Building the Dream of Collaborative River Management

5 years into the Grand Valley River Corridor Initiative

GVRCI
GRAND VALLEY
RIVER CORRIDOR INITIATIVE

Hannah Holm
American Rivers

Erin McDermott
RiversEdge West

Origins


ACE
USED AUTO PARTS

RiversEdge West

RESTORE + CONNECT + INNOVATE

one river front

Discover • Inspire • Belong

GVRCI Vision

The communities of the Grand Valley are committed to a data-driven approach to steward a resilient, vibrant, and healthy river corridor that supports agriculture, habitat and wildlife, recreation, economic growth, and sustainable development benefiting today's and future generations.

GVRCI

Objectives

- **Engage** river corridor stakeholder groups to identify common values and challenges
- Provide a **platform and resource** for river corridor stakeholders, fostering coordinated collaboration on future river-centric endeavors, leading to informed decision making
- **Develop strategies** to address shared goals, objectives, and challenges
- **Foster community**, education, and connection with the river

GVRCI History and Progress

Phase 1 (2020)

- Core Team formed
- Seed funding secured
- Initial stakeholder engagement
- Visioning and priorities

Phase 2 (2021-2022)

- Advisory Council formalized
- Data review and gap analysis
- Stakeholder workshops
- Governance structure
- Fluvial hazard zone mapping

Phase 3 (2023-2025)

- Operating principles
- Riparian and floodplain health assessment
- Flow preferences workshops
- Jurisdictional planning framework

Phase 4 (2025-2027)

- River Corridor master planning
- Floodplain and riparian restoration project development
- Collaboration and outreach

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GRAND VALLEY RCI Structure

Core Team

- Rivers Edge West
- American Rivers
- One Riverfront
- Wash Water Science and Engineering

RiversEdge West
RESTORE + CONNECT + INNOVATE

AMERICAN RIVERS

wash
WATER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY

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STRATEGIC BY NATURE

GVRCI Structure

Advisory Committee

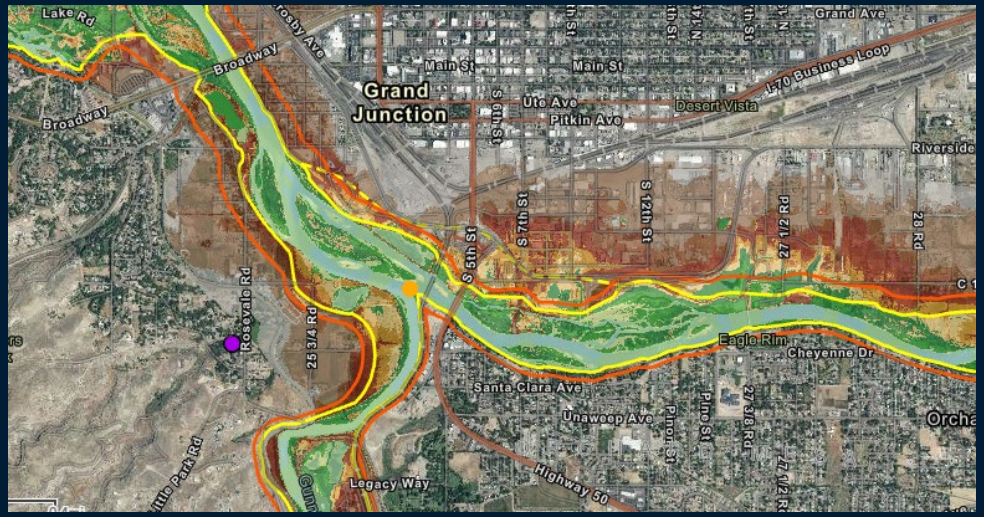
- Mesa County
- Town of Palisade
- City of Grand Junction
- City of Fruita
- Mesa Conservation District
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- US Fish and Wildlife
- Bureau of Land Management
- NRCS
- Colorado Canyons Assoc.
- Colorado West Land Trust
- Clifton Water
- Audubon Rockies
- Ducks Unlimited

