

DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP
Biannual Meeting
March 29, 2011

Welcome by Uncompahgre Field Office

Barbara Sharrow of the BLM Uncompahgre Field Office welcomed everyone. She emphasized that the UFO is currently revising its management plan, and the work of the DRRP coincides and can mesh with that.

Dave Kauffman of the UFO said the restoration project goes through the heart of their office. The Montrose district adjoins several BLM districts, and this project cuts through boundaries and represents a uniting of efforts. All the offices have been working on weed-treatment and riparian improvement. This project is very important for the BLM because it ties in with other efforts the field offices are engaged in.

Building the partnership

Facilitator Marsha Porter-Norton said from 2008 to 2010 the partnership worked rapidly on the ground and treated hundreds of acres. Now some “care and feeding” of the partnership is necessary and so, she said, the Core Team (day to day implementing team) met in Durango recently to do planning. They are giving recommendations today to the DRRP via a PowerPoint she presented entitled, “Recommendations to the DRRP” (available by emailing Marsha: porternorton@bresnan.net along with the retreat meeting notes). Marsha discussed roles of the Core Team’s members (four BLM districts, The Nature Conservancy, Tamarisk Coalition, three conservation corps, the Walton Family Foundation and the facilitator). She gave key strategic directions and recommendations for the DRRP in the following areas: Core Team, communication, committees, funding, and monitoring.

There was discussion regarding communication. Marsha said nothing is “broken”, but the recommendation is that communication be improved. She said a web site can be created and hosted through Fort Lewis College at relatively low cost. The meeting minutes can be posted on the web site; portions will be public, and portions will be for partnership members only. An e-newsletter is already available to people who sign up for it. Other recommendations for communication were to vitalize the Outreach/Education Subcommittee and find ways to talk about the DRRP internally and to external audiences.

One recommendation related to committees was not to have a Science Subcommittee at this time and to use other means to address science questions. Marsha said the Science Subcommittee has not been active, but there is an active Monitoring Subcommittee. Stacy Kolegas, executive director of the Tamarisk Coalition, said there was a feeling that the DRRP is handling science issues through other processes, and continuing to have a Science Subcommittee would mean duplicating effort and asking people to come to another meeting. The idea was to involve people in an ad-hoc manner and re-establish a committee later if needed.

In the following discussion, a number of people raised concerns about abandoning the concept of a science committee. Some were:

- The agencies like to have science out in front;
- There are pots of money available specifically for science-related projects;
- Science needs to be out front in order to attract academic researchers;

- The DRRP has talked a great deal about being science-driven and it's important not to lose that.

It was suggested that the monitoring and science subcommittees be combined, since they include many of the same people. It was stated that monitoring is a subset of science, so combining the two would make sense.

Clark Tate, chair of the Monitoring Subcommittee, said coming up with monitoring protocols has been time-consuming and this subcommittee may not have enough time to dedicate to science. Others said the number of interested people available to become involved seems to be growing and that should help, and the major portion of the monitoring work will be finished before long.

There was consensus to combine the monitoring and science subcommittees. Marsha said there will be a committee sign-up at the end of the day. It was decided that the current Monitoring Committee can meet and determine how to best integrate a Science Committee into their existing Committee (this makes sense because it will likely be many of the same people).

Outreach and education: Mike Wight of the Outreach Subcommittee said there has long been talk about signage at boat ramps and other ideas for outreach, but there has been a lack of energy and funding to implement this idea. The Outreach/Education Subcommittee would like to see more interest in its work. Until now the subcommittee has been focused on educating the Conservation Corps groups, but it has also been able to educate the broader public about the Partnership through media and other means. He asked for interested people to talk to him at lunch and sign up on the sign up sheet.

Marsha said asked whether people are comfortable with the recommendations that are being made. There was consensus to support them.

Logo: Stacy passed around copies of the proposed new logo for the DRRP. Comments were favorable. The logo's integration of the river and landscape met with approval.

