to reduce wildfire threats to cottonwood forests posed by invasive trees and to improve habitat for endangered fish. REW collaborated with Colorado partners to begin identifying future restoration sites, including organizing a socially distanced site visit and collecting pre-treatment vegetation data. REW and other partners also began fundraising efforts to implement restoration in Colorado.

LOOKING AHEAD:

The WRP aims to finalize the partnership's Memorandum of Understanding and finish the restoration plan by early 2021. The WRP will then begin efforts to implement the plan.



DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

The Dolores River flows through an increasingly arid landscape in southwest Colorado and northeast Utah. The Partnership includes around 20 entities including federal natural resource agencies, state agencies, counties, municipalities, academic institutions, non-profits, private landowners, and others who are focused on the restoration of the riparian habitat.

Since 2009, REW has co-coordinated the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) to ensure that invasive species, primarily tamarisk and noxious weeds, are mitigated along the riparian area. Over 2,000 acres have been treated in the last decade, and the DRRP has transitioned to maintaining restoration work and conducting monitoring to inform implementation and restoration progress. A new [Storymap](#) was developed in 2020, which is available on REW's website to visualize DRRP's data.

LOOKING AHEAD:

In 2021, the DRRP has multiple goals and projects planned. While continuing monitoring and maintenance work, the DRRP is also continuing to gather resources to treat initial tamarisk stands in the remote Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area.

The DRRP is also beginning to engage with partners to develop and implement a geomorphic monitoring protocol to inform adaptive management efforts and other physical projects.

SUPPORTING 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 2020, 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

Purgatoire Watershed Weed Management Collaborative

Purgatoire 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



Photo by Kamie Long

A FEW EXAMPLES...

During 2020, REW worked closely with the Grand Staircase Partnership (Escalante River, Utah), Friends of Verde River (Verde River, Arizona), Gila Watershed Partnership (Gila River upstream of Safford, Arizona), the Lower Gila River Collaborative (Gila River downstream of the City of Phoenix, Arizona), and a diversity of agencies and organizations along the lower Colorado River (downstream of Lake Havasu) to provide technical guidance and research that would help these watershed partnerships to meet their riparian restoration goals. REW's involvement with these partnerships focused on providing technical guidance on strategic planning, monitoring and riparian restoration; and evaluating past riparian restoration efforts:

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Watershed partnerships work at sub-watershed scales that cover thousands of square miles. Where to focus restoration efforts in these large areas first, second, third and so forth, and what types of restoration strategies would be most effective in improving riparian conditions are two key questions that need to be addressed. REW provides strategic planning input through committees associated with several watershed partners and has also developed strategies that help these partnerships to thoughtfully identify restoration priorities and the strategies that will be most effective in meeting long-term goals.

EVALUATING RESTORATION

Results of past riparian restoration efforts can provide a wealth of lessons learned for the benefit of future restoration. However, research efforts need to be undertaken to evaluate these past restoration efforts to allow past restoration to be identified and documented for the benefit of future restoration projects. In this regard, REW evaluated riparian restoration efforts along the lower Colorado River conducted by Havasu National Wildlife Refuge, the Bill Williams National Wildlife Refuge, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Imperial National Wildlife Refuge, Cibola National Wildlife Refuge, Quechan Nation, and the Sonoran Institute. Over 50 individual riparian restoration efforts were evaluated by REW in 2020 with evaluation results summarized in a draft document. This report will be finalized and, in summary form in early 2021.

TECHNICAL GUIDANCE

ON MONITORING & RIPARIAN RESTORATION

Central to the missions of all the partnerships mentioned above is the restoration of riparian habitat in the regions where they work. Thoughtful development of design and effective rollout of restoration tactics are two key ingredients of restoration success.

In this regard, REW provides input throughout the year to help watershed partnerships effectively implement restoration tactics to improve the likelihood for success. In addition, in 2020, REW conducted workshops on monitoring riparian vegetation and channel morphology conditions with the Grand Staircase Partnership and Friends of Verde River as well as worked with these and other partnerships to document and finalize monitoring protocols that will allow them to better quantify how well they are achieving their restoration objectives.

ADAPTING TO

A NEW NORMAL

When schools transitioned to virtual learning and public gatherings were postponed as a result of COVID-19, our method of connecting youth and communities to rivers and educating practitioners quickly pivoted.