GVRCI Funding

- One Riverfront
- Mighty Arrow
- Colorado Water Conservation Board
- Colorado River District
- Colorado Healthy Rivers Fund
- Western Colorado Community Foundation
- River Network
- Xcel
- City of Grand Junction, City of Fruita, Town of Palisade
- *In Kind Support!*

Accomplishments & Learning

Fluvial Hazard Zone Mapping



- Supplemental, Non-Regulatory Floodplain Hazard Mapping and Planning Tool
- Available via Mesa County Floodplain Management

GVRCI

GRAND VALLEY RIPARIAN AND FLOODPLAIN ACTION PLAN

PROTECTING AND RESTORING THE GRAND VALLEY'S VANISHING RIPARIAN CORRIDORS

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JOHNSON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING

ALBA watershed consulting

Photo Credit: Joel Sholtes

LAND USE CHANGE IN THE RIVER CORRIDOR

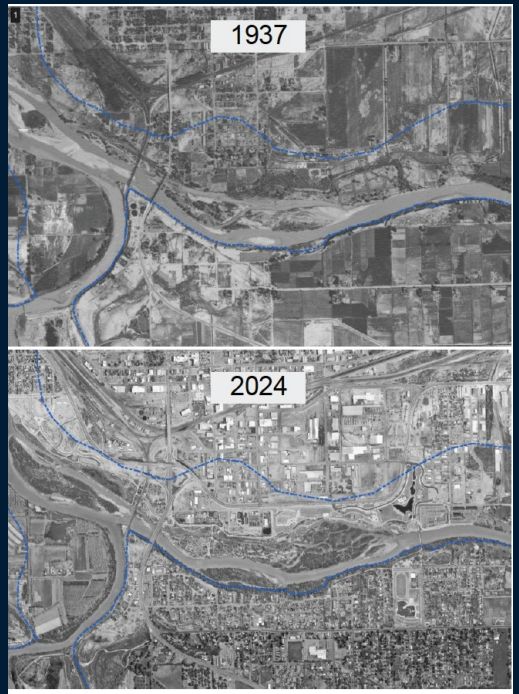


Figure 2: Land use changes within the historical riparian corridor (blue lines) evident between 1937 and 2024 in the vicinity of the confluence of the Colorado River and Gunnison River.