Memorandum of Understanding

Catherine Robertson of the BLM Grand Junction Field Office presented the MOU for the DRRP. She said as many people as possible should sign it today, but other signatures can be added later. The end of April was set as the deadline to sign. She asked anyone with a concern about anything in the MOU to let her know immediately. It was pointed out that the MOU lists a Science Subcommittee as among the DRRP's subcommittees. Language reflecting the previous discussion will be incorporated.

Catherine said the Partnership is an effort from the ground up and it is attracting favorable attention from all levels of the BLM. She said a need has been identified for an assistance agreement that would carry over between states. Dave Rosenkrance, a new employee with the BLM, is taking responsibility for this project. Nikki Grant-Hoffman of the GJFO will be the contracting person for that effort. Catherine said it is hoped the MOU will give DRRP more visibility in the agencies and more flexibility.

Catherine said it would be helpful to have a list of subcommittee members and who they represent in order to know if there is a hole in the representation.

Monitoring

Watershed-wide monitoring: Clark reported that the Monitoring Subcommittee met yesterday. She said last season there was a collective watershed-wide monitoring effort including approximately 10 sites on each of the four BLM districts, for 39 sites total. The monitoring took place primarily in easily accessible areas where restoration work was to be completed. Clark described the line-point intercept method that was used and said the recent meeting was to discuss whether this protocol will answer the key questions.

Clark said the DRRP's ecological goal throughout the watershed is to shift plant-community composition from one dominated by invasive communities to one dominated by native species. The goal is for 90 percent of the riparian area in the watershed to consist of less than 5 percent tamarisk and less than 15 percent other invasive species, such as knapweed. She noted that means 20 percent invasive-species cover would remain, and said there is some concern about that. However, for now the Partnership is working toward that goal and trying to determine whether that goal is being achieved on these 39 sites.

Clark said the current monitoring protocol can answer that goal with varying levels of confidence. The Monitoring Subcommittee has decided to lay out different strata or criteria for categorizing comparable portions of the watershed. For instance, sites with light densities of tamarisk (10 – 20 percent) in a canyon are different from sites in a bottom land. The idea is to look at all of the light-tamarisk areas in canyons, etc., and compare them to other, similar areas. The next step would be to see how many monitoring sites occur in each of the different strata. If there is not enough representation from any particular stratum, more sites may need to be established to get the necessary representation. She said the next steps are:

- Define the strata;
- See how well each area is represented;
- See whether a few more sites can be added economically if necessary.

Clark said the plan for this year is to continue the 39-site monitoring protocol begun last year, utilizing graduate students from the University of Denver. The Monitoring Subcommittee has decided to change the monitoring protocol from line-point intercept to meter quadrat plots (for understory) with a line-intercept protocol (for woody trees). This was based on a cost-benefit analysis by Dr. Anna Sher of the University of Denver that indicated that the latter method, though slightly more subjective, would be faster. Clark said researchers will be able to use the information collected last year but hope to collect information more efficiently this year. Anna Sher is writing up that protocol and should be finished by the end of April. At the same time the strata will be written up and given to the BLM for confirmation. Those are the next major action items. A Monitoring Subcommittee phonecall in early May will evaluate these materials and decide how to move forward.

Q&A: It was commented that the quadrat method is about twice as fast as point intercept and that switching methods is worthwhile.

A question was asked about photo-point monitoring. Clark said there are four photo points taken at the corners of acre plats. The conservation-corps crews also take a lot of photo points.

It was asked whether there was an opportunity for volunteers to be part of monitoring. Clark said yes. She had been discussing watershed-wide monitoring. She said rapid project monitoring is something new and involves more of a walk-through on a site-by-site basis, and that effort would be more appropriate for volunteers.

Clark said some people are interested in using satellite imagery in combination with on the ground methods to monitor a watershed-wide shift from invasive to native species. This method is currently being used to see where the tamarisk beetle is defoliating leaf trees. There is optimism that this could provide interesting information.. This effort would involve in-kind contributions from Utah State University, plus some cash expenditure. This is pending.

David Graf of the Colorado Division of Wildlife asked how the treatments are being done. Clark said methods vary, partly by field office. All this is well recorded at each site so the methods can be compared.

