

Escalante River Watershed Partnership Summary of 2015 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 2015.

General Partnership Accomplishments

Milestones:

- **ERWP receives award.** In December the Utah Chapter of The Nature Conservancy presented ERWP's Coordinating Committee with its annual Conservation Award. The plaque will be on display in the Escalante visitor center.
- **ERWP was nominated for the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) Champion of the Year for 2016.** This was for the work that ERWP does with AmeriCorps on public lands.

Transitions:

- GSEP: Kris Waggoner has taken on a new role as part-time administrative assistant for the work on public lands. ERWP welcomes Nick Behe as new Public Lands Coordinator.
- Western Water Resources: Tim Bardsley has moved out of state and Seth Ahrens has taken over as a water resources specialist for the Science & Conservation Targets Committee.
- GSENM: Kevin Miller has relocated to the Denver office of BLM; Amber Hughes has returned and will be representing the Monument on the WICR Committee.
- Welcome to new DWR Fish Biologist Erik Woodhouse who will be participating in the Science & Conservation Targets Committee
- Dixie National Forest: Jessie Warner is a new addition to the Partnership and will participate on the WICR committee.

Special Events:

- ERWP sponsored several **public outreach events/presentations** in 2015: Hydrology 101, Russian olive research, and a special showing of the movie "Utah's Uncertain Water Future".
- The third 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 include chainsaw safety, first aid, riparian ecology, herbicide use and safety, and backcountry working and living.
- ERWP hosted artists participating in the Escalante Canyon Art Festival at one of the backcountry restoration sites along the Escalante River. Art from this trip can be found at www.escalantewatershed.org.

- ERWP hosted Rob Walton of Walton Family Foundation (and one of our most significant funders) in late fall, on a field trip to special places in the watershed.

Coordinating Committee

Strategic Planning:

- Two planning retreats were held in 2015 (August and December) to continue the process of developing both a long-term funding plan to implement the 10-year Action Plan, and a marketing/communications plan to develop additional understanding and support for ERWP activities.
- During the December retreat, the Coordinating Committee reviewed standing committee structure and reorganized to accommodate areas where energy and focus are needed over the next few years. Two standing committees remain: Woody Invasives Control and Restoration, and Science & Conservation Targets. Subcommittees will be created for individual projects as needed.

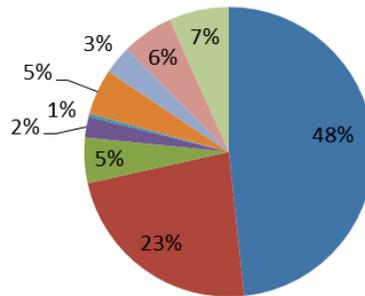
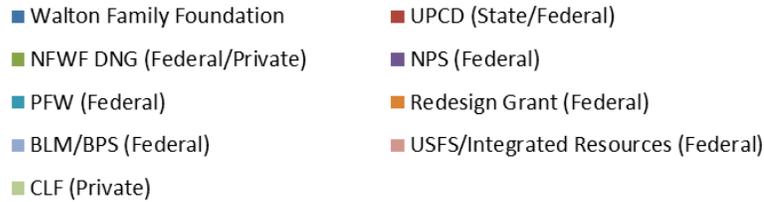
Watershed Partnership Coordinator:

- Much effort went into developing a job description and advertising a position for Watershed Partnership Coordinator. Many promising candidates applied and several interviews were conducted. However, we have not been able to fill the position as yet. The Watershed Partnership Coordinator issue will be revisited later in 2016.

Fundraising:

- Approximately \$1,500,000 was raised to implement high priority restoration actions throughout the Escalante watershed in 2015. 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.
- The Coordinating Committee's Funding Sub-committee completed the Outreach and Funding Plan in summer 2015. This a comprehensive plan that outlines strategies for fundraising, identifies potential funding sources, audiences, and messages for outreach and donor solicitation.
- ERWP joined with 8 other watershed partnerships to participate in the Tamarisk Coalition-led fundraising initiative, Restore our Rivers (ROR). Once ROR reaches its fundraising goal and ERWP has raised \$45,000 in match over the next two years, ERWP will receive \$150,000 in ROR funds. This effort will be overseen by the fundraising sub-committee and Linda Whitham will be the point person. The goal is to use ROR fund to build ERWP's financial sustainability over time.

