

RIVERSEDGE WEST *annual report*



RiversEdge West

22 YEARS OF

river restoration & stewardship

Photo by Bob Wick

2023

2023 Impact

\$924,210

RAISED FOR RESTORATION
& RIVER EDUCATION

827

YOUTH & ADULTS
EDUCATED

362

RIVER RESTORATION
PROFESSIONALS EDUCATED

635

ACRES OF RESTORATION
CONDUCTED

619

PLANTS PLANTED

2,902

ACRES MONITORED

10

VOLUNTEER
EVENTS HOSTED

141

VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED

51

JOBS SUPPORTED



A note from Rusty & Don

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Join us as we reflect on highlights from the past year; another year of progress, challenges, and achievements in our mission to restore and sustain healthy riparian (riverside) ecosystems in the West. Despite the challenges our rivers are facing, our commitment to stewardship and community engagement has remained constant. Our dedication to conserving riparian landscapes and fostering collaboration has pushed us forward, enabling us to make significant strides in our restoration efforts.

In 2023, we achieved several important milestones, including:

- **Expanding Restoration on Public and Private Lands:** We sustained and expanded our restoration projects across five river systems and with numerous private landowners in CO and UT, covering thousands of acres of riparian habitat. We helped create a shallow water wetland on private property, and took steps to formalize a restoration partnership along the Uncompahgre River in Western CO.
- **Engaging Youth and Community:** Through volunteer events, classroom programming, community events like the Grand Valley River Fest and Raft the River, and 4-day Wellspring Project, we cultivated a deeper connection to rivers and our natural environment among volunteers, local residents and youth.
- **Leading Restoration Collaboratives:** Continuing to lead and support numerous restoration partnerships allowed us to forge strategic partnerships with government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and landowners. Through shared expertise and resources, we leveraged our collective impact, increasing the effectiveness of our restoration projects.
- **Building Organizational Infrastructure:** In partnership with other local non-profits, we founded the Confluence Center of Colorado. The Confluence Center is a capital building project that will serve as the long-term home for RiversEdge West. Once built, the Center will bring together mission-focused, nonpolitical organizations working at the confluence of land and water science, education, recreation, agriculture, and stewardship.

We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to you - our supporters, partners, and stakeholders for your invaluable contributions to this work! Without your unwavering support, our accomplishments would not have been possible. Together, we continue towards a sustainable future for our rivers and communities; **thank you.**

As we move forward, RiversEdge West remains steadfast in our commitment to advancing riparian restoration for the benefit of our rivers and communities that depend on them. In 2024, we will build upon the momentum of our past achievements and explore new paths for innovation and collaboration. Thank you again to all who have contributed to RiversEdge West's success in 2023. Stay safe and enjoy those rivers!

Sincerely,



Rusty Lloyd, Executive Director



Don Schuster, Board President



2023 at-a-glance

Last year, we built upon our successes and saw our positive impact on rivers grow. Below are a few highlights:



REW/WCCC Monitoring Intern, Cassidy, collecting data in McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area.



Students Audrey, Kaylah, and Nayo learning about & connecting with rivers during REW's Wellspring Project.



Planting for the Future Workshop attendees learning from Kyle Faig about water flow regime, invasive vegetation control, and discuss future restoration efforts.



A private landowner collaborated with REW to create a shallow water wetland on their property. The wetland supports diverse plant communities, providing abundant food resources for migratory waterfowl and sandhill cranes.



REW volunteers, Sandra and Gordon, planting native plants to ensure long-term ecological health at existing restoration sites.



Heavy equipment working on initial tamarisk removal along the Dolores River near Bedrock.

Engaging kids and young adults in our RIVER EDUCATION PROGRAM

In 2023, REW continued to expand our education program, hosting The Wellspring Project for middle schoolers, Raft the River for community members, and sponsoring capstone projects for Colorado Mesa University students.

The Wellspring Project engaged 13 students from 9 different middle schools in a free, river and art-centric, summer program. Students learned about the complexities of the Colorado River and water in the West through artistic expression, as well as field trips and presentations with local stakeholders. Field trips included a tour of a sustainable farm, a tour of a water treatment plant, aquatic macroinvertebrate sampling, a visit to a fish hatchery where they learned about endangered fish of the Colorado River, and more.