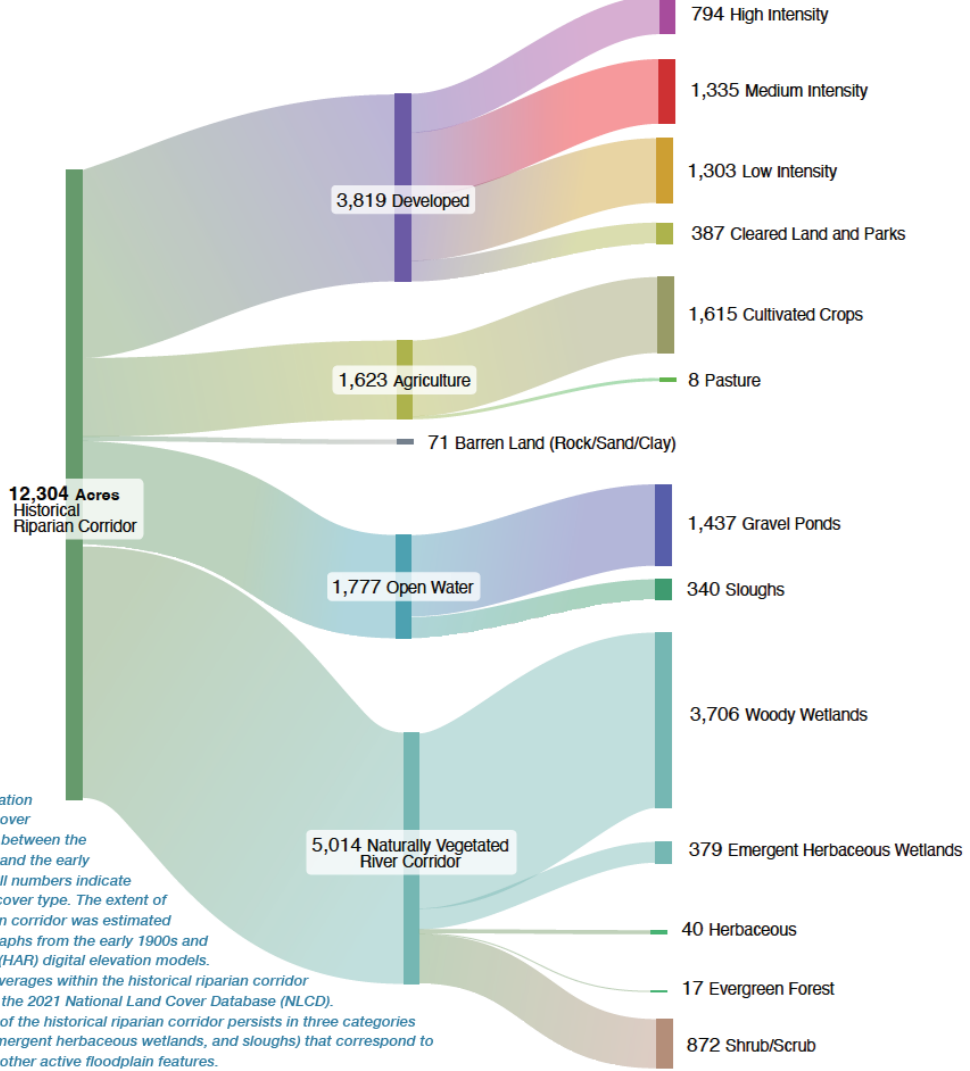


Figure 1: *Representation of changes in land cover types by acreage of between the mid-1880s (left bar) and the early 2020s (right bars). All numbers indicate acres within a land cover type. The extent of the historical riparian corridor was estimated using aerial photographs from the early 1900s and Height Above River (HAR) digital elevation models. Present day land coverages within the historical riparian corridor were mapped using the 2021 National Land Cover Database (NLCD). Approximately 35% of the historical riparian corridor persists in three categories (woody wetlands, emergent herbaceous wetlands, and sloughs) that correspond to riparian forests and other active floodplain features.*

RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

- Flood & Fire hazard mitigation
- Open space
- Resilient infrastructure
- Critical habitat

