



Fall 2023 Meeting
Thursday, November 16, 2023
2:00- 4:00 PM
Timberline Bank Community Room
649 Market St, Grand Junction, CO 81505

Meeting Notes

Objectives:

- Introduce RiversEdge West's Private Lands Biologist
- Develop understanding of habitat use of Yellow-billed Cuckoo
- Discuss site stewardship model for revegetation projects
- Provide update on DRC Restoration Plan and MOU
- Coordinate upcoming projects
- Identify future funding opportunities
- Facilitate data sharing amongst partners

2:00 Introductions and Agenda

In attendance:

REW Staff: Joe Leonhard, Shannon Wadas, Christa Brown, Nicole Cook, Kate Hampson

Pete Firmin, Ivan Archer (CPW), Adam Petry (Western Biology), Matt Lambky, Kyle Alstatt (BOR), Dave Thornton, Trent Prall, Rob Davis (City of GJ), Jake Hartter (Terra Firma Land Stewardship), Christine Prins (BLM), Kamie Long (CSFS) Ross Mittelman, Ryan Surad (Mesa County), Lauren Swartz (Western Slope Conservation Center), David Varner (CWLT), Jeff Pieper (CSU extension), Whit Blair (USFWS), Alex Nees (SGM)

2:10 Yellow-billed Cuckoo habitat use presentation and Q&A (Adam Petry, Western Biology)

- 2022 did a large survey across the state through a competitive state grant – first synchronized effort across the range
- Occupancy areas: Yampa, North Fork of the Gunnison, San Luis Valley- Conejos
 - North Fork as been sited since 2008, confirmed nest in 2008
- Habitat tends to be mixed native/exotic, dense midstory often in the form of Russian olive

- River dynamism
- One of the latest migrating birds in North America
- Fastest breeding birth in North America
- Survey visits are every 14 days to try and avoid missing a breeding cycle
- 2022 results:
 - 52 survey sites
 - 2597 call points
 - 27 cuckoos
 - 23 project related cuckoos
- Found habitat outside of the riparian habitat in massive (up to 45 feet tall) Russian olives on agricultural land
- Exotic agricultural land- sites were up to 50 acres
- Foliage gives a nice microclimate
- 80% of cuckoo detections are by sound detection only
- Russian olive literature is lacking in western Colorado
- August 2023 found a nest in Russian olive
 - Thick willows with large insects that the bird prefers
 - Cottonwood interspersed
 - Lots of grasshoppers
- Evolution in cuckoo understanding:
 - Not just a riparian bird
 - Areas that are impacted by monsoonal rain
 - Soil saturation is variable
 - Habitat is commonly Russian olive dominant with the proximity of willows
 - Nests have typically been 13 feet up in Russian olives
 - Concentrated use on breeding grounds, not necessarily needing 12 acres (more in the 3-5 acre range)
 - Predators – Cooper’s Hawk (don’t like Russian olive)
 - Biggest limiting factor is prey based
- Structure over species is the concern – only confirmed nest substrate is Russian olive
- Successional element to think about with dying cottonwoods
- Conservation measures:
 - Avoid earth disturbance within suitable or critical habitat (June 1st – August 31st) overlaps with migratory bird season
 - Avoid an increase in noise levels above ambient conditions within .5 miles of suitable habitat during breeding season
 - 2023 nest started on August 6th, fledged on August 23th and 24th, September 20th was last confirmed fledging was detected
- Restoration outcomes:
 - Think about successional habitat
 - Planting can be more important than removal
 - NRCS has brush management guidelines
 - Aim for over 75% canopy cover
 - Potted samplings over pole plantings

- Removal:
 - Slow phase, remove and replace over multiple years
 - As tamarisk density increases population decreases, not true with Russian olive
 - Chose sites that are small, less than 5 acres, canopy cover less than 25% , smaller Russian olive, less than 50% treatment in a year
 - NRCS Brush Management Guidelines 314 (interim and local)
- If you think you hear a cuckoo, let Adam know! , take a video recording with location services on and send to info@westernbiology.com

Questions:

- How far away from riparian habitat where birds found – over a kilometer from the closest river
 - Nucla area has been one of the top 5 detection habitats, Rogers Mesa, areas around Cedardge,
 - Pseudo-riparian is a term to describe the novel habitat
- With slow growing midstory plants – what would the actual phase out approach be?
 - Have noticed some cuckoos in native broad leaf habitat, but native tends to lack a midstory, have not found cuckoos to breed in areas with a lack of midstory
 - Fidelity to their sites – clearcutting is not a great option
- How to balance public safety and fuels mitigation with suitable habitat? Fire breaks and continuity of fuels.
 - Plantings as an offset (planting positive)
- What interactions do elm trees have?
 - Cuckoos are opportunists
 - There is a larger elm component on the North Fork
- City of Grand Junction is trying to leave anything >8-inch diameter in size
- How do you feel about the Russian olive on the noxious weed list in CO?
 - Where do you draw that line?
 - So many species utilize the Russian olive as a food resource
 - Be very concerted about successful replacement when removal is occurring
 - Would like to see a project that models quantifying removal vs new establishment
- USFWS – understanding of why regulations exist
 - Encouraging surveys but understand not always feasible
 - Site visits would be an option
 - 5 acres would be a best management practice- case by case though

2:50 REW/City of Grand Junction site stewardship collaboration and resources (Joe Leonhard, RiversEdge West and Rob Davis, City of Grand Junction)

- REW has a great group of volunteers that want something to do
- Way to support our partners
- Open space with 1300 acers
- Start small and possibly try out on other areas

3:00 Project updates

- CPW – found a nursery out of Loveland who will do deep potted plants (28-inch pots)
 - Have far more success with deep potted plants
 - Timeline: started growing now, will be ready in fall of 2024
 - CPW bought the pots
 - <https://one-canopy.com/>
 - What is a realistic expectation for heavy watering early on?
 - City of GJ prioritizing xeric species
 - Look for sites closer to the water table
 - Land Trust has had luck with Wildscapes in Moab- but must have the order a year in advance

3:20 Possible funding opportunities (Shannon Wadas, RiversEdge West)

- See follow up links

3:30 Monitoring reports and recording treatment areas (Joe Leonhard, RiversEdge West)

- Can we do a happy hour to gather data
- Mesa County Trail crew:
 - Winter is open, Dec, Jan, Feb
 - Summer is booked with the USFS
 - Spring has been busy with restoration work

3:50 DRC Memorandum of Understanding and DRC Restoration Plan updates (Joe Leonhard, RiversEdge West)

- Looking for a subcommittee

4:00 Adjourn