



*Fall along the Dolores River. Photo credit: RiversEdge West*

# 2023-2024 Annual Report







Dear Partners,

As we gear up for another season of restoration work, we're excited to share the latest news and developments with you.

As the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) continues to grow and evolve, we want to give a warm thank-you to Montana Cohn and Nate Peters for their leadership and contributions in recent years. Their dedication helped pave the way for what's next.

We're excited to introduce Melissa Neubaum, who joined RiversEdge West (REW) in June 2024 as a Restoration Coordinator. Among her many roles, Melissa is now helping to coordinate the DRRP. She's excited to dive deeper into riparian restoration and collaborate with diverse stakeholders to restore vital lands, finding new ways to collaborate, build relationships and think creatively.

Tarryn Dixon joined Conservation Legacy's Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) in January 2025 as the Watershed Programs Manager, co-coordinating the DRRP alongside her other responsibilities. With experience in kitchens, farming and ranching, noxious weed management, and GIS, Tarryn is passionate about conserving land and water to support resilient working landscapes and communities.

As we look back on the past few years, we're filled with deep gratitude for the unwavering support and collaboration of our partners. The progress we've made together—despite transitions, shifting funding landscapes, persistent drought, and countless other challenges—stands as a testament to the strength of this community. Each milestone reflects the dedication, persistence, and heart of so many individuals and organizations working together.

In this report, we're proud to highlight some of what we've accomplished—and we look ahead with hope and renewed energy for the year to come.

Warmly,



*Melissa Neubaum*  
Melissa Neubaum  
RiversEdge West



*Tarryn Dixon*  
Tarryn Dixon  
Conservation Legacy



## DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Since its inception in 2009, the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) has been working diligently across two states, four Bureau of Land Management field offices, five counties, numerous private landowners, and nearly 200 miles of the Dolores River and its tributaries. The focus of their efforts has been to address the impacts of invasive riparian plants and restore the river's riparian corridor to a healthier, more natural state. As a public-private collaboration, the DRRP is united by a shared set of ecological, social, and economic goals aimed at restoring the Dolores River's riparian ecosystem. Trust and strong working relationships are at the core of the partnership, providing a solid foundation for effective decision-making.

The partnership's work encompasses not only the restoration of riparian habitats but also public education, monitoring, scientific research, and adapting management strategies based on new data, lessons learned, and emerging challenges. With a commitment to problem-solving, resource-sharing, and a vision of a self-sustaining and resilient Dolores River, the DRRP is dedicated to long-term ecological health.

### THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS PROVIDED CASH OR IN-KIND SUPPORT IN 2023-2024:

*AmeriCorps*

*Bird Conservancy of the Rockies*

*Bureau of Land Management*

*Bureau of Reclamation*

*Canyon Country Youth Corps*

*Colorado Mesa University*

*Colorado Parks & Wildlife*

*Colorado State University Extension*

*Colorado Youth Corps Association*

*Colorado Water Conservation Board*

*Conservation Legacy*

*Dale Army*

*Dolores County, CO*

*Dolores River Boating Advocates*

*Forever Our Rivers Foundation*

*Fort Lewis College*

*Gateway Canyons Resort*

*GOCO*

*Jim Johnston*

*Mesa County, CO*

*Mesa County Weed and Pest*

*Mesa County Partners*

*Montrose County, CO*

*National Fish and Wildlife Foundation*

*Natural Resources Conservation Service*

*Rimrocker Historical Society of Western Montrose County*

*RiversEdge West*

*San Miguel County, CO*

*Southwest Basin Roundtable*

*Southwestern Water Conservation District*

*Terry Moreland*

*The Nature Conservancy*

*US Fish & Wildlife Service*

*US Department of Energy*

*US Department of the Interior*

*Utah Division of Wildlife Resources*

*Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative*

*Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado*

*Walton Family Foundation*

*Western Colorado Conservation Corps*



## PARTNER FAREWELL: NATE PETERS

Nate Peters worked as the Watershed Programs Manager for Conservation Legacy's Southwest Conservation Corps, where he co-led the DRRP for over three years.

In this role, Nate oversaw conservation corps crews and the on-the-ground implementation of restoration plans. He also planned projects and sites, updated the DRRP geodatabase, organized volunteer, community, and partnership events, and worked with a diverse group of landowners and land managers.

One aspect of the role that Nate especially valued was the wide variety of people he got to work with—ranging from other nonprofits, BLM land managers, contractors, conservation crews from multiple programs, to students and private landowners. A particular highlight for him was the time spent camping and working in remote areas along the Dolores River, where he could enjoy the peace and natural beauty of the region.



