

RIVERSEDGE WEST'S 22ND BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

2026 RIPARIAN RESTORATION CONFERENCE

Where Water, Wildlife, and People Meet



MARCH 3-5, 2026

COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY • GRAND JUNCTION, CO



RiversEdge West
RESTORE + CONNECT + INNOVATE

2026 RIPARIAN RESTORATION CONFERENCE

Where Water, Wildlife, and People Meet

DAY 1
MARCH 3, 2026

2026 Riparian Restoration Conference

Where Water, Wildlife, and People Meet

TUESDAY, MARCH 3 — DAY 1



9:00–10:00am MST

Check-in and Networking with Refreshments (Room: Atrium)

WELCOME

10:00–10:30am MST
Room: North Ballroom

10:00–10:15am

Welcome

John Marshall, President, Colorado Mesa University

10:15–10:30am

Conference Kick-off

Rusty Lloyd, Executive Director, RiversEdge West

SESSION

Moderated by Rusty Lloyd, RiversEdge West
10:30am–12:00pm MST
Room: North Ballroom

10:30–11:00am

Revisiting Tamarisk Biocontrol in the Western United States: Ecological and Societal Implications

Pamela L. Nagler, Southwest Biological Science Center, U.S. Geological Survey

11:00–11:30am

Colorado River Health Assessment Framework (CoRHAF): Bridging the Data Gap for Scalable Riverscape Monitoring

Steven Reeves, Colorado Water Conservation Board

11:30am–12:00pm

Building the Dream of Collaborative River Corridor Management: Five Years of the Grand Valley River Corridor Initiative

Erin McDermott, RiversEdge West

LUNCH

12:00–1:10pm MST
Room: Food Service in Atrium, Seating in South Ballroom

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

1:10–2:50pm MST

Diverse Stakeholder Engagement

Moderated by Shannon Wadas, CMU Water Center
Room: North Ballroom

New Perspectives in Restoration

Moderated by John Leary, RiversEdge West
Room: South Ballroom

1:10–1:35pm

The High Line Canal Natural Resources Management Plan: A Regional Collaboration

Susan Sherrod, Biohabitats

1:10–1:35pm

Adapting Together: Lessons from the Colorado River Restoration Partnership (DRRP)

Melissa Neubaum, RiversEdge West

1:35–2:00pm

Communicating with the Community: Complex Collaborative Conservation at the Creek

Julia Lankisch, Center for Collaborative Conservation

1:35–2:00pm

Floodplain Focused: Insight into Achieving Great River Restoration, Without the River

Sydney Salzwedel, Biohabitats

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

(continued)

1:10–2:50pm MST

Diverse Stakeholder Engagement

Moderated by Shannon Wadas, CMU Water Center
Room: North Ballroom

New Perspectives in Restoration

Moderated by John Leary, RiversEdge West
Room: South Ballroom

2:00–2:25pm

River Revitalization and Enhancement through Collaboration

Kelly Wolff, Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management

2:00–2:25pm

Collaborative Construction Oversight Between Engineers and Ecologists Improves Erosion Control and Project Success in Riparian Restoration Projects

Haley Stratton, ERO Resources and Adam Dungan, Muller Engineering Company

2:25–2:50pm

Engaging Community through the Yampa River Scorecard Project

Kim Lennberg, Alba Watershed Consulting

2:25–2:50pm

An Overview of Utah's State Sovereign Lands Restoration Program

Keith Hambrecht, Utah Division Of Forestry, Fire and State Lands

BREAK

2:50–3:10pm MST

Snacks available in Atrium

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

3:10–4:00pm MST

Sourcing Native Plants

Moderated by Christa Brown, RiversEdge West
Room: North Ballroom

Beavers: Pests or Partners?

Moderated by John Leary, RiversEdge West
Room: South Ballroom

3:10–3:35pm

What Does it Take to Grow Native Plants?

