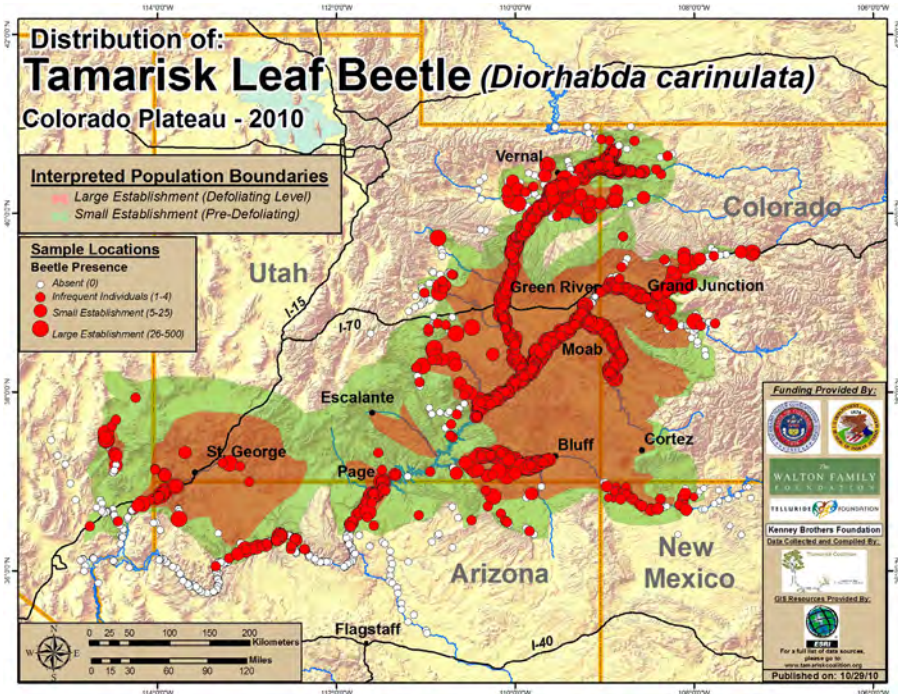


Tamarisk and Russian Olive in Grand & San Juan Counties

Throughout the West, tamarisk and Russian olive have changed the face of our rivers and riparian areas. Civic leaders, government agencies, and local conservation and community organizations agree these invasive plants are one of the most pressing threats to our natural resources. Both Grand and San Juan Counties have listed tamarisk and Russian olive as noxious weeds.

“As responsible community members, it’s important to us to manage our property in a way that benefits--not damages--our local natural resources. By removing Russian olive and tamarisk, we not only enhanced our own property and reduced our risk of wildfire, but we also made a contribution to the health of our wildlife and the success of our entire watershed.”

*Bill and Katie Stevens
Landowners, Grand County, Utah*



Nesting Great Blue Heron. Along the Colorado River, these birds rely on healthy cottonwood trees for nesting. Photo © Alan Eckert Photography.

Tamarisk Beetle

In 2004 a biological control, the tamarisk leaf beetle (*Diorhabda* spp.), was introduced along the Colorado River near Moab to reduce stands of tamarisk and help restore native cottonwoods and willows. The larva of the beetle feeds upon the foliage of the tamarisk plant, reducing chlorophyll production and photosynthesis, which reduces the food made by the plant. This process weakens and can kill the plant over time. Experts don't expect the beetle to eliminate tamarisk, but they do hope it will significantly reduce the number of tamarisk trees, giving native vegetation a better chance to flourish.

By 2009 the beetles had covered an area of about 20 million acres in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada. Now for much of the summer, tamarisk trees affected by the beetle are defoliated and appear dead, possibly increasing fire danger during peak tourist season. Urgency is growing to remove the dead and dying tamarisk in key locations and restore more appropriate native vegetation. Government and local organizations are now conducting more biomass removal projects to reduce fire hazards and protect campgrounds, homes, and areas of native vegetation that are not fire tolerant.

As the tamarisk declines due to beetle activity, other woody invasives such as Russian olives are now poised to move in. New vigilance and additional funding for restoration projects are needed to ensure that we capitalize on the impact of the tamarisk leaf beetle and keep our rivers free from all invasives.

Why Should Our County Care?

Southeast Utah Tamarisk Partnership

Here in southeastern Utah, all of us are affected by the spread of these non-native plants. Our recreation activities on the Colorado River and its tributaries are hampered by waterways and canyons choked with both tamarisk and Russian olives. Our towns and campgrounds face increased fire danger from the fuel loads of these invaders. The wildlife we watch and enjoy loses quality habitat as these plants spread. Perhaps most important, our county is now home to the tamarisk leaf beetle, and there is a growing need to remove trees impacted by the beetle and restore cottonwoods and willows for the benefit of people and wildlife.

In March 2006 a partnership was formed to coordinate riparian restoration efforts along the Colorado River and its tributaries. The Southeast Utah Tamarisk Partnership (SEUTP) is composed of local, state and federal agencies, businesses, non-profit organizations and individuals committed to restoring, protecting and maintaining a healthy riparian ecosystem in southeastern Utah's Colorado River watershed. The Partnership completed a Woody Invasives Management Plan to tackle tamarisk and other riparian invasives. Over twenty agencies, organizations and individuals have signed on to this plan (see below).



Rafters on the Colorado. Photo © Tim Higgs

Partners

- Grand County
- San Juan County
- National Park Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- Utah Department of Transportation
- Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
- Utah Division of Forestry Fire and State Lands
- Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration
- Grand Canyon Trust
- The Nature Conservancy
- Tamarisk Coalition
- Rim to Rim Restoration
- Red Rock Forests
- Plateau Restoration
- Living Rivers
- Utah State University Extension
- Castleland Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc.

- Canyon Voyages
- City of Moab
- Town of Castle Valley
- Red River Canoe Company
- Jennifer Speers

Contact Information

If you're a private landowner in southeastern Utah and are interested in restoration work or joining the Southeast Utah Tamarisk Partnership, please contact one of the following officers:

SEUTP Co-Chairs:

- Sue Bellagamba, The Nature Conservancy
435-259-2551 or sbellagamba@tnc.org
- Kara Dohrenwend, Rim to Rim Restoration
435-259-6670 or kara@reveg.org