Throughout the week, students collected trash from riverside parks in Mesa County and repurposed this trash to create a collaborative sculpture inspired by the Colorado River. The week culminated with a rafting trip down the Colorado River, where

students got to experience the water source they learned about first-hand!

For its Annual Raft the River float trip, REW hosted over 50 community members, providing them with the opportunity to learn more about riparian restoration from REW staff and board members while floating down the Colorado River.

REW also sponsored two capstone projects for Colorado Mesa University students. One group sampled aquatic macroinvertebrate communities in Horsethief Canyon State Wildlife Area (HCSWA). They provided valuable data about which methods work best for sampling, baseline data on which macroinvertebrates are present in HCSWA, and future recommendations for studies on the impacts of mosquito control treatments on macroinvertebrates. The second group assessed the potential for process-based restoration techniques along the Little Dolores River. They developed restoration plans with suggestions for invasive plant removal, monitoring, and the installation of beaver dam analogs.



Photo: CMU student Holly Stanley with a kick net sample full of aquatic macroinvertebrates.



Photo: Wellspring students enjoy a rafting trip down the Colorado River!

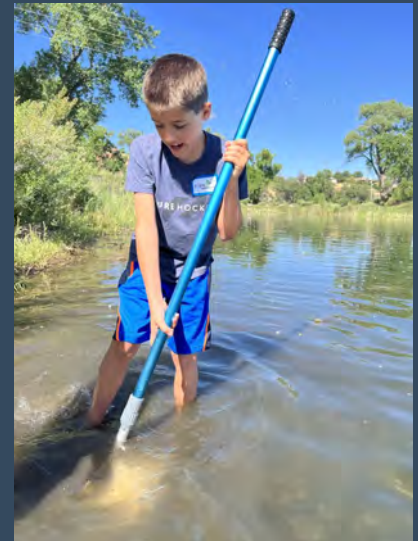


Photo: Wellspring student, Kyden, samples aquatic macroinvertebrates at Connected Lakes State Park.

Engaging the community in **RIVER STEWARDSHIP**

In 2023, REW partnered with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the City of Grand Junction to lead monthly volunteer events from April through October.

Over 140 volunteers joined us to improve wildlife habitat and enhance access to river recreation areas. Together we removed countless invasive plants like Russian olive, kochia, and pampas grass, planted 394 native plants, and provided 282 volunteer hours towards keeping our parks and riverside areas beautiful!

Our stewardship program engages the local community in restoration work, serves as a hands-on educational opportunity, and helps us maintain restoration sites ensuring their long-term success.



"My volunteering experience with RiversEdge West these past two years has been truly transformative. Working alongside dedicated individuals, I had the opportunity to contribute to the restoration and preservation of our precious river ecosystems. From planting native vegetation to clearing invasive plant species, I felt a deep sense of purpose in helping to protect our natural heritage.

This experience not only enriched my understanding of environmental conservation but also connected me with a community of like-minded individuals who share a passion for the well-being of our rivers and the environment. Volunteering with RiversEdge West was a rewarding and inspiring journey that left a lasting impact on me."

-Stefanie Von Flue, RiversEdge West Volunteer



Photo: REW's Education and Outreach Coordinator, Nicole, loads up plants for a volunteer planting event.



Photo: REW Volunteer, Susan, removing invasive kochia at Connected Lakes State Park.



Photo: Connie and Michael planting cottonwood trees at Fruita State Park.



Photo: Niki getting ready to plant native plants at Fruita State Park.

DESERT RIVERS COLLABORATIVE

Restoring habitat along the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers

RiversEdge West (REW) formed the Desert Rivers Collaborative (DRC) in 2012 to cooperatively protect, restore and maintain native riparian habitat in Mesa and Delta Counties.

The partnership comprises over 20 non-profits, federal and state agencies, and local government stakeholders. Using funds provided by REW, DRC partners worked collaboratively to remove invasive vegetation to improve wildlife habitat and reduce wildfire risk.

In 2023, this funding financed a two-person strike team that removed invasive vegetation regrowth throughout the Grand Valley over a 16-week period.