Rebecca Wright, North Fork Native Plants

3:10–3:35pm

Results of a Beaver Inventory on the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District of White River National Forest, Colorado

R. Clay Ramey, U.S. Forest Service

3:35–4:00

Colorado Seed Tool

Danielle Bilyeu Johnston, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

3:35–4:00pm

A Beaver Management Planning & Human-Beaver Conflict Resolution

Adria Survoy, National Wildlife Federation

SESSION

Integrating Freshwater Protection and Restoration into Wildfire Risk Reduction, Fire fighting Strategies, and Post-Fire Recovery Programs

Moderated by Alex Funk, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
4:20-5:00pm MST
Room: North Ballroom

With billions of dollars flowing in from federal programs to support watershed restoration projects, an ecosystem of nonprofit organizations, local governments, and foundations throughout the state are coming together to figure out how they can best support each other to leverage these historic funds. At the center of these conversations is the recognition that holistic approaches to watershed health and sustainability require investments that build local and community capacity to navigate and pursue federal funds, and to build/sustain efforts over time. During this moderated discussion, panelists will present case studies and explore the opportunities and challenges in building local and community capacity to support multi-benefit watershed projects. Case studies and discussions will help participants discover opportunities for applying these concepts in their watersheds and provide an understanding of the suite of tools, resources, and funding available for support of the work. Warming temperatures, persistent drought, and aridification are key drivers increasing the risk and severity of wildfires. New science is revealing the important role wetlands, healthy riparian systems, and beaver-complexes play before, during, and after fires. When in healthy condition, the saturated soils, braided stream channels, and vegetation associated with these freshwater systems do not readily burn. Thus, they can slow fire movement, provide refuge for wildlife and wildland firefighting crews, and serve as natural firebreaks. After a fire, freshwater systems filter out sediment, ash, and other pollutants that are left in a fire's wake, decreasing the amount of sediment that ends up in reservoirs and water treatment facilities. Fire refugia can also aid in wildfire recovery by sustaining vegetation and facilitating seed germination, which can support reforestation efforts post-fire.

This panel will explore the most current science as it relates to the nexus between wildfire risk mitigation and riparian system restoration and conservation efforts, with a focus on beaver-modified riverscapes and wetland complexes. The panel will also touch on efforts underway within the United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management regarding developing more formal guidance and training processes to support integrated stream restoration and wildfire risk reduction processes, and near-term opportunities for practitioners to work with these federal agencies to advance collaborative projects designed to reduce wildfire risk while enhancing the health of aquatic ecosystems. A spotlight of this discussion will include an overview of an active effort funded by the Foundation for America's Public Lands to model wildfire behavior responses to aquatic restoration and managed wetland projects that can inform federal agencies' approaches to better aligning wildfire risk mitigation efforts where aquatic co-benefits may be better realized. The panel will also include interactive elements, seeking to learn more from the audience about potential projects where wildfire risk mitigation efforts could be incorporated into planned riparian treatments to unlock new financial resources previously unavailable for more traditional wildfire risk mitigation efforts.

Speakers and Panelists:

Emily Fairfax, PhD, University of Minnesota,
Alex Funk, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Alicia Marrs, National Wildlife Federation
Tomer Hassan, Foundation for America's Public Lands
Adde Sharp, National Forest Foundation

POSTER SESSION & HAPPY HOUR

5:00–7:00pm MST

Room: Lounge and South Ballroom

Join us for appetizers and drinks at the poster session and happy hour! Discuss with poster presenters and exhibitors, catchup with familiar faces, and network with others in your field. Each attendee receives 1 complimentary beer, wine, or non-alcoholic beverage. Cash bar available. Posters will be displayed throughout the first 2 days of the conference.

Effects on Aquatic Macroinvertebrate Community from Mitigating Impacts of Legacy Mining near Telluride, CO

Antonia (Nia) Taubr, Colorado Mesa University

Stone by Stone: Process Based Restoration for Upland Watershed Improvement

Eve Fischer, Friends of the Verde River

Distribution of Gulf Coast *Phragmites australis* Subspecies Along the Lower Verde River

James Holderer, Natural History Institute

Tamarisk Beetle Map: Looking Back and Looking Forward

John Leary, RiversEdge West and Amanda Stahlke, Colorado Mesa University

Lower Gila River Initiative: Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management

Kelly Wolff and Jacob Eberspacher, Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management

River Revitalization and Enhancement through Collaboration

Kelly Wolff, Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management

2026 RIPARIAN RESTORATION CONFERENCE

Where Water, Wildlife, and People Meet

DAY 2
MARCH 4, 2026

8:00–8:30am MST

Check-in and Breakfast (Room: Atrium)

SESSION

The State of the Colorado River

Moderated by Rusty Lloyd, RiversEdge West

8:30am–9:50am MST

Room: North Ballroom

8:30–8:35am

Welcome to Day 2

Rusty Lloyd, RiversEdge West

8:35–9:15am

What's Actually Happening on the Colorado River Right Now?