Rather than hosting in-person learning and events, we focused on providing high-quality virtual learning opportunities and socially distanced events, such as:

- › a year-long virtual riparian restoration [webinar series](#)
- › socially distanced volunteer events for community members that assisted with ongoing restoration efforts
- › an online [resource page](#) for K-12 educators that provides access to numerous river-related education curriculum

In a typical year, our education program provides classroom and field experiences for students and community members that enrich their understanding and connection to river ecosystems.

Similarly, our workshops and annual conference provide collaborative venues for riparian restoration practitioners to learn about and strategize next steps for addressing the multitude of challenges facing our rivers.

WEBINAR SERIES

REW's year-long virtual webinar series offered a free opportunity for riparian restoration practitioners and community members alike to learn about specific aspects of riparian restoration. Over 560 people tuned into the webinar series, which covered topics ranging from the effects of the tamarisk beetle and the importance of monitoring, to working on private lands, restoring for birds, and adapting restoration to climate change.

VOLUNTEER EVENTS

REW hosted six socially distanced volunteer events across the Grand Valley of Colorado that engaged 72 community members. Volunteers built bird boxes, planted trees and shrubs, and pulled weeds at a multiple restoration sites.



Photo by the Southwest Conservation Corps



Photo by the Southwest Conservation Corps

CONNECTING, EDUCATING, & INSPIRING

RESTORATION

PROFESSIONALS

In 2020, RiversEdge West's annual conference and webinars connected and educated 1,018 riparian restoration professionals.

"RiversEdge West puts together a top-notch conference that attracts a wide range of relevant restoration presenters who are doing important work.

Having the opportunity to not only hear from the experts but to actually interact with them between sessions is invaluable. If you are involved in riparian restoration in any capacity you need to clear your calendar to make room to attend this conference!"

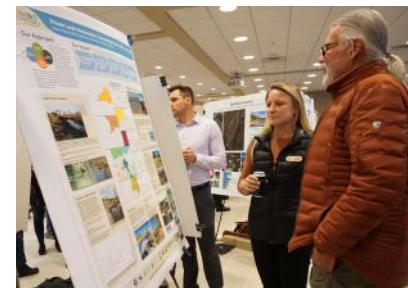
/ 2020 CONFERENCE ATTENDEE /

18TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

REW's Annual Riparian Restoration Conference 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.

Hosted in February of 2020, the conference set a new attendance record with over 225 scientists, land and water managers, tribal, state, and federal government representatives, students, watershed groups, and consultants in attendance from across 13 states. Attendees shared evolving practices in riparian restoration that bridged science and practice.



 **RiversEdge West**
RESTORE + CONNECT + INNOVATE

BUILDING A

STEWARDSHIP FRAMEWORK

While the initial removal of invasive plants is a first step in restoring riparian ecosystems, equally important is the ability to garner resources and support for the ongoing monitoring and maintenance of this work. One method for protecting these riverside investments is through community-driven stewardship and standardized metrics.

With this in mind, RiversEdge West is creating a stewardship framework that will provide guidance to those conducting restoration to maintain the many areas that have undergone various levels of riparian restoration.

The stewardship framework will foster ecologically sound and resilient riparian landscapes, protect past investments, and inform effective restoration techniques.

The stewardship framework will incorporate standardized metrics, long-term monitoring protocols and site prioritization strategies, costs and implementation plans to employ strike teams through youth conservation corps groups. This strategy will assist partners with ongoing monitoring and maintenance needs that they are not able to conduct on their own, and provide initial and ongoing training with partners in how to utilize these tools.



Photo by the Southwest Conservation Corps



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 communicate their project and 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; and
- > Informing policy at the local, state, and federal level to encourage public funding for restoration work.

In 2020, additional assistance redefining grant scopes and metrics, applying for COVID-19 relief funds, redesigning events, and reprioritizing work schedules was provided to partnerships to help them navigate the unpredictable circumstances of the pandemic.

Helping watershed partnerships to conduct these restoration actions is essential to the long-term success of restoration.

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.