2015 ERWP Income Breakdown Total: \$1,446,972



Note: In-kind services still need to be added.

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

Education and Outreach

Outreach

- Participation in:
 - Escalante Canyon Arts Festival: ERWP partnered with this annual festival to sponsor artists on the river.
 - Boulder Heritage Festival: Division of Wildlife Resources and Dixie National Forest partners gave presentation on native fishes.
 - Frontier Science School: Several ERWP partners gave presentations for students at the school.
- Volunteer Trips:
 - Two week-long trips were held – thanks to the Great Old Broads for Wilderness and Wilderness Volunteers.

- Volunteer Events:
 - Two revegetation events were held on private land in March and May to salvage willows and cottonwoods, and to plant native potted plants along the river as part of an NRCS Southwestern willow flycatcher initiative.
- ERWP sponsored 3 well-attended presentations/events open to the public.
- Increased ERWP presence at local community meetings:
 - Boulder City Council: Steve Cox is a council member.
 - Interagency meetings with County Commissioners: Terry DeLay attends monthly.
- Wide Hollow – New Escalante Irrigation Company (NEIC):

Several ERWP partners have been involved over the past year consulting with NEIC on sedimentation, storage capacity and other watershed protection issues as well as potential mitigation measures to address threats to the newly built Wide Hollow Reservoir. Members of NEIC were invited to give a presentation at the October ERWP meetings where they discussed issues related to beaver and solutions to on-going sediment problems.

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.escalantewatershed.org.
- Developed and distributed brochures and newsletters.
- Write-up in Utah Historical Society periodical.
- News articles about ERWP-related activities were published in:
 - Wayne and Garfield County *Insider*.
 - TNC's Newsletter: Basin Range & Rimrock.
 - Etched Magazine.
 - Colorado Plateau Biennial Proceedings.
 - NPS Insider (<http://inside.nps.gov/index.cfm?handler=viewnpsnewsarticle&type=Announcements&id=17632>)
 - Conservation Lands Foundation Blog (<http://conservationlands.org/artists-on-the-escalante>)
 - Walton Family Foundation Blog (<http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/stories/restoring-utah-escalante-river>)
 - University of Wisconsin Blog (<https://www.uwec.edu/news/news/biology-students-explore-help-protect-future-of-utah-watershed-551>)
- Outreach efforts
 - Increased number of public presentations including Escalante Chamber of Commerce.
 - Increase in engagement with local utilities, landowners, and public officials.
 - Outreach materials developed: Escalante plant guide, ERWP bumper stickers, ERWP coasters and cutting boards made of Russian olive.

Science & Conservation Targets Committee

Native Fish Update

- Warm water fish: DWR monitoring this past year revealed presence of all 3 warm water Conservation Agreement fish species, including Roundtail chub which had not been seen in the watershed since 2009!
- Cold water fish: As of 2015, 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 6 drainage locations.
 - Continuous temperature monitoring was conducted on 9 stream locations.
 - Bank stability, cover and stream width assessments were conducted at 11 sites.

Water Quality

- Citizen Science Utah Water Watch: ERWP joined forces with Utah State University to launch a volunteer-based water quality monitoring program in the Escalante watershed. Ten volunteers and four ERWP partners attended the training in early October conducted by USU, and 13 sites located on public lands in the watershed were selected to be monitored over the next several months. Data will be stored in a statewide database and available for public use (www.usu.edu).

Dixie National Forest

- Ongoing efforts to address fuels reduction and aspen promotion took place in several locations on the Forest this past year. Including the 1,500 acre Mitchell Spring Vegetation Improvement project planned for 2016 in Main Canyon west of Escalante. Natural succession is taking place in aspen forests due to its being a short-lived species.
- Within the Escalante watershed, 83 miles were repaired, improved and maintained to minimize erosion and to keep users on the roads.