There was discussion of possible monitoring add-ons for wildlife and geomorphology. The Utah Department of Wildlife is monitoring birds in the state-line area and other areas. The Monitoring Subcommittee is trying to connect researchers who can add focus on different areas related to wildlife. There is an effort to monitor geomorphology on the Dolores to see whether the river is shifting channel as tamarisk is removed.

It was suggested that the Bureau of Reclamation be invited to the table because it has spent millions of dollars on scientific studies and might have useful information. Stacy agreed and said bringing them into this partnership has been an action item.

Rapid project monitoring: Clark said rapid project monitoring is site-specific and is designed to determine whether control and revegetation treatments have been successful and what maintenance may be necessary. Such monitoring has been used on the San Miguel River. It looks at a site that was treated previously and asks: How healthy is it now? What non-native species are present? and so on. The Monitoring Subcommittee decided there is a need for a brief checklist-type of monitoring and Amanda Clements of the UFO is drafting a protocol for this purpose. Clark said the desire is to check these sites every year. The Monitoring Subcommittee has talked about providing funds to hire an intern to complete the survey. If this proves useful, volunteers could take over the monitoring later. Landowners could also use the survey. The Monitoring Subcommittee is having a conference call at the beginning of May and if everyone likes the idea they will try to hire an intern this summer. After the protocol has been created they want to look at how to synthesize information and make adaptive-management decisions. This is ongoing. Clark said anyone is welcome to sign up for the Monitoring Subcommittee.

It was asked whether the Monitoring Subcommittee needs more members and if there are any holes in representation. Amanda said it would be good to have more members, perhaps one representing wildlife. David Graf, Barbara Hawke, and Marty Moses volunteered to try to connect more with private landowners. Catherine said a long-term NRCS member is needed, and Jim Boyd of NRCS said someone will be found. Jim said the NRCS has a contract with the landowners that allows NRCS to do more monitoring, but it does not always have time. Nikki said it would be good to know NRCS's standard monitoring protocols with private landowners.

Implementation plans

Peter Mueller of The Nature Conservancy said he and Clark took the different polygons that were created at the beginning of this process, as delineated in the Dolores River Riparian Action Plan (DR-RAP), and over the last year asked questions such as: Should we work here? Why or why not? This took a lot of time, but they developed a prioritization plan about where to work and why, and what results can be expected. Peter presented an Implementation Plan Summary and said it starts to take a look at the big picture ecologically and financially.

Clark said prioritization can be difficult – deciding where to work and what is cost-effective. Using DR-RAP, they developed a list of criteria regarding places they want to work and a list of places where biocontrol might be useful, and made a decision tree. Working with the BLM, they ranked polygons and made a decision on priority, then listed feasibility characteristics based on who owns the land. Then there is a prescription for what kind of control to use (biocontrol or active).

Peter said in the fall of 2009 DRRP treated 170 acres from the Dove Creek pumps to Disappointment Creek. He said as the effort moves further downstream it will become more expensive because the problems and challenges of the lower watershed are more significant.

Peter said their job is to see what's working and what's not, up and down the watershed: What should we do? Where should we do it and why? He said so far the successes are probably outnumbered by the failures and that needs to be switched around.

Peter said it is anticipated that there will be a need for \$950,000 in 2012, roughly twice as much as 2011. He presented a map that shows treated areas. He said the map is a good depository of information and a visual indicator of what's happening. It will be on the web site.

Q & A: Barbara Sharrow asked whether work done on the San Miguel River can be incorporated into the map although it was done previously. Peter said this would be a good component to add, as well as work done previously on other tributaries.

Mike Wight of the Southwest Conservation Corps said Disappointment Creek will be the present focus for the conservation-corps crews. Two weeks ago Western Colorado Conservation Corps planted 5,000 willows on Paloma Ranch, where treatment was done last year. This year the conservation corps will be working mostly on BLM land but also on a little private land. They hope to finish all the BLM land in Disappointment Valley this year. They have been doing cut-stump and chemical treatments except close to water. They hope to finish all of the priority areas in the Dolores District this year. Mike said there is still some reluctance on the part of some Disappointment Valley landowners to sign on because they are concerned about someone being on their property.