*Nate enjoying the beauty of the region. Photo provided by Nate Peters.*



*Nate and SCC crew members conducting vegetation monitoring. Photo credit: SCC*

Nate has since moved into a new role within Conservation Legacy, as the Western Region Operations Technician, where he will be working with all of the organization's programs across the country. He notes, "I'll be providing training and mentorship to a larger number of AmeriCorps members for trainings such as wilderness first aid, trail building, chainsaw operation, and river restoration. It's going to be a very dynamic position, and I'm really looking forward to the new places I'll visit and the people I'll get to work with."

We wish Nate the best in his new position and are confident that crews everywhere will benefit from his experience and expertise. We also want to offer a special shoutout to Nate for all he did to keep the DRRP moving forward during periods of transition and for the knowledge and training he provided to new staff.





Burn piles of cut tamarisk. Photo credit: SCC

## ECOLOGICAL SUCCESSES

*Increasing the number of acres of sustainable, healthy riparian plant communities while reducing those dominated by tamarisk and other invasive, non-native species.*

While removal of primary tamarisk continues—particularly in areas that remain difficult to access—the partnership has increasingly focused on controlling tamarisk regrowth, managing secondary weed species, and monitoring treated sites. Since the inception of the DRRP, approximately 2,000 acres of initial tamarisk stands have been removed, and efforts to address the remaining primary infestations are ongoing. However, shifting funding and priorities have placed greater emphasis on regrowth management and long-term maintenance. Investigating more effective techniques for restoring native plant communities is also a key priority.

## PROGRESS TOWARDS ECOLOGICAL GOALS IN 2023–2024

- 115** —→ Acres of woody invasive species treated, including tamarisk, Russian olive and Siberian elm
- 670** —→ Acres of secondary weeds (e.g. Russian knapweed, white top) treated
- 25** —→ Acres of revegetation (seeding native grasses & planting forbs, shrubs, & trees)
- 1590** —→ Acres of vegetation monitored to prioritize work sites and assess restoration efforts



Vegetation monitoring crew floating on the Dolores. Photo credit: REW



Tamarisk stumps. Photo credit: SCC



## SOCIAL SUCCESSES

*Supporting youth, enhancing public safety, improving aesthetics.*

As part of our commitment to youth development and land stewardship, we created 50 opportunities for young adults through traditional 8-person conservation corps crews and smaller 3-person strike teams. Each member receives at least 120 hours of annual training and earns an AmeriCorps education award.

Continued invasive species removal enhances public safety by reducing fuels and improving road visibility.



In April 2023, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, volunteers planted 95 native plants across 8 acres of a recently burned cottonwood gallery along the San Miguel River.

## PROGRESS TOWARDS SOCIAL GOALS IN 2023 & 2024

50



Conservation corps crew members and leaders engaged

>12,000



Hours worked by conservation corps crews

8



Volunteers engaged at one volunteer event



*Volunteers planting native vegetation. Photo credit: REW*



## THE NEXT GENERATION OF STEWARDS



The DRRP is proud to partner with conservation corps crews such as those from the Southwest Conservation Corps and Western Colorado Conservation Corps. These programs collaborate with land managers on land improvement projects while engaging young adults in meaningful service opportunities. Through their work, participants develop valuable skills—ranging from technical abilities like chainsaw operation and backcountry first aid to essential life skills such as responsibility, leadership, and a strong work ethic. These experiences foster both personal growth and a lasting commitment to natural resource stewardship.



## THE DRAMS PROJECT

The Dolores River below McPhee Reservoir has experienced significant changes in hydrology, geomorphology, and biology due to altered streamflow and sediment supply from dam operations, with potential long-term impacts on the river's form and ecological function.



