

Escalante River Watershed Partnership Summary of 2016 Accomplishments

The Escalante River Watershed Partnership (ERWP) has completed another successful year of riparian restoration and related activities. Below is a summary of the outstanding work, as well as challenges, that took place in 2016.

General Partnership Accomplishments

Milestones

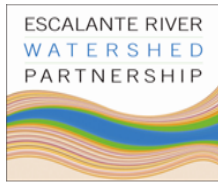
- ERWP updated their Charter and signed a 5-year extension of the original Partnership Agreement – NINE new partners joined in 2016.
- Created Outreach Sub-committee & Fundraising Sub-committee (sub-committees of Coordinating Committee).
- Joined Restore our Rivers Initiative (a fundraising campaign including nine watershed partnerships, designed to raise funds from private donors for historically difficult-to-fund partnership activities, such as capacity and long-term monitoring).
- Broadened meeting venues across the watershed.
- Mike Wight received the President's Award at the Tamarisk Coalition Symposium.

Transitions

- GSEP: Noel Poe has retired, but will still be involved in ERWP as a board member of GSEP; Nicole Croft accepted the position of Executive Director; ERWP welcomes Stephanie Minnaert as new Public Lands Coordinator.
- GSENM: Ken Bradshaw, Soils Scientist, and Dana Backer, Science Program Administrator, joined ERWP and will participate in the Science/Conservation Targets Committee; Matt Betenson, Deputy Monument Director, joined the Coordinating Committee; Amber Hughes took a new position as NEPA Coordinator for the Monument, and is no longer actively involved with ERWP.
- Western Water Assessment – Seth Arens joined the partnership, taking over from Tim Bardsley.

Special Events

- ERWP sponsored two **public outreach events/presentations** in 2016:
 - “Russian Olive Invasion in the Escalante River Watershed” was held in early spring
 - “Paleontology of the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument” was held in late fall
 - Both events were well-attended by local and regional community members.
- ERWP hosted a table at the Canyons of Escalante Arts Festival in September 2016, and participated in the Calf Creek Hike to celebrate GSENM's 20th Anniversary.
- The fifth annual two-week long Conservation Corps Collaborative Training and graduation ceremony was held in August – the largest training of its kind in the country. Topics included chainsaw safety, first aid, riparian ecology, herbicide use and safety, and backcountry working and living.



Coordinating Committee

Strategic Planning

- During the December retreat, the Coordinating Committee reorganized the standing committee structure to accommodate areas where energy and focus are needed over the next few years. Capacity needs for administrative, fundraising, and coordination were discussed, and how these tasks would be covered by ERWP partners. Fundraising was a big part of the discussion, including how ERWP will raise over \$1M for the coming year.

Watershed Partnership Coordinator

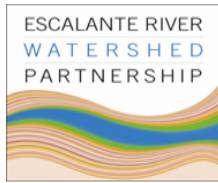
- With Grand Staircase Escalante Partners (GSEP) hiring two new staff members this year, Executive Director and Public Lands Program Coordinator, hiring another new person for the Watershed Coordinator position is not ideal for the organization currently. ERWP Coordinating Committee plans to revisit hiring a Watershed Partnership Coordinator in 2018.