Amanda Clements said the Uncompahgre Field Office is just getting started doing treatments this year with four pilot projects throughout different reaches of the river. They want to do cost comparisons and restoration comparisons to see how the beetles work. She said tamarisk is just one-third of the problem. The other two elements are noxious weeds and flows. They are going to look at different ways of removing tamarisk – burning small plots, hand-crew removal with debris hauled away, beetles, and hydroaxing followed by mulching of debris. They will do herbaceous-weed treatment, mostly spraying of knapweed, plus reseeding. At the same time in

the office there is a major environmental assessment under way that will allow them to do hundreds of acres of restoration and treatment in their field office. Previously the UFO didn't have anything in place to cover this.

Sparky Taber said the Grand Junction Field Office began work on private land south of Gateway with mechanical treatment of 90 acres of tamarisk and sprayed 100 acres of knapweed last fall on the Paloma Ranch. Also, since the first of the year they have been doing willow planting, with help, along 1 1/2 miles of the ranch. He said the Wild Turkey Federation is interested in working on Blue Creek, a tributary to the Dolores, with the GJFO and there may be some treatments this fall. He discussed the herbicides that are being used.

It was commented that there is a lack of native shrubs on privately grazed riparian areas so it is encouraging to hear about the planting efforts.

Ann Marie Aubry of the Moab Field Office said last fall they treated about 211 acres near the state line. Part of their work this year is re-treating those same acres with herbicide and reseeding. They have had some successes working with the ranchers and are also working with the Wild Turkey Federation. She said the Roberts Bottom area was treated in 2004 but there are still problems there with Russian knapweed, so it will be re-treated. The MFO's weeds coordinator is willing to try different techniques, including goats and mowing. They will be doing some fencing to control grazing to be proactive with future treatments. They will probably do some planting at the state-line area and have an ongoing inventory and monitoring with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. The MFO is preparing a major programmatic weed EA. Ann Marie said Rim to Rim Restoration and the Southeastern Utah Tamarisk Partnership have been key partners.

Mike said on Disappointment Creek they have been working with beetles. They are clearing around cottonwoods to protect them from wildfire and to open up willow habitat.

Peter said implementation plans are a work in progress. He and Clark will work with the respective BLM offices to see how they are doing every season. They will evaluate the past season's work and what is next and how that corresponds to funding. They are trying to look at the major costs so they don't run out of funding halfway through a project or have to skip parcels of land. They will evaluate their plans in November for the following year based on financial resources.

Peter said Chris Massingill of Mainstream Contracting created a spreadsheet that attempts to categorize the work activities for active treatments and to break down the costs. Chris is being funded by the Walton Foundation to improve efficiencies for the conservation corps and also for contractors. The desire is for anybody using Walton Foundation funds to be able to use this format. Peter said Chris is looking for feedback and he would like to channel it.

Stacy said the Core Team has been working with NRCS and the BLM regarding relations with private landowners. After this meeting there was to be a private-lands working group meeting and Stacy invited anybody interested to stay.

Funding

Stacy, chair of the Funding Subcommittee, said the goal of the DRRP has been to have diverse funding sources and partnerships that can be used in a flexible manner. DRRP relies 100 percent on implementation planning to be successful. The implementation-planning process started in 2011 to break down what work would be done in 2011. They have worked with the BLM to refine cost-calculators and come up with refined costs for each year. Stacy presented a handout showing where the effort is now. She said the subcommittee is fairly confident the Partnership is fully funded for 2011. They are refining numbers for 2012, 2013 and 2014, and are relying on the implementation plans to match funding needs with funding opportunities. The green part of the handout represents possibilities for funding. In the next month or two they want to fill in the funding needs for 2013 and 2014. They want to track this and keep it on the web site.

Peter said they have asked for a BLM official to be named as an intermediary between the weed persons, ecologists and others who can serve on the Funding Subcommittee so information on their progress goes to the state BLM office.

Rusty Lloyd, program director for the Tamarisk Coalition, said they are working on a strategic approach to the fundraising – building rapport and relationships with those funders.

It was commented that it is good to compartmentalize private vs. public funding sources and it may be a good time to look at the private foundations. Stacy agreed and said the Walton Foundation's support for the Partnership has been very helpful.