Hydrology

- Monitoring (USFS):
 - Summertime stream temperature on 9 streams.
 - Water stage on 4 streams.
 - Multiple Indicator Monitoring (streambank stability, bank alterations, and greenline to greenline width) on 10 streams.
- Surveys:
 - An additional 40 groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs) were surveyed on National Forest System lands bringing the total GDEs surveyed to 85 with the following results:
 - 59 GDE's (hillslope type) showed no hydrologic alterations.
 - 5 GDE's (hillslope/helorene) showed no soil alterations.
 - Completed geomorphic surveys on 5 streams.
- Springs and Seeps (NPS):
 - \$30,000 in funding was secured to conduct a 2-year survey and characterization of springs and seeps in the Escalante basin.

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.

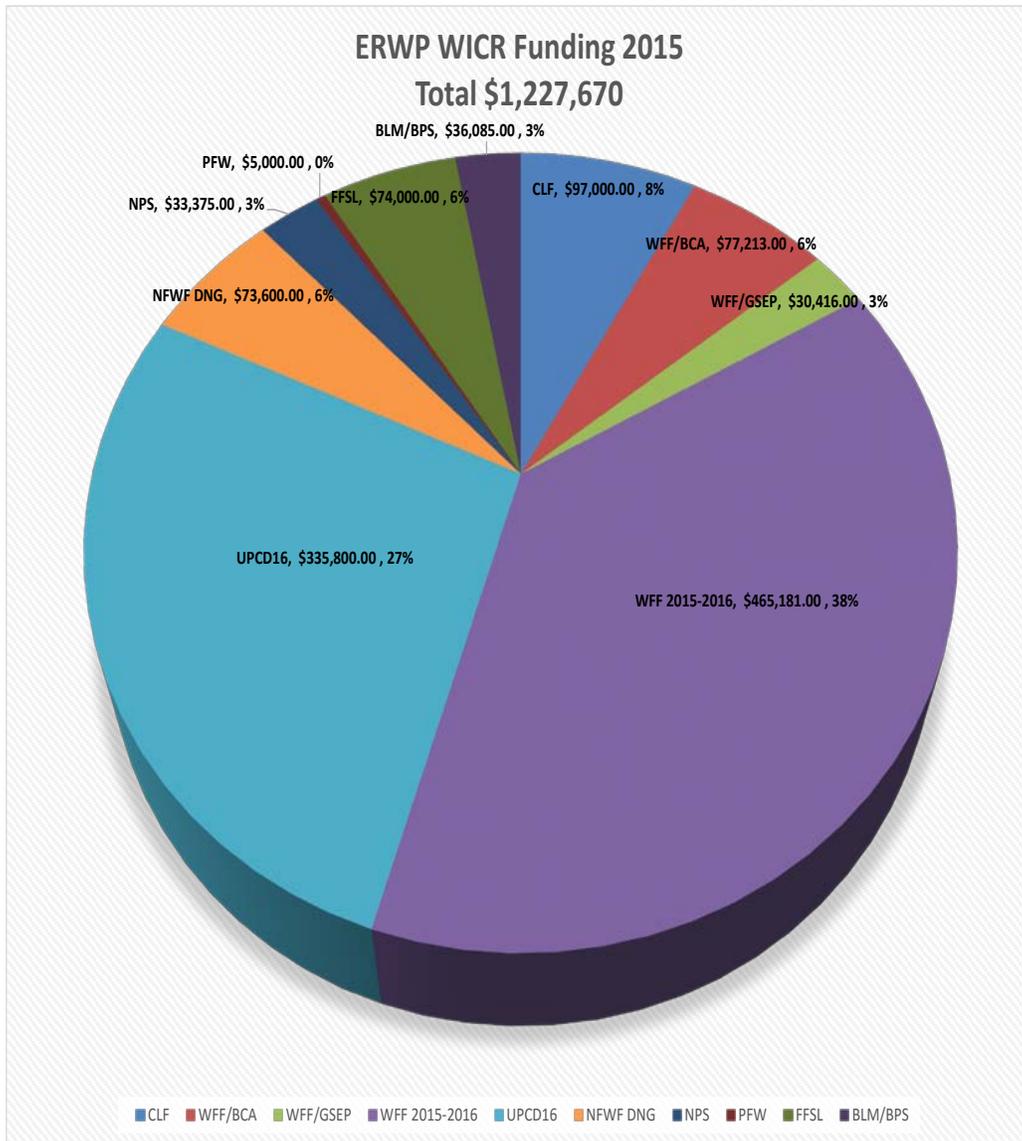
- **Headwaters Demo Site:**
 - Continued recording of water table measurements from piezometers.
 - Established preliminary photo points for monitoring of ERWP exclosure.
Note: It has become clear that, since the installation of the piezometers, this area has been geomorphologically and hydrologically compromised by past attempts at dam building and alteration of the river channel. It is not, therefore, the best example of natural hydrologic conditions.
- **Legacy Cottonwoods (pre-1930's trees):** A second year of mapping for geographic distribution and abundance using newly developed protocols was completed in 2015. Data will be analyzed and presented later in 2016.
- **South Hollow:**
 - Dennis Bramble continued monitoring of prospective reference site including: repeat photography, new plant identification, and tours for interested visitors. A series of vegetation transects were also re-read 5 years after their establishment. New this past year is the installation of an automated weather station as well as a water-level data logger to monitor ground water dynamics at the lower end of the South Hollow. Dennis hopes to make this site a model for future reference area sites.
- **Reference Areas:** This subgroup has made much progress in 2015 including:
 - Identified major vegetation types for which they would like to see example reference areas.
 - Developed criteria for working with reference areas (e.g., what kind of agreements are needed to balance least bureaucratic burden with maximum potential for long-term valid science research).
 - Will begin to develop a list of sites to nominate as reference areas on private lands.
- **Migratory Bird Survey**
 - Subcommittee formed to address bird survey needs in relations to massive Russian olive removal in bird habitat.
 - Russian olive treatments will be conducted after nesting season is over.
 - FWS bird survey data will be added to ERWP's database.