Additionally, REW partnered with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to create a Restoration Coordinator position to plan and implement riparian restoration projects in McInnis Canyons and Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Areas. The Restoration Coordinator was frequently in the field in 2023, gaining access to remote sites in the National Conservation Areas (NCAs), and making note of access challenges while recording vegetation conditions.

RiversEdge West created a monitoring team, in partnership with Western Colorado Conservation Corps (WCCC) to monitor restoration sites every other year on federal, state, local and private lands. REW uses this monitoring data to inform

restoration priorities for the following year and coordinate with partners to fundraise for this work.

In 2023, the WCCC Monitoring Interns recorded vegetation cover and mapped invasive species on over 2,000 acres of riparian habitat; from neighborhood parks to wilderness areas.

Monitoring data was compiled by REW and shared with our DRC partners. This data is being used to inform future vegetation management and will be part of the long-term monitoring database that will enable land managers to identify vegetation trends over time. The Monitoring Interns produced an amazing report that can be found at <https://arcg.is/1yfDyG>.



Photo: REW/WCCC Strike Team chipping tamarisk and Russian olive removed from a CPW site along the Colorado River in Grand Junction.



Photos: REW Restoration Coordinator kayaking to access restoration sites along the Gunnison River in Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area.

DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Maintaining restoration on the Dolores River

RiversEdge West and Conservation Legacy's Southwest Conservation Corps have co-lead the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) since 2009. This long-standing partnership is committed to restoring riparian habitat along 200 miles of the Dolores River in Colorado and Utah through collaboration with many diverse stakeholders.

It was a busy year along the Dolores River! In 2023, an initial 18 acres of tamarisk were removed in the Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area near Bedrock. This project had been a long time in the making and was a critical piece in

restoring habitat along this section of river that required additional planning and collaboration with federal partners.

An eight-person conservation corps saw crew completed two weeks of restoration work and a three-person strike team crew completed nine months of work, in addition to various contractors who contributed to the continued restoration of habitat along the Dolores River.

In total, 190 acres of tamarisk and 230 acres of secondary weeds were treated. Volunteers assisted with a planting event near the confluence

with the San Miguel, planting 95 plants along eight acres of revegetated land. The ongoing monitoring of these lands is equally important for future planning and a two-person monitoring crew monitored 852.09 acres over a 10-week period in June and July.

Looking ahead, RiversEdge West is excited to work on an updated restoration plan for the DRRP, identifying goals and objectives for the next three years to continue improving the health of the Dolores River.



Photo: The Southwest Conservation Corps monitoring crew floated through difficult to access stretches of the Dolores River in Mesa County to conduct vegetation monitoring.

PARTNERING ON THE UNCOMPAGHGRE

Beginning restoration on the Uncompahgre River

RiversEdge West is leading an initiative to formalize a partnership along the Uncompahgre River that began in 2022. Initiating this partnership on the Uncompahgre River is important to our goals at REW in prioritizing riparian health within the entire watershed of Western Colorado.

In 2023, REW was successful in securing funding from the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the Colorado River District to complete an initial restoration project within the City of Montrose.

This project involved collaboration with the City of Montrose, conservation corps, Friends of the River Uncompahgre volunteer group

and other local partners to work on removing invasive tamarisk and Russian olive trees and planting native trees and shrubs.

Ecologically, this work has been important for the City of Montrose to improve the health of the river and wildlife habitat throughout an urban environment. It is also important socially and economically due to the abundant outdoor recreational activities along the river corridor.

REW will continue to pursue additional funding in the future geared towards planning and formalizing a partnership and working on a longer-term restoration plan for the Uncompahgre River.



Photos above: Volunteers with Friends of the River Uncompahgre plant native trees and shrubs, working to restore an important riparian area.

Photo: Western Colorado Conservation Corps crew working on Russian olive removal along the Uncompahgre River in the City of Montrose.

WHITE RIVER PARTNERSHIP

Restoring the White River

RiversEdge West has been leading the White River Partnership (WRP) since forming it in 2019.

WRP partners are committed to restoring and maintaining healthy riparian areas along the White River in northwest Colorado and northeast Utah through collaboration among public, private, and nonprofit entities.

