

Taming Tamarisk in New Mexico



The Southwestern willow flycatcher was placed on the federal endangered species list in 1995.



he Rio Grande valley is one of the most storied places in America. Nestled at the river's edge is Taos, New Mexico, a community with a love for the land that stretches back to the time of ancient pueblos. Residents live in concert with nature and do their best to protect both the valley's heritage and its future through best management practices.



Tamarisk shrubs crowd out native willows and cottonwoods, the preferred habitat for endangered birds and other wildlife.

Challenge:

As in much of the Southwest, tamarisk, also known as saltcedar, has invaded the riparian areas along the Rio Grande near Taos. This greedy invasive shrub absorbs hundreds of gallons of water each year from a river basin already facing a dwindling water supply. It also crowds out other plants that provide native habitat for birds and animals.

Controlling tamarisk in this area is complicated. A small endangered bird species, the Southwestern willow flycatcher, relies on dense shrubs along the river for nesting and forage. In the past few decades, over 90 percent of the bird's habitat has been destroyed. Treating tamarisk within flycatcher habitat requires careful consideration of breeding and nesting needs, accomplished through treatments outside the April-September breeding season and developing alternative habitat. In addition, developing positive working relationships with the public enhanced the collaborative process.

Solution:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is conducting research and implementation on five miles of shoreline near Taos. The research will identify the control methods best suited for tamarisk and other invasive plants by using Integrated Pest Management techniques.

The BLM engages community members of all ages in control projects and raising awareness of riparian ecosystem function and the threat to the flycatcher's habitat. In addition, research will identify uses for tamarisk biomass and will encourage concerned citizens to reach across boundaries between public citizenships.

Result:

It is estimated that more than 60 acres of land along the Rio Grande near Taos can be restored to native plants, restoring additional water flow and expanding the safe zone for the Southwestern willow flycatcher. Research projects will pinpoint the most efficient and economical ways to control tamarisk and other invasive shrubs, while minimizing the impact on the flycatcher. Where native shrubs are likely to gain a firm foothold after treatment, tamarisk will be eradicated and restoration work completed. The BLM estimates that more than 100 volunteers from across the community will participate in eradication and education programs in the coming year.

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Learn More:

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