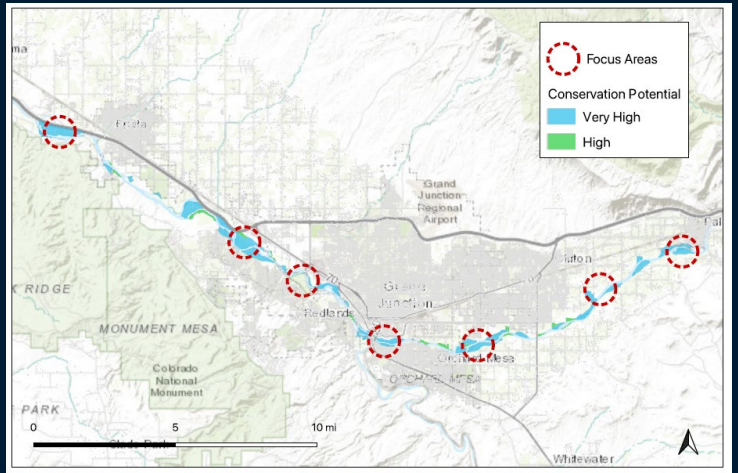
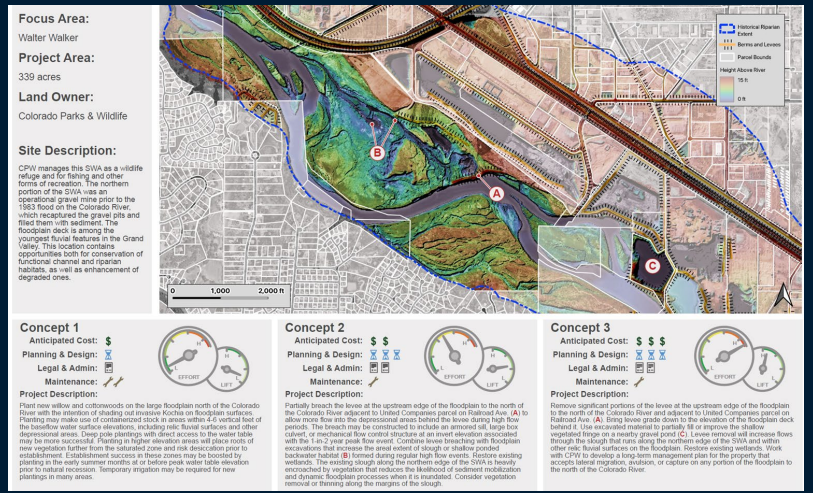
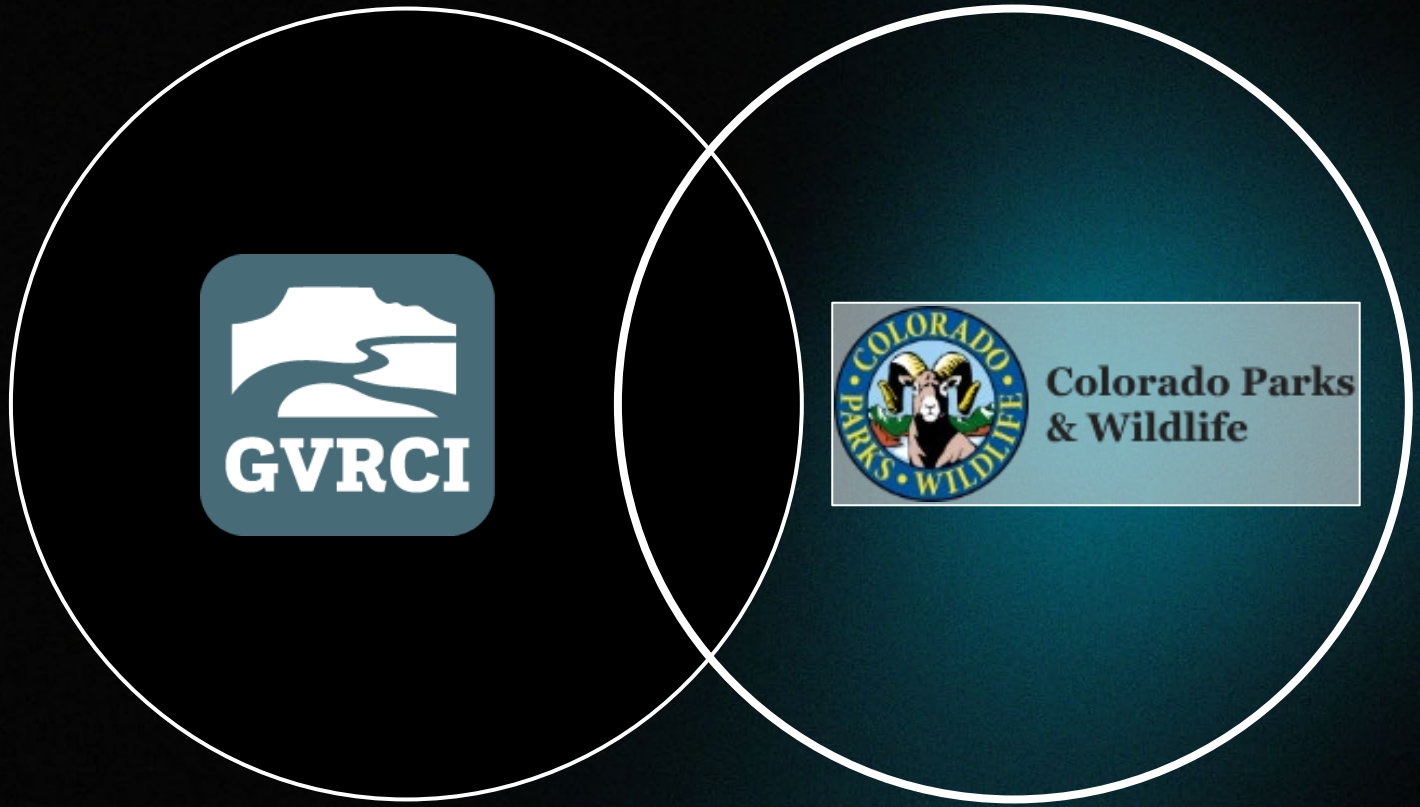