In 2023, 90 acres of invasive tamarisk and Russian olive were treated along the main stem of the White River and Yellow Creek, an important tributary of the White River. Fifteen acres along Yellow Creek were revegetated with native plants. REW hosted a Tamarisk Beetle Herding Workshop in Rangely, Colorado, as part of the 2023 Workshop Series that was attended by partners from

across the White River watershed. REW staff also supported a process-based restoration workshop by coordinating the site visit and serving on a panel about riparian vegetation.

Moving into 2024, REW and WRP partners will continue to restore riparian habitat to benefit native fish, wildlife habitat, and agricultural use in the White River watershed.



Photo: Western Colorado Conservation Corps crew meeting with Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and RiversEdge West staff at a restoration site along the White River.



Photo: White River Partnership partners in the field during the Rangely Tamarisk Beetle Workshop.



Photos above: Removal of Russian olive on public land along the White River improves river access for public land users and river rafters. In this photo, Russian olive infestations had reduced the visibility of a public lands sign.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PLANNING

in Mesa County

As economic growth and development continues in the Grand Valley, coupled with chronic and potentially worsening environmental stressors such as drought and fire, it is imperative to have a concerted effort in sustainable planning to ensure that the river corridor is managed to support its diverse values.

REW co-leads the River Corridor Initiative; a community-driven initiative focused on supporting and maintaining a healthy river corridor and the associated needs, uses, and values for generations to come.

THE GRAND VALLEY RIVER CORRIDOR INITIATIVE

2023 Update

The Grand Valley's River Corridor extends from De Beque, Colorado to the Utah state line; it also encompasses the Gunnison River from Bridgeport to the confluence with the Colorado River. The river corridor is the lifeblood of the community and is a vital economic, cultural, and ecological resource that supports the Grand Valley's wellbeing and prosperity.

Given the diverse values supported by the river, the River Corridor Initiative (RCI) was formed in 2020 to address the acute need for enhanced coordination, planning,

and collaboration on river corridor related activities. It is led by a Core Team with representatives from RiversEdge West, Colorado Mesa University, and American Rivers. An Advisory Council comprised of a diverse set of stakeholders meets quarterly to advise on current objectives and processes.

Since 2020, the RCI has had some exciting achievements. The Fluvial Hazard Zone, the area of land that rivers may occupy and influence, was mapped. Additionally, various stakeholder engagement workshops were conducted to identify common

goals and challenges.

In 2023, funding was secured to assess how fluctuating water flows affect river users, in addition to a workshop series geared toward the potential development of a framework among local governments for inter-jurisdictional river corridor planning and management. These two projects will continue into 2024 in addition to a riparian and floodplain health assessment to identify conservation and restoration opportunities.

Restoring PRIVATE LANDS

In partnership with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), RiversEdge West's Private Lands Biologist (PLB) cultivates relationships with private landowners in Mesa County.

The PLB supports private landowners interested in restoration projects on their property. Extensive planning ensures that the landowner's goals and the best restoration outcomes for impacted wildlife are met. Well-designed restoration plans are vital

for securing appropriate funding for each project. Through the partnership between REW and NRCS, restoration projects on private lands are supported by each organization's unique funding sources.

The PLB's focused approach and dedication to each project's outcomes guides the landowner to partnerships and organizations that can aid in each project's success. Detailed communication is vital in finding contractors to address

environmental concerns and to complete the necessary restoration tasks on each landowner's property.

We prioritize projects that enhance riparian habitat and wildlife corridors in our community. Our PLB works to connect with new landowners and to host workshops to spread awareness of why these projects are important, what the planning process involves and to get new projects off the ground.



LANDOWNER SPOTLIGHT: *Steve Bittle*

Since 2020, Steve Bittle, avid land steward and landowner on the Western Slope, has had a vision to create a wetland on his property to support the conservation of native species and to develop waterfowl hunting opportunities.

Steve began working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through their incentive program to realize this vision and in 2022, connected with RiversEdge West. REW's Private Lands Biologist (PLB), a partner position with the NRCS, worked closely with the Bittle Family and brought in various partners, to assess the ideal location and design for a wetland on the property.