Fundraising

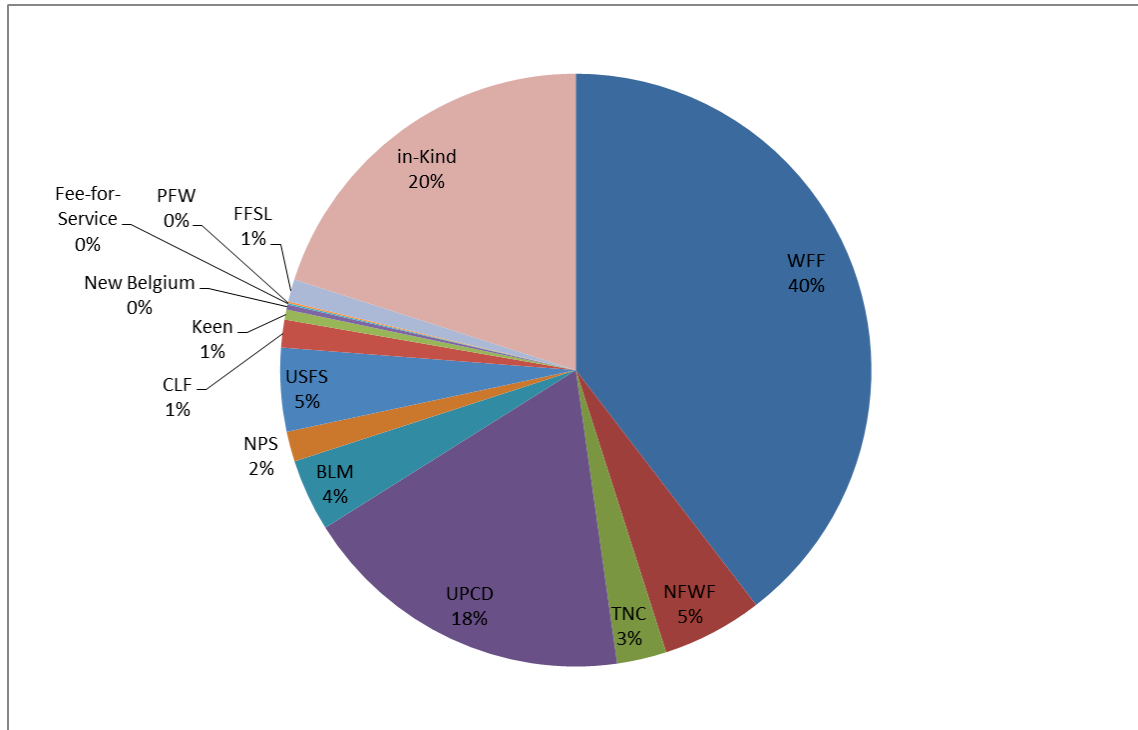
- Approximately \$1.8M was raised to implement high priority restoration actions throughout the Escalante watershed in 2016. Funding sources include private grants and donations, federal and state funds, as well as partner and volunteer in-kind donations. Several new foundations and other funding sources were targeted this past year in an effort to diversify funding, including the KEEN Effect and New Belgium grant programs, and the Hemingway Foundation.
- The Coordinating Committee's Funding Sub-committee produced a fundraising brochure in 2016 targeting specific audiences, and highlighting ERWP's successes, challenges and need for continuing this important work. Brochures will be distributed to any partner wishing to help with fundraising.
- ERWP completed its first year raising private funds to meet the goals of the Tamarisk Coalition-led fundraising initiative, Restore our Rivers (ROR). ERWP was able to meet, and exceed, the match amount for year one, and has received \$38,888 to be used for coordination and long term monitoring. Once ROR reaches its fundraising goal and ERWP has raised \$45,000 in match over the next year, ERWP will receive an approximate total of \$150,000 in ROR funds. The goal is to use ROR funds to build ERWP's financial sustainability over time.
- Walton Family Foundation has committed to additional funding for the partnership through June 2019.

ERWP Action Plan

- The 10-year Action Plan has been updated and priorities revisited this past winter, with input from all Committee chairs. This plan acts as a comprehensive guide to Escalante Watershed Restoration, encompassing issues of water quantity and quality, riparian restoration, native species preservation, research, and education and outreach. This plan is a living document, and is updated annually to capture adaptive management needs in a dynamic watershed. The latest version is now available, and will be distributed to partners and posted to the ERWP website.



Breakdown of 2016 Funding



Education and Outreach

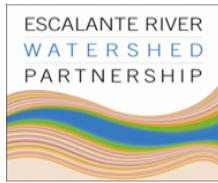
Outreach

- Participation in Escalante Canyon Arts Festival: ERWP setup a booth during the festival.
- Volunteer Trips:
 - Two week-long trips were held – thanks to the Great Old Broads for Wilderness and Wilderness Volunteers.
- Volunteer Event:
 - One volunteer event was held in October to plant native potted plants along the river, as part of a joint effort with USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.
- Increased ERWP presence at local community meetings.
- Special ERWP meeting in June focused on local stakeholder outreach. Participants formed break-out groups to discuss how ERWP can better understand issues of concern in these communities, and to think of creative ways to help community members on such issues within the boundaries of ERWP's mission.