Grazing

Clark said one of the identified stressors on the ecosystem is grazing by wildlife and livestock. Grazing can be hazardous to restoration efforts, but it can also be beneficial if properly planned. There is not an anchoring document for grazing like DR-RAP that would provide guidelines to define such things as when fences are appropriate. Clark said she and others have proposed creating a grazing subcommittee composed of BLM grazing specialists along with anyone else considered appropriate that would produce a document with guiding language.

Stacy said grazing is an important economic factor on the Dolores River. There is a perception on the part of some funders that restoration can't be done in the presence of cattle. She said it would be good to provide common language to explain how and when grazing can be incorporated into restoration. For grants it would be useful to have information on how grazing is affecting restoration plans.

Jim Boyd of NRCS said grazing is a part of restoration, but he is not sure how big it is. He suggested rolling this issue into the Monitoring and Science Subcommittee rather than creating a grazing committee. Stacy said she is talking about an ad-hoc group to provide a forum to communicate about this issue. The group wouldn't have to be permanent.

During discussion, several people said it would be relatively simple to come up with basic grazing and restoration guidelines or Best Management Practices to show how grazing and restoration can coexist. Peter said the funders don't want DRRP to put out a message that cows are bad.

Some specific comments were:

- Water availability and quality are important aspects of the grazing issue.
- This should be framed not as a problem but as a challenge or opportunity.
- It might make sense to create generalized grazing protocol for different landscapes/strata and then ask BLM range cons or permittees whether they make sense, and have a dialogue.
- More outreach and education to funders is needed.
- Landowners are natural partners in the restoration effort. This is not “spin” but is based in science.

There was agreement that grazing has to be part of the equation. It was agreed that the message needs to get out and ranchers need to be brought in early in the process.

Peter, Ann Marie, Sparky and BLM range cons said they are interested in being on an ad-hoc committee. It was suggested that a communications specialist be included as well. Marsha said she hopes there will be something to bring back at the next meeting in November.

Landowner agreements

Peter said the Nature Conservancy will seek permission from landowners for the Partnership to do work on their lands. The conservation-corps groups may have an additional approval process for landowners. A background sheet is being developed to give to landowners as well as a permission form for them to sign. That coordination goes to Peter and he works with the conservation corps. It was suggested that conservation districts may be a good avenue for working with landowners. Peter agreed.

Social goals

Mike Wight, river restoration director for the Southwest Conservation Corps, discussed secondary goals of the work on the ground by the SCC, Western Colorado Conservation Corps and Canyon Country Youth Corps. He showed part of a video put together by a videographer to show what the conservation corps worked on last year. The video is available on You Tube (the link will be posted in the next e-newsletter).

Mike said last fall an outside social-goals evaluator was hired. He gave a PowerPoint presentation about the Initial Social Outcomes Evaluation for the Dolores River Restoration Crew. The evaluation was given to all three conservation corps to quantify accomplishments beyond the ecological benefits to the watershed. Pre-work and post-work surveys were given. Mike said each of the individual conservation corps had some method to measure outcome but this evaluation was designed to ensure consistency and effectiveness. He said the evaluation found general satisfaction with program quality on the part of participants. Some commented that the challenging things about the program are also the rewarding things – e.g., camping outside and being in a group.

Mike said 72 individuals were hired for the different corps; of these, 50 percent were from the Dolores watershed. Fifty percent were considered at-risk youths. Thirty percent were Native Americans. The conservation corps treated 291 acres of tamarisk.

Mike said among the benefits to the participants were increased technical skills, team-building, environmental stewardship, and a desire to move into public lands as a career focus. He said there needs to be increased post-program tracking.

Wrap-up and next steps

Marsha said to sign up for committees if desired. She said volunteers are needed from across the districts to work on education and outreach. The notes from the meeting will be sent out. The web site will be ready in a couple of months.

Comments about the meeting: Marsha asked for feedback about the meeting. Comments were: Timing was good, lunch was good, the meeting kept on track. Marsha said next time she wants everybody to be able to sit around the table.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be in November, 2011 in Moab, Utah.