Figure 13: Recommended restoration and conservation strategy for the Grand Valley. Focus areas include public lands where barriers to large scale restoration activities were assessed to be somewhat lower than other positions on the landscape. Riparian patches intermediate the focus areas and mapped as either "Very High" (blue) and "High" (green) conservation potential represent the highest priorities for conservation action.



Aligning goals with partners



Focus Area:

Orchard Mesa

Project Area:

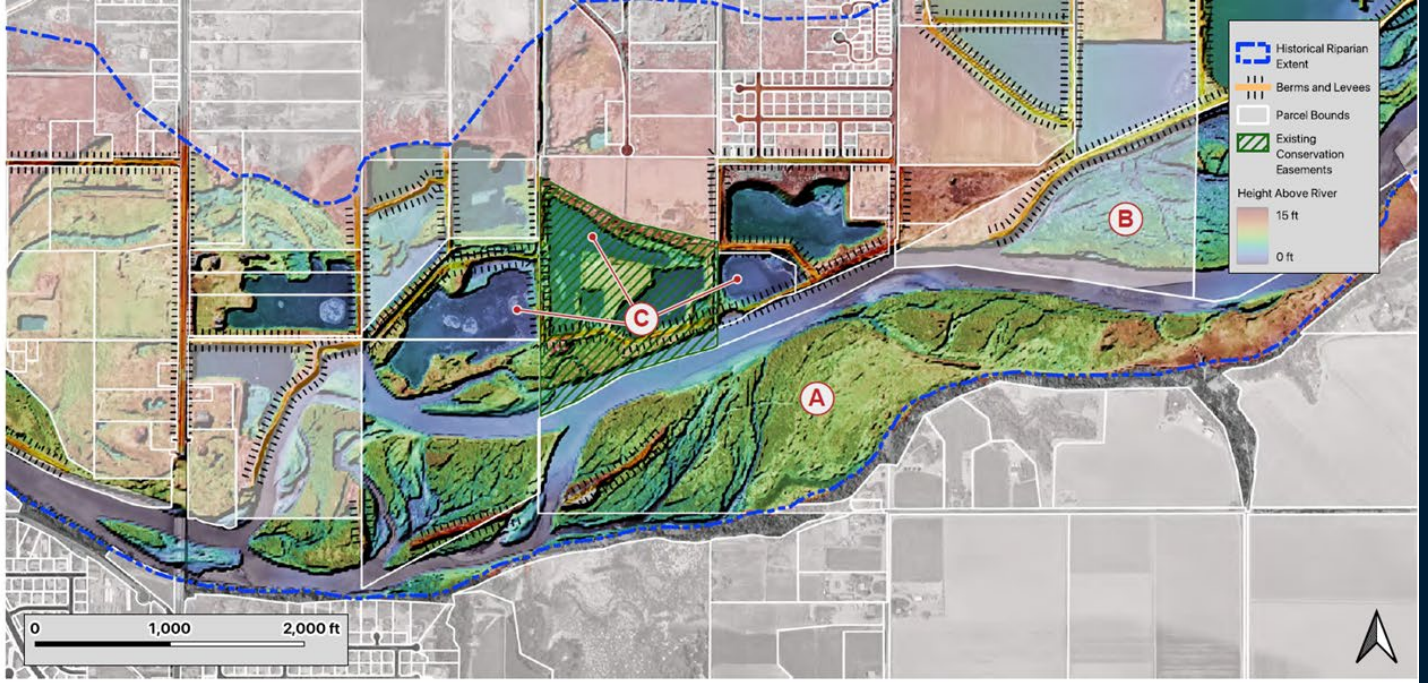
387 acres

Land Owners:

Colorado Parks & Wildlife;
Bureau of Reclamation

Site Description:

This focus area comprises several parcels owned by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Bureau of Reclamation. One private parcel on the north side of the river includes a significant floodplain area. The floodplain pocket on the south side of the river is undeveloped and managed primarily for wildlife and waterfowl hunting. Vehicle traffic is prohibited. The parcels to the north of the river consist of abandoned gravel ponds that boast extremely high restoration potential. However, significant challenges must be overcome before work can proceed in this area.



Concept 1

Anticipated Cost: $
Planning & Design:
Legal & Admin:
Maintenance:

Project Description:

Remove non-native woody vegetation and replace with native plants, including cottonwood and willow, on the large floodplain to the south of the Colorado River (A). Planting may make use of containerized stock in areas within 4-6 vertical feet of the baseflow water surface elevations, including low lying areas. Deep pole plantings with direct access to the water table may be more successful. Planting in higher elevation areas will place roots of new vegetation further from the saturated zone and risk desiccation prior to establishment. Establishment success in these zones may be boosted by planting in the early summer months at or before peak water table elevation prior to natural recession. Temporary irrigation may be required for new plantings in many areas.

Concept 2

Anticipated Cost: $ $
Planning & Design:
Legal & Admin:
Maintenance:

Project Description:

Secure a conservation easement on the adjoining Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Bureau of Reclamation properties that comprise this focus area. Secure a separate conservation easement on the private floodplain parcel on the north side of the river (B). Supplement the conservation easements with a management plan that describes invasive woody species control, accommodates river movement across the floodplain, and restricts future development activity. Undesirable land uses for this focus area include hard-surface trails, boat ramps, park facilities and other types of more intensive development activities. A limited number of soft-surface trails may be acceptable, where construction and management of those trails does not depend on permanent structures, bank armoring, or other activities that would otherwise inhibit movement of the river channel across its floodplain.

Concept 3

Anticipated Cost: $ $ $
Planning & Design:
Legal & Admin:
Maintenance:

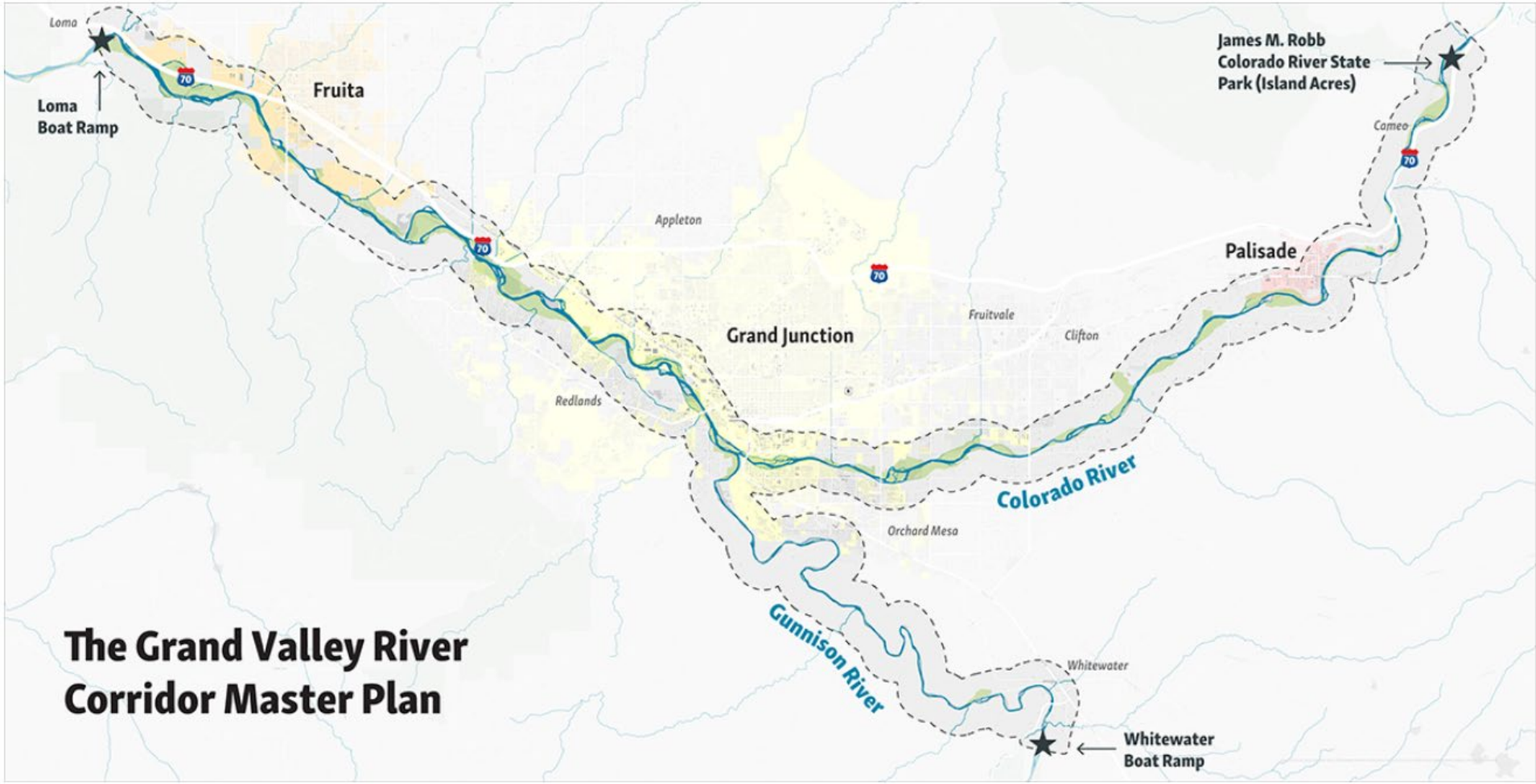
Project Description:

Work closely with CPW and the Recovery Program to fill and reconnect gravel ponds to the north of the Colorado River (C). Several ponds appear shallow and may be filled with material excavated from adjacent berms or spoils piles. Use excavated material to reshape floodplain topography and create complex backwater habitat preferred by native fish species for spawning and rearing. Reconnecting these areas to the active channel will help mitigate against a unplanned, and potentially catastrophic, capture of these areas by the river in a future flood event. Ensure that reclamation and reconnection of abandoned gravel ponds to the river does not inadvertently enhance habitat access for invasive fish species. Plant regraded floodplain surfaces with native woody and herbaceous vegetation. Restore degraded wetlands.