The PLB worked with the Bittle Family, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Ducks Unlimited to develop a plan for a 3.75-acre seasonal shallow water wetland. The goal of the Bittle Wetland project was to provide foraging and migration habitat for dabbling ducks and greater sandhill cranes during their migration and to enhance nearby waterfowl hunting opportunities. Through partnership with REW and Ducks Unlimited, Steve

Bittle's vision for a functioning seasonal wetland was able to come to fruition. After extensive earthwork, construction of the wetland was completed in March 2023. The wetlands were filled for the first time in September 2023 and have already seen an influx of waterfowl species.

Steve Bittle has worked hard to establish the vegetation and water flow cycle to ensure the success of this riparian area for wildlife. The wetland uses prescribed flooding and drawdowns to support diverse plant communities of grasses, forbs, and sedges, providing abundant food resources for migratory waterfowl and sandhill cranes. The Bittle family has been thrilled to see waterfowl begin to utilize the wetland.

This project marks REW's first shallow water wetland project on private lands in the Grand Valley! Going forward, the Bittle Family will maintain and manage the wetland, staying connected with REW's PLB as the project moves into its next phase. Private landowners like Steve Bittle and his family play a vital role in the development and conservation of riparian and wetland habitat.

RiversEdge West is excited to continue to partner with the NRCS, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Ducks Unlimited to identify and fundraise for additional wetland enhancement or creation projects that will benefit the overall habitat quality of riparian areas along the Colorado River corridor.



"I've been very happy with the waterfowl use and that has really been the success of this project...The movement of this project once REW stepped in was fast and great. I do appreciate that REW was able to move this forward and help cover the costs for this conservation work."

- Steve Bittle



BEFORE

Photo: The wetland project, mid-construction, with the wetland embankment completed.



AFTER

Photo: The wetland project completed.

SHARING RESEARCH & BEST PRACTICES

Offering place-based education, collaboration, & training through our 2023 Workshop Series

The 2023 Workshop Series took us across the Southwest to Albuquerque, New Mexico; Rangely, Colorado; and Tucson, Arizona!

These workshops provided an opportunity for 117 land managers, consultants, scientists, private landowners, governments, and nonprofit organizations to share the techniques, scientific findings, and lessons learned that are vital to successful restoration.

In Albuquerque, attendees discussed innovative restoration techniques and monitoring approaches required to navigate changing conditions across the

Middle Rio Grande at our Planting for the Future Workshop. In Rangely, tamarisk beetle and biocontrol experts introduced beetle herding as an exciting new tool in tamarisk mitigation.

In Tucson, we explored climate-resilient riverside habitat with talks from wildlife and restoration experts and an afternoon site visit to the Tohono O’odham Nation’s Wa:k Hikdan riparian restoration site.

These focused and place-based workshops provided a venue for education, collaboration, and training and addressed specific needs in each region.



Photo: An attendee at the Rangely Tamarisk Beetle Workshop practicing net sweeps to count tamarisk beetles.



Photo: Habitat for the Future Workshop attendees learning from Dr. Sean Mahoney in Tucson, AZ.



Photo: Habitat for the Future Workshop attendees touring a restoration site at the Pueblo of Santa Ana in New Mexico.

What part of the workshop was the most useful in relation to your work?

“Understanding the work happening around the state; sometimes we feel isolated in the NE, but it’s good to make connections with like people.”

- Albuquerque attendee

“Knowledgeable speakers, new science, relevant topic to watershed restoration in the West”

-Rangely attendee

“The workshop felt very local, where science and management leaders from the local community allowed for collaboration that can be immediately effective.”

- Tucson attendee

“I was able to engage with partners that I had only met virtually. These personal face-to-face encounters will be extremely helpful in developing these partnerships further.”

- Tucson attendee

PROVIDING ACCESS TO RESTORATION TOOLS & RESEARCH

Maintaining an online Resource Library for Restoration

RiversEdge West continues to maintain an online resource library with the latest information and research on restoration, tamarisk beetle, and southwestern willow flycatchers. Whether you're a restoration practitioner, scientist, or interested community member, the library is a useful tool. The library includes planting guides, scientific papers, presentations from our biennial conferences, field guides, and more!