Communications

The committee focused efforts on targeting new audiences this past year. Efforts include:

- ERWP Facebook page continues to be updated and visited.
<https://www.facebook.com/EscalanteRiverWatershedPartnership>



- ERWP Website and Blog www.escalanteriverwatershedpartnership.org
- Developed and distributed brochures and newsletters: new fundraising brochure was developed in 2016; Fall newsletter.
- News articles about ERWP-related activities were published in:
 - Wayne and Garfield County *Insider*.
 - National Park Service feature story in the *Crossroads* Fall 2016 issue: (http://escalanteriverwatershedpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Crossroads-in-Science_ERWP.pdf).
 - TNC Fall Newsletter – feature article on ERWP.

Science & Conservation Targets Committee

Native Fish Update

- Warm water fish: DWR sampling of three species monitoring stations revealed two conservation species; Flannelmouth Sucker and Bluehead Sucker populations were robust, with multiple age classes represented.
- Cold water fish: As of 2016, 14 populations of the Conservation Agreement fish species Colorado River cutthroat trout are occupying 27.6 stream miles; this compares with 5 remnant populations in 1990's.
- Monitoring activities:
 - Quantitative fish stations were completed at 3 locations on North Creek, and distributional surveys were completed on two streams in the drainage.
 - Continuous temperature monitoring was conducted on 3 stream locations.

Water Quality

- Citizen Science Utah Water Watch: ERWP joined forces with Utah State University in fall of 2015 to launch a volunteer-based water quality monitoring program in the Escalante watershed. In 2016, participants in this program, including both community members and ERWP partners, submitted 83 reports from 10 unique monitoring sites, and added to the statewide water quality data base (www.usu.edu).

Dixie National Forest

- On-going efforts to address fuels reduction and aspen promotion took place in several locations on the Forest this past year. The Sawmill Aspen Stewardship project was completed north of Boulder during 2016. Project included 817 acres of vegetation treatments to maintain and regenerate aspen stands in the area.
- Forests began implementing the 1,500 acre Mitchell Spring Vegetation Improvement project in Main Canyon west of Escalante. Project includes treatments on National Forest system lands bordering private in-holdings to reduce the risk of wildfires. Project also includes thinning area ponderosa pine stands and regenerating aspen in the area to improve wildlife habitat.
- Within the Escalante watershed, 80 miles of roads were repaired, improved and maintained to minimize erosion and to keep users on the roads.



Hydrology

- Monitoring (USFS):
 - Summertime stream temperature on 6 streams.
 - Water stage on 4 streams.
 - Partial Multiple Indicator Monitoring (Bank alterations only) on 12 streams.
- Surveys: Completed river assessment survey on 1 stream.
- Springs and Seeps (NPS):
 - \$30,000 in funding was secured to conduct a 2-year survey for characterization of springs and seeps in the Escalante basin.

ERWP Deer Creek Bio Blitz

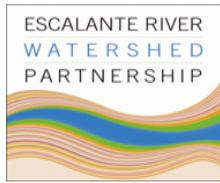
- In October, several intrepid ERWP partners and local community members participated in a weekend bio blitz in the Escalante watershed, recording the presence of all native plant, animal and other life forms encountered. This was the fourth bio blitz on the Deer Creek property, resulting in over 600 native species documented, underscoring the biological richness and diversity of the watershed. John Spence has compiled data from the 2016 bio blitz and submitted a report to ERWP.

Science and Research

- Watershed Resource Database: ERWP's GIS Specialist continues to work with researchers and land managers to assimilate all known datasets and associated metadata from throughout the watershed. This database is a central repository and is available to the public, with some access limitation based on data ownership.
- ERWP has partnered with BLM and USU to implement a landscape level assessment as part of the Rapid Ecoregional Assessment (REA) program.
- Legacy Cottonwoods (pre-1930's trees): A third year of mapping for geographic distribution and abundance using newly developed protocols was completed in 2016. A report was compiled and submitted to ERWP, and is available on the website.
- South Hollow: Dennis Bramble continued monitoring of prospective reference site including: repeat photography, introduction of camera traps, collection of data from the new weather station and water table dynamics with new automated piezometer well, and completion of new experimental livestock enclosure.
- Headwaters Demonstration Site: monitoring was limited to repeat photos only; given the unnatural hydrologic conditions of the area the piezometer monitoring may be discontinued in the future.