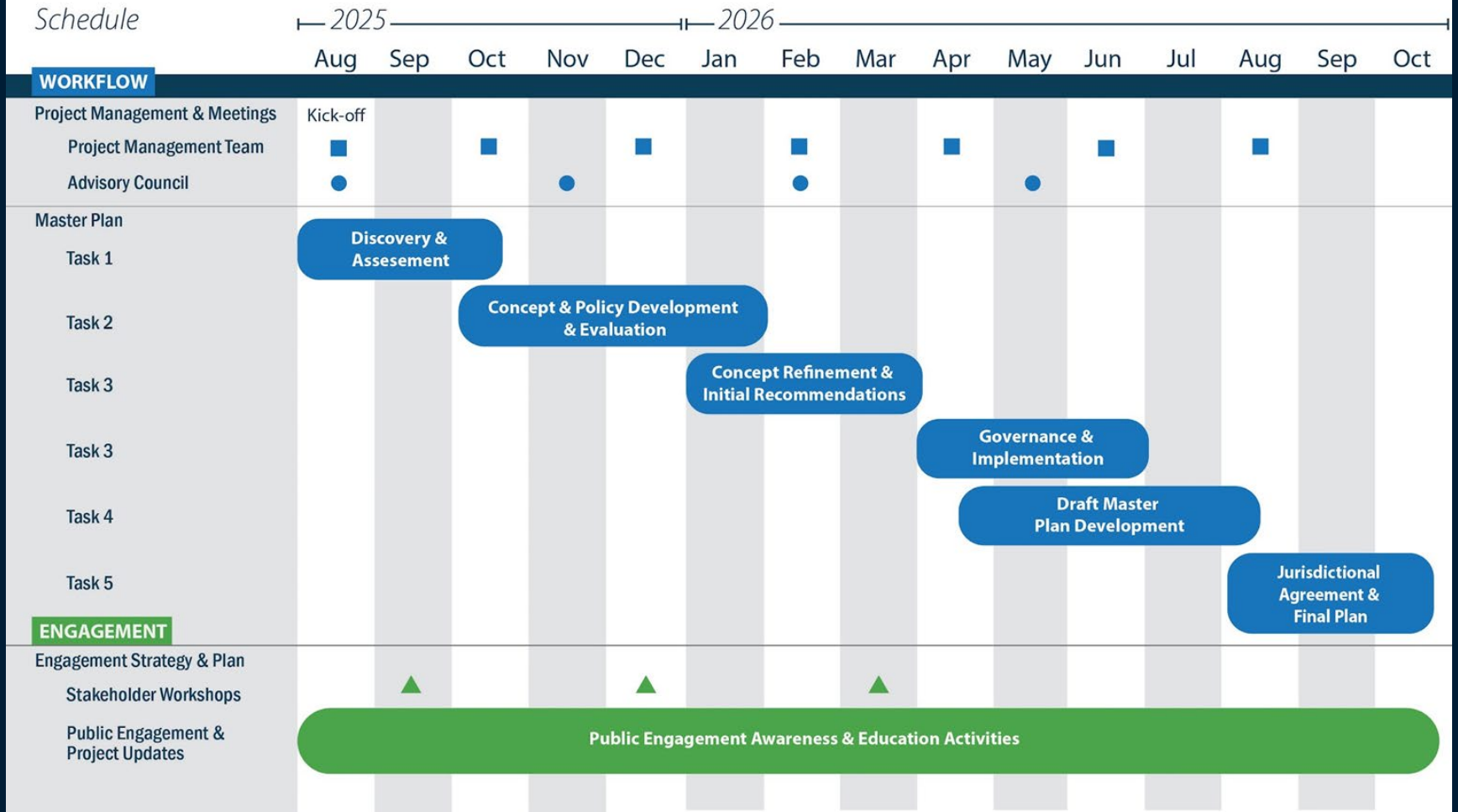
Master Planning Process

Vision Elements to Guide Future Planning

- Ecology and Wildlife Resilience / A Dynamic River
- Agriculture
- A Recreational Asset
- A Connected Corridor
- Community and Economic Vitality
- Balanced Land Use
- Collaborative Governance


Loma
Loma
Boat Ramp
Fruita
Appleton
Grand Junction
Redlands
Fruitvale
Clifton
Palisade
Cameo
James M. Robb
Colorado River State
Park (Island Acres)
Colorado River
Orchard Mesa
Gunnison River
Whitewater
Whitewater
Boat Ramp
The Grand Valley River
Corridor Master Plan

Grand River Valley Master Plan



How does this all get done?

- Consistency
- Leadership and Roles
- Respecting Differences
- Relationship Management
- Facilitation
- Patience

Looking Ahead

- Master plan implementation
- Project development
- Continued conversations with stakeholders


Thank you!