MONITORING THE TAMARISK BEETLE

Sharing critical information about tamarisk biocontrol

The tamarisk beetle (*Diorhabda* spp.) is a biological control agent introduced to target invasive tamarisk. Biological control, or biocontrol, is an integrated pest management method where a highly specialized natural enemy is introduced to feed on target invasive species.

Since 2007, RiversEdge West has been a leader in monitoring tamarisk beetles and sharing critical information about beetle research and beetle movements across the west, as well as the

restoration implications of these movements.

In 2023, REW published its annual tamarisk beetle map, which is based on beetle reports provided by hundreds of partners across the West. REW also led a beetle workshop for the United States Geological Survey and San Carlos Apache tribe in Arizona, and a tamarisk beetle management workshop in western Colorado in partnership with Colorado State University and the Colorado Department of Agriculture.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Coming together to shape our land and water future

REW is excited to announce the formalization of the Confluence Center of Colorado Inc. Receiving its 501c3 status in 2023, the Confluence Center is a collaborative partnership of local nonprofits in Mesa County who are committed to the same mission-driven work of land and water stewardship, education, recreation, agricultural, and restoration efforts.

This is an exciting and rare capital building project to establish a collaborative land, water, and education center at the confluence of the mighty Colorado and Gunnison Rivers.



The Confluence Center of Colorado

The building will include a land and water resource hub serving as a collaborative and informative space for work on river systems, as well as an educational and interpretive resource for the public to gain a better understanding of land, water, science, recreation, and agricultural resources.

The Center will also house co-working and community space for visiting organizations or other local nonprofits working on these important issues. Additionally, the building will include a STREAM (Science, Technology, Rivers, Art, and Mathematics) preschool and childcare center that will offer 45 full-time preschool slots. Emphasizing

river and water education, the preschool will incentivize high-quality early childhood education with an early introduction into science learning. The preschool will support equitable access for underserved and underrepresented children with dedicated space and scholarship enrollment.

Once built, the Confluence Center will provide RiversEdge West with a physical identity and a means to expand our community and youth education programs. In addition to crucial office space, the Confluence Center will increase the visibility of our organization's work and allow us to solve larger problems that can be identified through collaboration with

partner organizations.

Recognizing the Confluence Center as the very namesake of our community, REW believes this collaboration will be an invaluable asset in helping to solve larger problems. Together, the Confluence Center partners' united presence and unique location will increase science-based education and stewardship capability and magnify the long-term impacts of shaping our land and water future for the greater good of the local community, state, and nation.

Stay tuned for more updates or visit www.confluencecenterco.org to learn more!

Thank you,

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Cara Kukuraitis
Director of Development
and Communications

Montana Cohn
Restoration Coordinator

Christa Brown
Private Lands Biologist

Nicole Cook
Education and Outreach
Coordinator

Christine Prins
Private Lands Biologist

Rusty Lloyd
Executive Director

Joe Leonhard
Restoration Coordinator

Shannon Wadas
Associate Director

John Leary
Restoration Coordinator

2023 Board of Directors

Jay Wilcox, AZ; President

John Justus, CO

Donald Schuster, CO;
President (incoming)

Robb Parsons, CO;
Treasurer

Kelianne Chamberlain,
CO; Vice President

Isabel Borman, CO;
Secretary

Tom Oliver, CO; Vice
President (incoming)

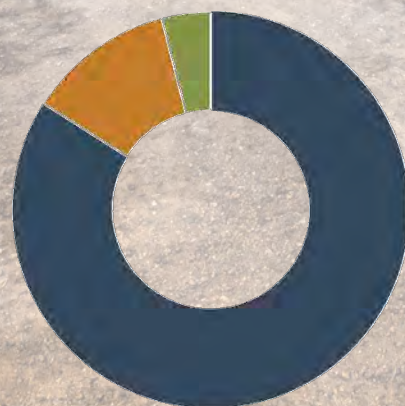
Biff Messinger, CO

Jay Thompson, CO

Yasmeen Najmi, NM

2023 FINANCIALS

\$1,322,201



■ Programs (\$1,110,179)

■ General Administration (\$153,733)

■ Fundraising (\$58,288)



RiversEdge West

22 YEARS OF
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Thank you!