Luke Runyon, Center for Environmental Journalism, University of Colorado—Boulder

9:15–9:55am

Water Law

Mark Hermundstad

9:55–10:25am

Shoshone Water Rights Preservation

Rebecca Briesmoore, Colorado River District

BREAK

10:25–10:45am MST

Snacks available in Atrium

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

10:45am–12:50pm MST

Plant Response to Changing Conditions

Moderated by Sara Jurca, RiversEdge West

Room: North Ballroom

Restoration Project Planning and Overviews

Moderated by Erin McDermott, RiversEdge West

Room: South Ballroom

10:45–11:10am

Let's Talk about *Phragmites australis*: Native and Nonnative Reed in the Grand Canyon

Emily Palmquist, Southwest Biological Science Center, U.S. Geological Survey

10:45–11:10am

Investing in Colorado's Watersheds: Update on CWCB Water Plan Grant Program

Ashley Garrison, Colorado Water Conservation Board

11:10–11:35am

The Role & Management of Invasive Species in Ecological Succession Following Reservoir Decline in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area

Katie Woodward, Western Colorado University

11:10–11:35am

Lower Gila River Initiative: Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management

Kelly Wolff, Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management

11:35am–12:00pm

Investigating Native and Invasive Riparian Species Under Varying Environmental Stressors in the Arid Southwestern United States

Amber Renee Archie, Northern Arizona University

11:35am–12:00pm

The Riparian Hero of Downtown Tucson, AZ—Tucson Waters Santa Cruz River Heritage Project: 6-Years of Habitat Restoration

Joseph Cain, The City of Tucson

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

10:10am–12:50pm MST

Plant Response to Changing Conditions

Moderated by Sara Jurca, RiversEdge West
Room: North Ballroom

Restoration Project Planning and Overviews

Moderated by Erin McDermott, RiversEdge West
Room: South Ballroom

12:00–12:25pm

Climate-Driven Shifts in Vapor Pressure Deficit Tolerance May Favor Invasive *E. angustifolia* Over Native *P. fremontii*
Rebecca Senft, University of Utah

12:00–12:25pm

Shallow Water Wetlands for Migrating Waterfowl in Western CO
Christa Brown, RiversEdge West

12:25–12:50pm

Russian Olive Invasion Accelerates Mean-der Migration and Channel Confinement in the White River, Utah
Danny White, Colorado State University

12:25–12:50pm

TBD

LUNCH

12:50–1:50pm MST

Room: Food Service in Atrium, Seating in South Ballroom

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

1:50–3:30pm MST

Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration (LT PBR)

Moderated by Sara Jurca, RiversEdge West
Room: North Ballroom

Vegetation Restoration Project Management

Moderated by Melissa Neubaum, RiversEdge West
Room: South Ballroom

1:50–2:15pm

The Limits to Flow Impacts form Beaver-based Restoration in Headwater Streams
Joel Sholtes, University of Colorado Boulder and Wash Water Science and Engineering LLC

1:50–2:15pm

Data Management Tools for Maintaining Compliance in Integrated Vegetation Management
Dan McLendon, American Conservation Experience

2:15–2:40pm

Aggrade and Recover: Process-Based Restoration After Monsoon Floods on Dugout Ranch, UT
Wally Macfarlane, Utah State University

2:15–2:40pm

The Difficulties of Monitoring Wet Meadow Restoration Projects in Central Utah
Dallin Baker, Utah State University

2:40–3:05pm

Integrating Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration with Invasive Vegetation Management in High Desert and Southwest Riverscapes
Joseph Leonhard, The Nature Conservancy

2:40–3:05pm

Lessons from the Cache La Poudre: Using Drones and GIS to advance River Restoration Monitoring
Ben Sellers, Covering Ground Mapping

3:05–3:30pm

Rock Dam Structures for Wet Meadow Restoration in Central Utah
Clint Wirick, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

3:05–3:30pm

Developing the Montana Woody Invasive Species Management Plan
Sara Ricklefs, Invasive Species Action Network

BREAK

3:30–3:45pm MST
Snacks available in Atrium

SESSION

Community Navigator Program Models

Moderated by Stacy Beaugh, Strategic By Nature, Inc.

3:45–4:55pm MST
Room: North Ballroom

There are numerous programs in the Southwest that are working to accelerate watershed project funding and implementation. These “Community Navigator” programs are helping watershed groups and other local organizations navigate to funding and other supports to build funding, capacity and resources that can help with projects.

