

RIVERSEDGE WEST ANNUAL REPORT 2022



Photo by Tom Till Photography



RiversEdge West (formerly Tamarisk Coalition) is a nonprofit founded in 2002 with a mission to restore riparian (riverside) ecosystems through education, collaboration, and technical assistance. By protecting the quality and ecological integrity of riparian lands, we promote the economic, social, and cultural wellbeing of the communities where we work.

A NOTE FROM RUSTY & JAY

Dear Friends,

2022 marked 20 years for RiversEdge West, can you believe it! RiversEdge West (formerly Tamarisk Coalition) was incorporated in 2002 with a mission to restore riparian ecosystems through education, collaboration, and technical assistance. We have a lot to be thankful for; our staff and board, our many partners, and especially for those who have invested in RiversEdge West through the years and helped build a solid foundation for us to grow.

Over those two decades, RiversEdge West (REW) had many successes including:

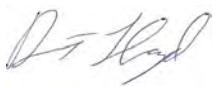
- Provided leadership and support to over 60 restoration partnerships resulting in the restoration of 10's of thousands of acres of riverside lands
- Hosted over 50 conferences and workshops combined to share new ideas and techniques
- Created community and youth education programs to cultivate the next generation of stewards
- Raised millions of dollars for restoration throughout the Southwest to help restore our rivers

We didn't do it alone and tip our hats and give thanks to the many partners and supporters like you that collectively helped us along the way. With that, we are excited to present our 2022 Annual Report. The REW team had a busy year and as always, these accomplishments were powered by hard work, tireless enthusiasm, and collaboration.

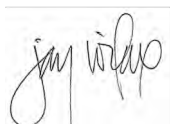
Looking forward to 2023 and beyond, you will see our impacts on rivers continue to grow through current and new initiatives that build upon our successes. We will be enhancing and expanding our restoration, education, stewardship, and internship programs, and are working to develop a Confluence Center to serve as a permanent home for REW and a hub for other like-minded nonprofits.

Just as we were 20 years ago, we remain committed to our work that supports fish and wildlife habitat and safeguards cultural, economic, agricultural, and recreational values for the communities where we work. Please keep in touch with us and thank you for your support. Stay safe and enjoy those rivers!

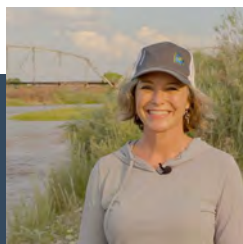
Sincerely,



Rusty Lloyd, Executive Director



Jay Wilcox, Board President



2022 IMPACT



1,357

YOUTH AND ADULTS
EDUCATED

268

RIVER RESTORATION
PROFESSIONALS
EDUCATED

556

ACRES TREATED

43

ACRES PLANTED

3,419

ACRES MONITORED

12

VOLUNTEER EVENTS
HOSTED

172

VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED

87

JOBS CREATED

SNAPSHOT

IN 2022, WE BUILT UPON OUR SUCCESSES AND SAW OUR POSITIVE IMPACT ON RIVERS GROW.

Restoration partners working together to reach restoration goals on the White River.



Students learning about & connecting with rivers during REW's Wellspring Project.



Conference attendees gathering at REW's conference that brought together over 200 diverse restoration partners that shared ideas & best practices for improving the future of restoration.



A private landowner gains access to restoration funding & resources to improve habitat for wildlife.



REW volunteers clearing Russian olive to ensure long-term ecological health at existing



Dolores River partners assessing a potential project site in the Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area.





Photo: REW volunteers remove invasive Russian olive, which outcompetes native plants that are vital for healthy riverside ecosystems.



Photo: A student floats the river for the first time during REW's Wellspring Project.



Photo: Students learn about the impacts of invasive plants and river health during REW's river education programming.

CONNECTING KIDS & ADULTS TO RIVERS & STEWARDSHIP

In 2022, REW continued to expand its education and stewardship programs, hosting [The Wellspring Project](#) for middle schoolers, Raft the River for community members, and monthly volunteer events from May–October to improve wildlife habitat and enhance access to river recreation areas.

The Wellspring Project engaged 16 middle schoolers in a free, river-centric, summer program. Students learned about the complexities of the Colorado River and water in the West through tours of a sustainable farm, water treatment plant, water quality testing, a visit to a fish hatchery where they learned about endangered fish of the Colorado River, and more. After the field tours, students embarked on an overnight river trip; the first river trip for many of the students. The week culminated with a collaborative art project where students created a mixed media collage of the Colorado River.



Photo: Students create a collaborative art piece based on their experiences on the Colorado River.



REW also hosted its Annual [Raft the River](#) float trip to community members which provides over 50 participants the opportunity to experience the river firsthand (a summer favorite!) and learn more about riparian restoration from REW staff and board members.

Photo: Wellspring students embarking on an overnight river trip.



Photo: A RiversEdge Steward cuts back Russian olive to encourage native plant growth.



Photo: Raft the River participants learn about invasive plants that reduce biodiversity along rivers.



Photo: Raft the River participants floating the Colorado River with REW staff and board.

LEADING THE DESERT RIVERS COLLABORATIVE



Photo (above): Spectators cheer on their ducks during REW's rubber ducky race which raises funds for DRC programs.