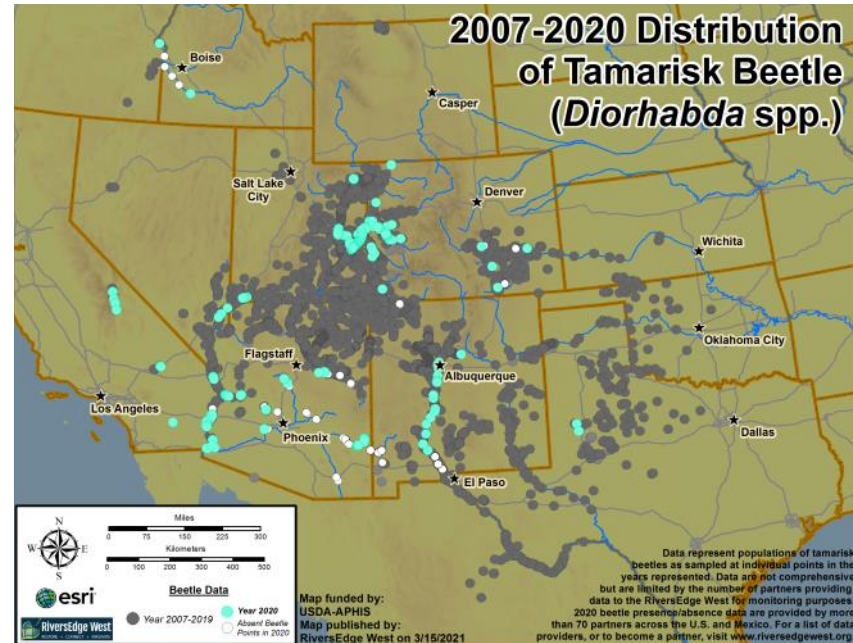
In 2020, REW worked with over 30 partners across the Western U.S. to create its annual distribution map. REW also held virtual webinars and hosted a two-part virtual workshop on improving the ecosystem for the southwestern willow flycatcher, funded by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. To get involved in the tamarisk beetle monitoring program, visit our [website](#).



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.



RESTORING

PRIVATE LANDS

REW continues to partner with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) under the United States Department of Agriculture to support a Private Lands Biologist partner position. Private lands comprise over half of all lands in Colorado. With such an array of various ownership, it can be a challenge to incorporate these lands into large-scale projects and funding opportunities, both for agencies and non-profits alike.

As such, the Private Lands Biologist provides access to federally funded programs and provides increased outreach and education to landowners across Western Colorado.

Through these initiatives, 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.

To date, the partner position has provided site visits and technical assistance to 107 landowners across 2,384 acres in Western Colorado. Potential project funding is estimated at \$151,400 dollars, with \$28,000 in federal funding approved thus far.

LOOKING AHEAD:

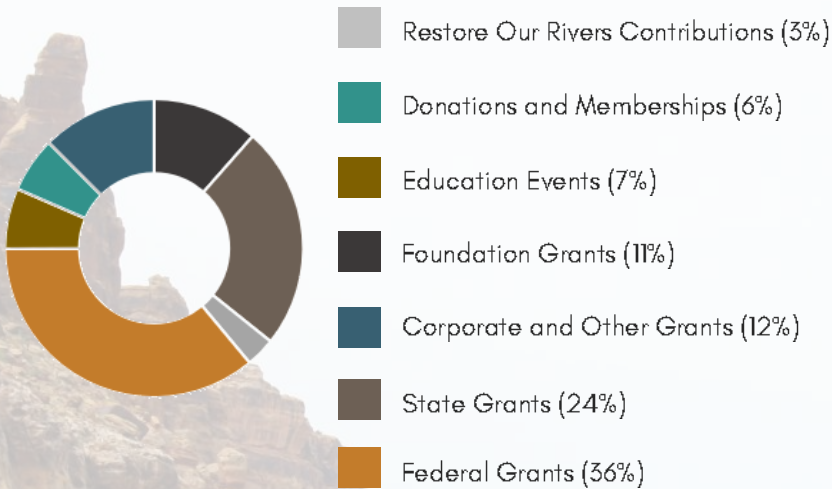
REW will continue to build off of the increased interest from landowners to conduct riparian restoration on their lands, connecting technical and funding resources to these important landscapes.



Photo by Cara Kukuraitis

FINANCIALS

INCOME \$930,027



EXPENSES \$964,022



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SARAH WILSON

Private Lands Biologist

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THANK YOU 2020

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REW welcomes and appreciates
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