The session will share lessons, opportunities, and challenges from these models, and invite participants to explore how community navigators and related tools can accelerate watershed projects, close resource gaps, and strengthen local capacity. The session will help attendees to:

- Learn what a “Community Navigator” is, their scale, and how they can add value to your watershed work.
- Engage with various resources, models and tools employed by Community Navigators and others that can advance watershed projects and planning.
- Share ideas on gaps and other existing tools to support projects in your region.

Speakers and Panelists:

Stacy Beaugh, Strategic By Nature, Inc.
Emile Elias, Strategic By Nature, Inc.
Carrie Padgett, Harris Water/Southwestern Water Conservation District
Esther Duke, Coalitions and Collaboratives
Lisa Clark, Southwest Decision Resources

CLOSING REMARKS

4:55–5:00pm MST
Room: North Ballroom

Rusty Lloyd, RiversEdge West

EVENING SOCIAL AT THE CONFLUENCE CENTER OF COLORADO

5:00–7:30pm MST
2596 Dos Rios Dr., Grand Junction, CO 81501

Join us at RiversEdge West’s homepage, the Confluence Center of Colorado, for an evening of food, drinks, and fun!

Each attendee will be provided with 2 drink tickets for beer, wine, or non-alcoholic beverages.

Local food trucks will be on site for dinner and snacks.

2026 RIPARIAN RESTORATION CONFERENCE

Where Water, Wildlife, and People Meet

DAY 3
MARCH 5, 2026

8:00–8:30am MST **Check-in and Light Breakfast** (Room: Atrium)

FIELD TRIPS & WORKSHOPS

8:30–11:30am MST

Choose between the following options during conference registration (continued on the next page).

Palisade Insectary Tour

Hosted by Dan Bean, Colorado Department of Agriculture

Time: 9:00–11:00am MST

Location: Meet at the Palisade Insectary at 9am—750 37 8/10 Rd, Palisade, CO 81526

Transportation is not provided but carpooling is encouraged.

Meet at the Colorado Department of Agriculture's Palisade Insectary for a walking tour. The Palisade Insectary has long been a promoter of the use of biological control in weed and insect pest management and is home to about 20 different species of biological control agents. Join us for a closer look at these insects and their unique rearing processes, as well as general information on past and future efforts by the Colorado Department of Agriculture's Biological Pest Control Program.

Using AI (Artificial Intelligence) in Fundraising for Conservation

Hosted by Stacy Beaugh, Strategic By Nature, Inc.

Time: 8:30–11:30am MST

Location: Colorado Mesa University, University Center; Room: West Ballroom

Stacy Beaugh, Strategic By Nature, Inc.

Illene Roggensack, Strategic By Nature, Inc.

Fundraising is a key function within our nonprofit organizations, with administrators and staff constantly balancing myriad other needs to prioritize fundraising tasks amidst limited capacity and full workloads.

Strategic By Nature and Virga Labs are collaborating with Walton Family Foundation to assess the ways in which community-based conservation organizations currently identify, access and secure revenues, manage relationships and communicate with funders. The team is interested in the “pinch points” encountered in the revenue generation process – i.e. activities that are cumbersome or otherwise frustrating – and how technology, particularly AI (artificial intelligence) tools, is being or could be used to make the process smoother and more effective.

The project has included gathering information from on-the-ground practitioners and other important stakeholders, researching available tools and contemplating/testing potential applications of AI technology, with findings to be “previewed” during this session at the RiversEdge West conference.

Participants will engage in an interactive workshop where they will share their perspectives and experiences, inform/test potential AI applications, and learn about the possibilities and limitations of new and emerging tools to support and maximize fundraising activities.

FIELD TRIPS & WORKSHOPS

(continued)

8:30–11:30am MST

Choose between options during conference registration.

Exploring the Biological and Ecological Foundation of Invasive Plant Management

Hosted by Bailey Goldberg, Western Colorado Conservation Corps

Time: 8:30–11:30am MST

Presentation

8:30–9:00am

Location: Colorado Mesa University, University Center; Room: East Ballroom

This presentation will focus on the importance of understanding invasive species to better implement management techniques. We will begin with classifications of invasive plants in Western Colorado and basic biological factors as they pertain to treatment success. I will discuss the process by which invasion occurs, and the characteristics that define the viability of an invasive plant in an ecosystem. We will then discuss Integrated Pest Management and its role in promoting native diversity. Finally, we will use these topics to explore species commonly targeted by conservation crews around Mesa County.

Site Visit

9:00–11:30am

Location: TBD

(Transportation is not provided but carpooling is encouraged.)

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