

2025

ANNUAL REPORT



DOLORES-RIVER
RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP



DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Since 2009, the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) has brought together partners across two states, five counties, numerous private properties, and nearly 200 miles of the Dolores River and its tributaries. Working collaboratively, the partnership addresses invasive riparian species and restores the river corridor to support healthier, more resilient ecosystems.

Built on trust, strong relationships, and shared ecological, social, and economic goals, the DRRP combines on-the-ground restoration with monitoring, research, education, and adaptive management. By sharing resources, learning together, and tackling challenges collaboratively, the partnership is helping build a healthier Dolores River for future generations.

LETTER FROM MELISSA AND TARRYN DRRP CO-COORDINATORS



Melissa Neubaum
Restoration Coordinator
RiversEdge West



Tarryn Dixon
Watershed Program Manager
Conservation Legacy



Dear Partners,

A river connects communities, ecosystems, economies, wildlife, and histories – and the Dolores River Restoration Partnership reflects those same connections. This work exists because no single organization, landowner, or agency can restore a river system alone. The progress in this report is the result of shared commitment: hundreds of conversations, days in the field, and the collective willingness to work toward a common vision for the Dolores River corridor.

Over the past year, partners across the watershed restored habitat, managed invasive species, improved revegetation success, and strengthened the collaborative foundation that makes this work possible. That foundation is built from many perspectives uniting around shared goals and remaining engaged through drought, wildfire, funding shifts, and evolving priorities – because restoration takes years to show results, and this kind of persistence is what sustains it.

That commitment showed up throughout the year: volunteers protecting cottonwoods and seeding native plants; conservation corps crews experiencing the rugged beauty of the canyon while contributing to restoration; partners gathering in the field to celebrate progress; and landowners sharing stories and deepening relationships with the river and one another.

In the face of shifting funding landscapes and extreme drought, we have also taken time to reflect on where the partnership has been and where it must go. This work is inseparable from future resilience – healthier riparian systems, stronger wildlife habitat, and more resilient communities along the corridor.

We are deeply grateful to every partner, funder, landowner, volunteer, and practitioner contributing today, as well as those who laid the groundwork years before. Many of this year's accomplishments began as conversations long ago, and they reflect decades of shared trust and stewardship.

With Gratitude,
Melissa and Tarryn

ECOLOGICAL SUCCESSES

The DRRP continues to prioritize invasive tamarisk regrowth control, herbaceous weed management, and long-term site monitoring, while pursuing remaining primary infestations as funding and opportunity allow. Alongside these efforts, natural recruitment of native species is evident, and active revegetation continues to reinforce and accelerate that recovery. In the face of persistent drought, reduced flows, and other ongoing challenges, the partnership is committed to fostering a diverse and resilient riparian ecosystem.



PROGRESS TOWARDS ECOLOGICAL GOALS IN 2025

- 85** → Acres of tamarisk removed
- 12** → Acres of revegetation
- 107** → Acres of herbaceous weeds treated
- 150+** → Cottonwoods protected
- 1378** → Acres of vegetation monitored



Photo credit: RiversEdge West

Photo credit: RiversEdge West



Before



After

Before and after tamarisk removal next to the Dolores near the confluence with the San Miguel. Photo credit: Western Colorado Conservation Corp



Tamarisk removal—cut stump. Photo credit: Southwest Conservation Corps

SOCIAL SUCCESSES

The DRRP is committed to building the next generation of land stewards by offering conservation corps crews meaningful, hands-on restoration experience. Invasive species removal extends well beyond ecology — it enhances the recreational experience for visitors, improves public safety by reducing fire fuels and opening sightlines, and restores the natural beauty that makes the Dolores River special. Through volunteer engagement and outreach with community members across the basin, we work to deepen public understanding of why healthy riparian systems matter not just for wildlife, but for the people and communities who depend on this river.



PROGRESS TOWARDS SOCIAL GOALS IN 2025

- 16** → Conservation Corps crew members and leaders engaged
- 26** → Weeks worked by Conservation Corps (treating invasives, veg monitoring)
- 11** → Volunteers engaged
- 191** → Hours contributed by volunteers
- 35** → Members of local community participating in meetings and events



Corps members in the field performing tamarisk removal. Photo credit: RiversEdge West, Southwest Conservation Corps, Western Colorado Conservation Corp

NATIVE FISH MONITORING AND RECOMMENDATION TEAM

In 2025, Ryan Unterreiner and colleagues from Colorado Parks and Wildlife implemented an experimental pulsed flow regime below McPhee Dam to better mimic natural flow variability in the Dolores River. During a year of continued water shortages and limited water available for fish pool releases, managers used strategically timed pulses ranging from 15 to 75 cfs to improve river conditions.

Preliminary results suggest these pulse flows provided multiple ecological benefits, including improved connectivity for fish movement, increased transport of food resources such as macroinvertebrates, and the creation of more diverse aquatic habitats. Higher-flow pulses also helped scour fine sediments from the riverbed and temporarily expand wetted habitat, supporting aquatic function in an otherwise low-flow system.