Russian olive invasion study

- A study to understand the mechanisms for invasion of Russian olive in the Escalante Watershed has been completed. It is still in USGS review, but principal author Mike Scott anticipates submitting it to a peer-reviewed journal sometime in June 2017.



Woody Invasive Control and Restoration Activities

Public Lands (NPS, Dixie NF, BLM, and State):

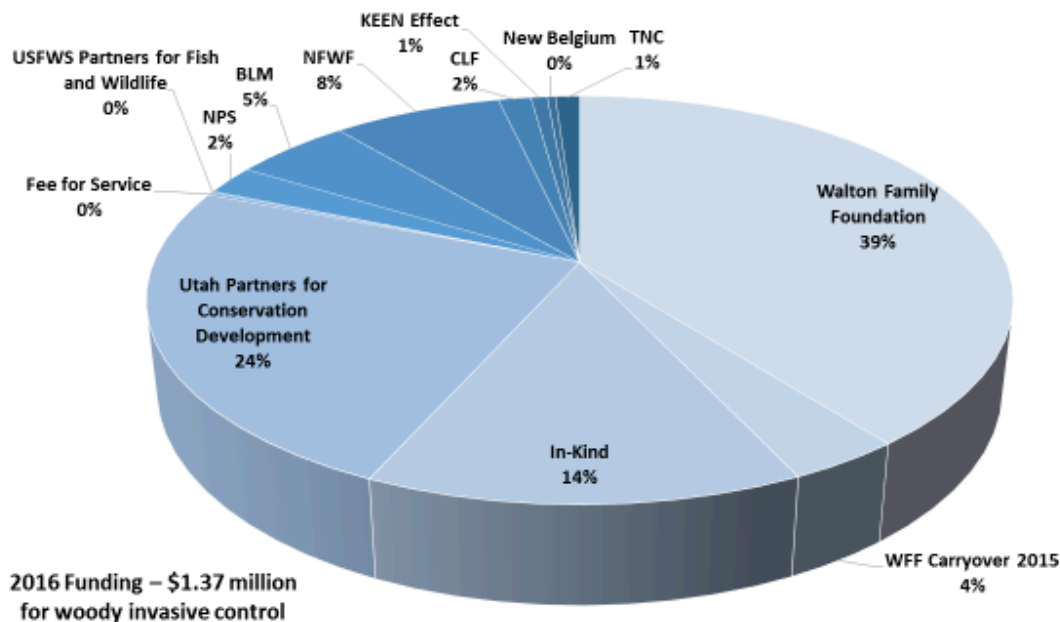
- Total acres treated – 254
- Total acres retreated – 857

Private Lands: (Boulder and Escalante)

- Total acres treated – 111
- Total acres retreated – 226
- Total acres actively restored – 7

Fundraising

- Over \$1.37 million in public and private funds were raised in 2016 to accomplish Woody Invasive control in the Escalante Watershed on public and private lands:



Long-term monitoring and rapid assessments

- Five rapid monitoring sites were established, and 10 post-treatment rapid monitoring sites were completed.
- Two long-term monitoring plots were read for a second time.
- Preliminary data analysis was conducted, and a report was submitted by John Spence; it is available on the ERWP website.



Landowner & Local Outreach

- A local contractor was employed for initial removal on private lands. This contractor provided employment for 11 Escalante residents through the winter months.
- Landowners participated in restoration activities through grazing management, retreatment of sprouts, fencing and monitoring.
- A Fee-for-Service Program continued to be implemented in the Boulder area this past year, with 8 landowners signed up.

Planning

- The Woody Invasive Control and Restoration Plan is available on the ERWP website: <http://escalanteriverwatershedpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Woody-Invasive-Control-Plan-V2-Final-1.pdf>.

Conservation Corps Collaborative Training and Closing Ceremony

- Hosted by ERWP, these events were held in Escalante in August, with over 75 Conservation Corps members in attendance. This training provides skills training based on the ERWP Cutting Guide developed by the WICR committee.

GIS

- The woody invasive database is stored using ArcGIS and University of Utah's DIGIT Lab services. ERWP has a public map of treatments by year that can be found at: <http://escalanteriverwatershedpartnership.org/what-we-do/riparian-restoration/riparian-restoration-treatments-by-year/>.