Partnerships Along the Fourmile Watershed: An Upstream Battle

By Jana Gregg and J.R. Phillips

Weed management often feels like an upstream battle. And, often times, it is!

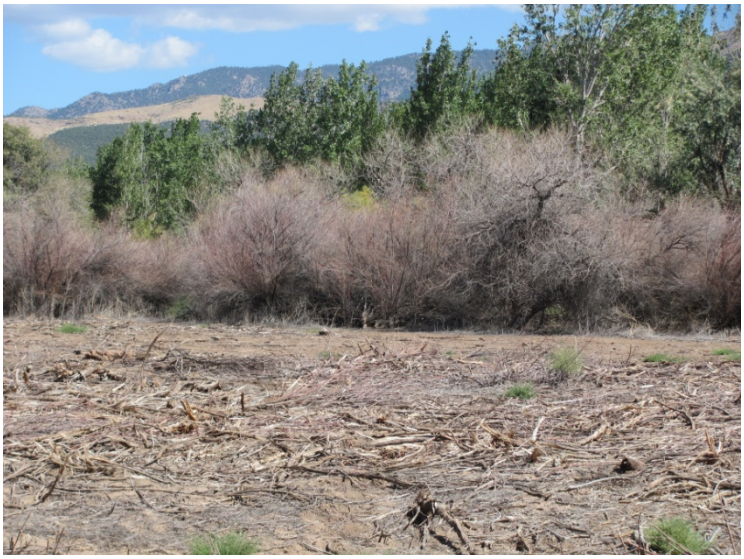
The Upper Arkansas Cooperative Weed Management Area (UACWMA) believes that working within the framework of extensive partnerships allows for successful weed management on a watershed basis. UACWMA is the largest weed management area in the state and involves multiple weed management partners including nine contiguous counties, multiple state and federal agencies, conservation districts, and landowners.

The benefit to a "watershed approach" is that an entire area of neighboring properties can be treated simultaneously. This reduces potential encroachment of neighboring weed infestations and minimizes treatment costs, particularly when utilizing aerial sprayers or hydro-axe equipment. In addition, management on a watershed scale allows for customization in management methods based on specific sites and landowner needs. Ultimately, this approach reaps successful weed control on a large scale.

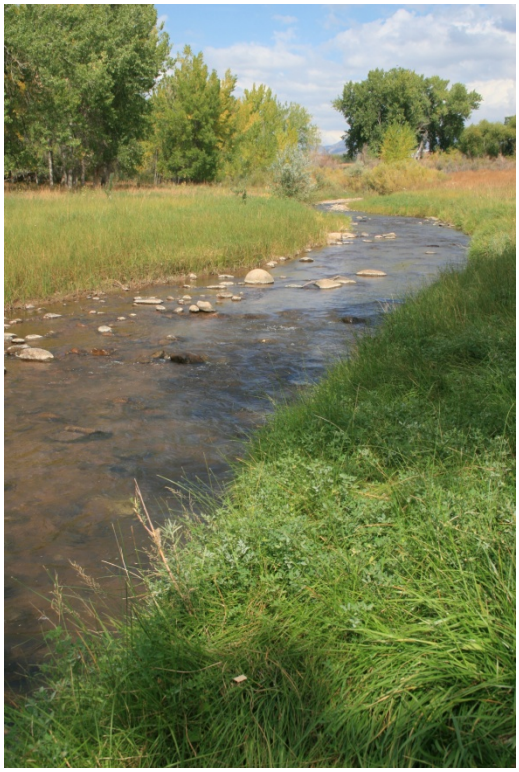
A recent and ongoing example of this watershed approach occurs on Fourmile Creek in Cañon City, CO. UACWMA partners along with landowners, worked collaboratively to fund a four-year program for tamarisk and Russian olive control as well as management of secondary invaders. UACWMA partnerships were utilized to pursue funding sources, recruit landowner participation, and coordinate various integrated weed management practices for the Fourmile watershed project.

Fremont County Weed Control (including J.R. Phillips, Jana Gregg, and Tom Grette) works closely with NRCS representatives (Rick Romano and Melanie Scavarda) Fremont Conservation District Manager, Janet Barnhart, to develop plans and funding scenarios. Sangre de Cristo RC&D is essential to project planning; Jane Wustrow, Coordinator, and Mike Stiehl, President (who also serves as Fremont County Commissioner), have been instrumental in providing the administration and coordination for this four-year watershed project. Colorado State University grad-students have conducted a number of research plots in the area involving various herbicide treatments, aerial applications, and mechanical methods. Most importantly, landowners have collaborated, contributed funding and labor, and even hosted related weed tours and events on their properties.

Historically, the project involved field operations to control tamarisk and Russian olive species. The second and third years have included management strategies by local qualified supervisors to address secondary species. Integrated pest management methods include mechanical removal, herbicide applications, aerial applications, and biological controls. Some sites include the incorporation of research plots to test the various management strategies. This third year of the project will include reclamation and reseeding of previously treated areas. Natural restoration of native species is already apparent on project sites. In the final stages of the project, agency involvement will lessen and management will transition back to the primary care of the landowners. The end result is an entire watershed area under noxious weed management and on its way to restoration.



In the background, evidence of aerial application of Habitat herbicide is seen, followed by Hydro-axe work in the foreground.



Fourmile Creek showing natural restoration of native species.