Monitoring showed that pulse events also contributed to cooler summer water temperatures, with peak releases producing measurable temperature reductions and helping keep temperatures below critical thresholds compared to more static flow conditions. Releases below McPhee Dam have become increasingly rare, occurring in only 11 of the past 27 years. These findings suggest that strategically managed pulse flows may be an effective way to maximize ecological benefits during persistent water-shortage years.

Managing flows out of McPhee Dam into the Dolores River is a collaborative effort between CPW, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Dolores Water Conservancy District. The pulsed flow concept was supported by the Dolores River Biology Committee (CPW, USFS, BLM, USFWS, TU) and the Dolores River Boating Advocates.

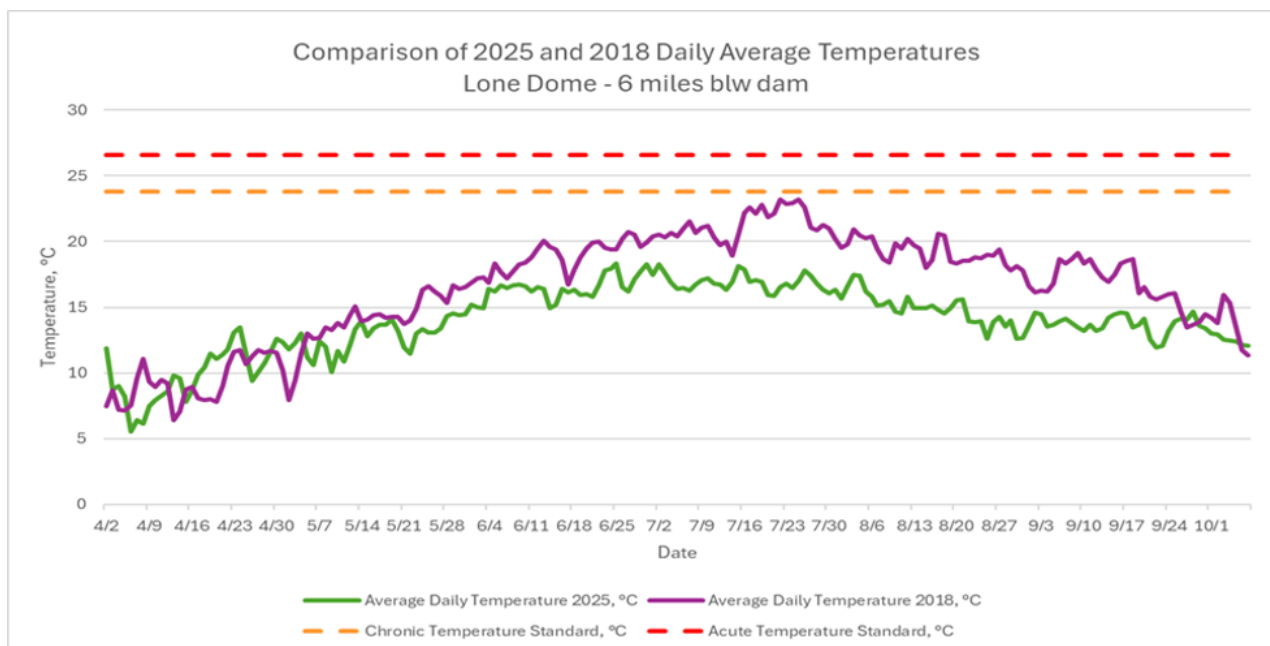
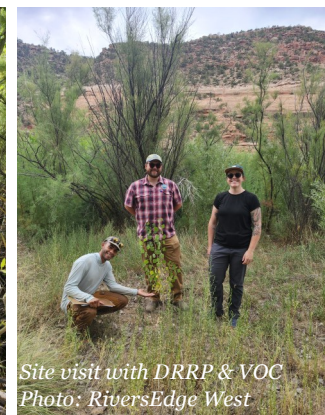


Figure: A comparison of two similar water years, 2018 (no pulsed flow) and 2025 (pulsed flow), and their effects on water temperature in the trout-managed tailwater reach of the Dolores River. Figure by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

VOLUNTEER EVENT CAGING COTTONWOOD

In October 2025, the DRRP hosted a volunteer event with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado. Eleven volunteers joined DRRP Coordinators and an SCC Strike Team to install protective cages around more than 155 young cottonwoods, helping protect them from herbivory and disturbance, and to seed 0.5 acres as part of native revegetation efforts. Volunteers traveled from across Colorado, contributing 191 volunteer hours, with support from a Colorado Water Conservation Board grant that made the event possible.

Throughout the weekend, participants learned about the importance of invasive species removal as well as the critical roles cottonwoods and beavers play in riparian ecosystems. The group camped at The Ball Park near historic Uravan, had the opportunity to explore the area, visit the Hanging Flume, and hear from members of the Rimrocker Historical Society about the rich history of Uravan.