Russian olive invasion study:

- A study to understand the mechanisms for invasion of Russian olive in the Escalante Watershed completed a third year, and results will be presented to the partnership in late winter. A final report will be compiled and distributed to the partnership in spring of 2016.

Woody Invasive Control and Restoration Activities

Fundraising – Over \$1.2 million in public and private funds were raised in 2015 to accomplish Woody Invasive control in the Escalante watershed:



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

- Total acres treated – 378.
- Total acres retreated – 560.

Private Lands: (Boulder and Escalante)

- Total acres treated – 110.
- Total acres retreated – 378.
- Total acres actively restored – 62.

Long-term monitoring and rapid assessments

- Five rapid monitoring sites were established; new protocols are still being tested and refined.
- Ten long-term transects have now been established and are being monitored throughout the watershed.
- Data analysis is underway and will be reported to the partnership in late 2016.

Landowner Outreach:

- A comprehensive plan for Russian olive retreatment on private lands was undertaken in 2015 which included:
 - Assessment of all treated parcels for presence of Russian olive.
 - Development and distribution of educational tools (rack cards):
 - Recognizing Russian olive.
 - Controlling Russian olive seedlings on your Property.
 - Retreatment and Monitoring Form.
 - Retreatment options for landowners: training, no training, or participation in fee-for-service program.
- Landowner participation: private land restoration reached a high this year. Landowners built fences, broadcast seed, retreated sprouts, monitored and worked with removal crews to clear brush.
- A Fee-for-Service Program was implemented in Boulder area this past year. 22 landowners signed up!!!

Planning:

- The Woody Invasive Control and Restoration Plan has been updated and is available on the ERWP website. This newest edition of the plan includes new information, including defining areas for restoration planning, and inclusion of USFS and Alvey Wash acreage counts.

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 has undergone some dramatic improvements and the data are now available via Google drive for information and file sharing. Google map of watershed (overflight) is now available on ERWP website: (<http://gsenm.org/erwp-interactive-maps/>).