

Riparian Restoration Through Wetland Creation

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A suite of different methods and techniques exist to restore riparian areas and degraded floodplains. A lesser-known method being employed in southwest Colorado involves riparian restoration through wetland creation. In partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, several projects using this technique have recently been completed. Here, I highlight the Lower Rio Blanco riparian restoration project which restored a degraded floodplain and riparian area through the creation of a 1.5-acre wetland. Ironically, historic river restoration activities in this area may have led to the current decline in riparian health which includes a struggling cottonwood gallery. Of particular interest, I will discuss how structures in the floodplain likely responsible for the degradation in the first place became useful in the wetland design. The presentation outlines the project objectives, the planning process used, how decisions were made regarding the restoration, the wetland design process, and project outcomes including the priority wildlife species that this “restoration through creation” has benefitted.