DOLORES RIVER ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT TEAM

As part of the DRAMS team, Dr. Cynthia Dott and colleagues from Fort Lewis College and Colorado Mesa University conducted vegetation monitoring along the Dolores River from 2020–2025 to better understand how different flow regimes influence riparian habitat in a system that must balance ecological and human water needs. Using transects and quadrats across six study sites and four key geomorphic zones, researchers tracked changes in vegetation, sediment dynamics, and fish habitat over time.



Results indicate that persistent low flows promote vegetation encroachment along channel margins, including increased willow establishment on open bars, channel narrowing, and habitat simplification that can reduce spawning and rearing habitat for native fish. In contrast, even occasional prolonged high-flow events provide immediate benefits by scouring bars and cobbles, reducing silt accumulation, and expanding open-channel habitat that supports more complex river conditions.

High flows also support floodplain processes by raising water tables, increasing cottonwood recruitment, and periodically resetting vegetation on upper floodplains, limiting the expansion of upland shrubs. Together, these findings underscore the importance of flow variability in maintaining a dynamic river system and sustaining diverse, functional riparian and aquatic habitats.

COMMUNITY MEET & GREET WITH THE DRRP

In May 2025, the DRRP hosted a community lunch and meet-and-greet for Dolores River landowners at the Paradox Community Center. The event provided an opportunity for nearly 30 attendees to connect with newer RiversEdge West and Southwest Conservation Corps staff, learn about ongoing restoration efforts, and discuss revegetation strategies, treatment techniques, and landowner interests and concerns.

The gathering also served as an important opportunity to clarify the DRRP's role in the region and reaffirm its commitment to collaborative, consensus-based riparian restoration. Attendees provided positive feedback and appreciated the chance to learn more about the partnership's goals, funding sources, and restoration approach



THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS PROVIDED FUNDING, IN-KIND SUPPORT OR SERVICES IN 2025:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <i>AmeriCorps</i> | <i>Dolores River Boating Advocates</i> | <i>San Miguel County Vegetation Control & Management CO</i> |
| <i>Bird Conservancy of the Rockies</i> | <i>Forever Our Rivers Foundation</i> | <i>San Miguel County, CO</i> |
| <i>Bureau of Land Management</i> | <i>Fort Lewis College</i> | <i>Southwestern Water Conservation District</i> |
| <i>Bureau of Reclamation</i> | <i>Grand County Weed Department UT</i> | <i>Telluride Foundation</i> |
| <i>Colorado Mesa University</i> | <i>Mesa County, CO</i> | <i>The Nature Conservancy</i> |
| <i>Colorado Parks & Wildlife</i> | <i>Mesa County Noxious Weed and Pest CO</i> | <i>US Department of Energy—Legacy Management</i> |
| <i>Colorado State University Extension</i> | <i>Mesa County Partners</i> | <i>Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado</i> |
| <i>Colorado Youth Corps Association</i> | <i>Montrose County, CO</i> | <i>Western Colorado Ag-Service LLC</i> |
| <i>Colorado Water Conservation Board</i> | <i>National Fish and Wildlife Foundation</i> | <i>Western Colorado Conservation Corps</i> |
| <i>Conservation Legacy—Southwest Conservation Corps</i> | <i>Rimrocker Historical Society</i> | |
| <i>Dolores County, CO</i> | <i>RiversEdge West</i> | |

2026: SO FAR

- **January Partnership Meeting:** Attended by more than 30 partners representing 15 organizations and several landowners. We shared program updates and discussed priorities for the next three years, herbaceous weed management strategies, and updates to the partnership MOU.
- **Spring Volunteer Event with DRRP and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado:**
 - 31 volunteers contributed 599 hours planted native plants, cut and treated tamarisk, and tested innovative restoration techniques to improve plant survival
 - Thank you to the Rimrocker Historical Society, Colorado Water Conservation Board and Southwestern Water Conservation District.
- **Western Colorado Conservation Corps Strike Team — Spring Field Work:**
 - Four hitches, treating nearly four acres of invasive tamarisk
 - Planted native trees and shrubs using multiple revegetation techniques
 - Repaired protective cages on cottonwoods
- **Funding:**
 - Pursued new funding opportunities to support long-term restoration efforts.



2026: STILL TO COME

- **Vegetation monitoring** with the SCC Monitoring Crew
- 14+ weeks of **invasive species removal and treatment** by Conservation Corps
- Treatment of **secondary weeds**
- **Planning** removal efforts for remaining large stands of primary tamarisk
- **DRRP meetings** with stakeholders to explore the future of the partnership, align goals and determine funding needs as initial tamarisk removal efforts decrease
- **Revegetation** trials
- Pilot project to remove willow and tamarisk to **improve fish habitat**
- **Outreach** with local communities
- Renewing of the **DRRP MOU**





TO LEARN MORE, CALL 970-256-7400

OR VISIT

riversedgewest.org/partnerships/dolores-river-restoration-partnership