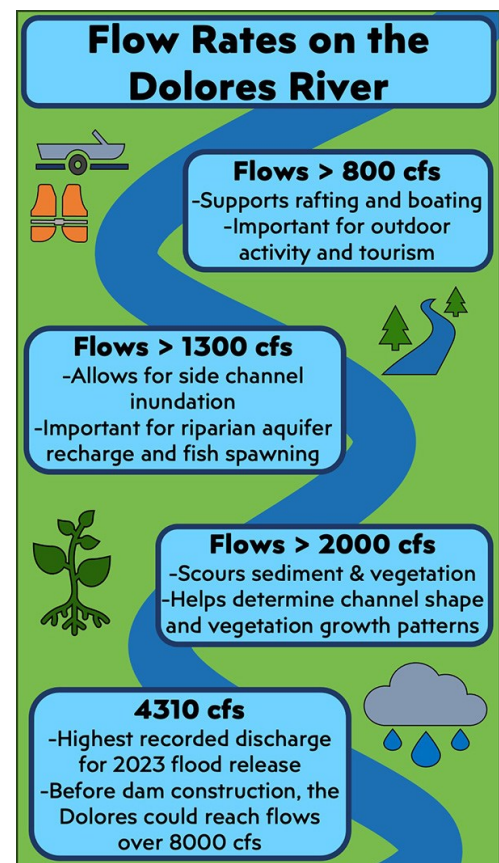
The Dolores River Adaptive Management Support (DRAMS) Team is a five-year collaborative monitoring effort with partners including Fort Lewis College, Colorado Mesa University, RiversEdge West, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Bureau of Reclamation, Conservation Legacy, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. DRAMS supports flow management recommendations from the Dolores River Native Fish Monitoring and Recommendations Team, which works to protect habitat for native flannemouth sucker, roundtail chub, and bluehead sucker.

DRAMS was created to establish baseline and annual monitoring below McPhee Dam, tracking channel changes, responses to dam-regulated flows, restoration impacts, and habitat conditions. A rapid-response component is also in place to monitor high-flow events triggered by snowpack and runoff.

DRAMS is now in its final year of monitoring. Learn more at [fourcornerswater.org/dolores-river](https://fourcornerswater.org/dolores-river).



Warm-water native fish species. Photo credit: Colorado Parks and Wildlife.



How different flow rates effect the river. Figure credit: DRAMS project website.



## BIRD SURVEYS

With a grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board, the DRRP is partnering with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (BCOR) to study how invasive species removal affects bird populations along the Dolores River. One round of avian surveys was completed in spring 2024, with second round scheduled for spring 2025.

Technicians are surveying three site types: areas with tamarisk removal only, areas with removal followed by revegetation, and untreated controls. BCOR will analyze bird density and abundance to assess restoration impacts. A similar study conducted in 2017-2018 offers baseline data for long-term comparison.

Current challenges include limited site access due to access permission, rugged river canyon terrain, and low spring water levels due to below-average snowpack.



*Photo: Yellow-breasted Chat (Icteria virens) by Jamie Chavez, licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0*

## PARTNER HIGHLIGHT: SETH DAVIS



*Seth scouting project sites. Photo credit: SCC*

You might recognize Seth Davis from his frequent presence in the field overseeing youth crews, ensuring their safety, and helping manage project implementation. Seth has been with SCC since 2021 and stepped into his current role as Watershed Programs Coordinator in January 2024.

Wearing many hats, Seth interviews, hires, and manages crew members; plans and supervises project work; trains crews in both hard and soft skills—everything from chainsaw skills to leadership and communication; conducts site visits; and interprets data to monitor progress and prioritize future work. His knowledge of the land along the Dolores River has been instrumental in guiding project locations and advancing the DRRP's mission.

One of Seth's most memorable moments on the Dolores? Swimming at the confluence of the warm, chocolate-brown Dolores and the ice-cold, crystal-clear San Miguel—finding the perfect swimming temperature proved to be quite the challenge!



## 2025 OUTLOOK

The DRRP looks to protect our shared investment by conducting monitoring and maintenance; to expand restoration work into inaccessible areas; and to bolster our revegetation and community stewardship programs. Looking ahead to the 2025 field season, key areas of focus include:

- Vegetation monitoring in Tres Rios BLM Field office parcels through the SCC Monitoring Crew
- Removal and treatment of primary tamarisk growth near Bedrock and the Dolores River Canyon WSA
- Conduct maintenance along portions of the nearly 2,000 acres of the Dolores River corridor that have previously undergone initial tamarisk removal, focusing on treatment of resprouts and secondary weeds
- DRRP meetings with stakeholders to explore the future of the partnership, align goals and determine funding needs as initial tamarisk removal efforts decrease
- Volunteer event to cage cottonwoods in partnership with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado
- Seeding with native seed mix in areas where invasive species have been removed and treated
- Planting cottonwood poles and containerized native trees and shrubs to assist active revegetation efforts
- Planning and initiating a pilot project to remove willow, tamarisk and sediment to improve habitat for native fish
- Conclusion of the DRAMS project



*View along the Dolores. Photo credit: Seth Davis*



*SCC strike team hiking to project site. Photo credit: SCC*





**TO LEARN MORE, CALL 970-256-7400**

**OR VISIT**

**[riversedgewest.org/partnerships/dolores-river-restoration-partnership](https://riversedgewest.org/partnerships/dolores-river-restoration-partnership)**