RiversEdge West leads the Desert Rivers Collaborative (DRC), a group of over 40 partners that cooperatively protect, restore, and maintain native river corridor habitat in Mesa and Delta counties along the Colorado and Gunnison rivers.

In 2022, REW partnered with the Bureau of Land Management to hire a Restoration Coordinator. The Restoration Coordinator is responsible for coordinating riparian restoration work in the Dominguez-Escalante and McInnis Canyons National Conservation Areas, and connecting those projects to the larger DRC efforts.

Many DRC sites are currently focused on monitoring and maintaining areas that have undergone initial tamarisk and Russian olive removal (such as planting native plants and/or treating invasive plant regrowth). In order to support these long-term site needs, RiversEdge West, in partnership with Western Colorado Conservation Corps (WCCC), hires Monitoring Interns every other year to document the condition of riparian vegetation and potential follow-up treatment needs. REW and WCCC also developed a 2-person "Strike Team" to complete retreatments of invasive plant regrowth on the sites. DRC Monitoring Interns and Strike Team crews will hit the ground in 2023.



Photo (left): REW funded and coordinated the planting of over 265 willows at Riverbend Park in Palisade, CO using the machine shown. The "stinger bar" reaches the layer of soil where the willows can establish roots.



Photo (right): Mesa County Noxious Weed and Pest staff join REW on a monitoring visit to assess the need for treating invasive plant regrowth on private land in Grand Junction, CO.



BEFORE



AFTER

Photos: Before and after photos of an area at Connected Lakes State Park that was being overtaken by invasive Russian olive.

LEADING THE WHITE RIVER PARTNERSHIP

RiversEdge West has been leading the White River Partnership (WRP) since 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 2022, 35 acres of invasive tamarisk and Russian olive were treated on federal, state, and private lands. RiversEdge West also led two revegetation events with local partners to re-establish native vegetation communities. During the event, over 200 willows were planted to stabilize the riverbank on a ranch and over 1,000 seed balls were made with help from the Rio Blanco County 4H Club and Colorado Northwestern Community College environmental science students. Seed balls consist of seeds rolled within a ball of clay and rich soil to assist germination.



Photo: Students from the Rio Blanco County 4H Club make over 1,000 seed balls made of soil, clay, and native plant seed.



Photo: Kayaks parked at a monitoring area.

Photo (below): Before-and-after photos of a riparian area that was being colonized by invasive tamarisk and Russian olive. Photos by Utah Conservation Corps and Western Colorado Conservation Corps.



CO-LEADING THE DOLORES RIVER RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

RiversEdge West has been co-leading restoration on the Dolores River with Conservation Legacy's Southwest Conservation Corps since 2009 and to date, has removed over 2,000 acres of tamarisk from the river corridor. This partnership works across two states with many federal, state, county, academic, and nonprofit and private partners.

In 2022, the Dolores River Restoration Partnership had crews working hard on restoring the river corridor for 10 months. Many of the dense infestations of tamarisk have been removed, and partners spent 2022 monitoring past treatments, removing tamarisk resprouts, and treating secondary invasions of herbaceous noxious weeds.

Multiple volunteer revegetation efforts took place, including a spring event where volunteers planted native plant species on the Dolores River near the confluence of the San Miguel, and a fall event where REW staff worked with the Bureau of Land Management, Southwest Conservation Corps, and Kiva Montessori School to plant native vegetation at the Bradfield Bridge Recreation Site.



Photo: Students from the Kiva Montessori School in Cortez planting cottonwoods at the Bradfield Bridge Recreation Site on the Dolores River.



RESTORING PRIVATE LANDS

Riparian areas are a mosaic of ownership and land management, with private landowners owning a sizable percentage of riparian areas. Despite this, private landowners are often underrepresented or left out of traditional restoration strategies. Funding available for restoration has also been out of reach for many landowners who are motivated to enact real restoration.

In an effort to connect riparian restoration and habitat conservation to all landowners and managers, REW's private lands program serves as a nexus between private landowners and watershed partnerships to get conservation and restoration onto private property (see next page for example). REW's Private Lands Biologist is a partner position with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Known, in part, for its financial incentive programs for private landowners to engage in conservation practices, the NRCS provides access to additional funding and restoration tools that further assist private landowners in conserving their property.

One project success to highlight was the development of a 3-acre seasonal shallow water wetland. While the wetland wasn't finalized by the close of 2022, the wetland was engineered, and a contractor broke ground and completed a water retaining structure. This wetland will be completed in 2023.

Seasonal shallow wetlands are an important habitat component for migratory waterfowl, and with the modern hydrology of the Grand Valley, this habitat is not as abundant as it once was. When this wetland is completed and functional, it will be operational for spring migration and fall waterfowl season and be dry during the summer to allow for large-seeded plants that are vital food sources for the migratory waterfowl.

REW will continue to build interest from landowners to conduct riparian restoration on their lands, connecting technical and funding resources to these important landscapes. Look for upcoming workshops, calls for applications, and ongoing partnerships within the Desert Rivers Collaborative to ensure private landowners are included in opportunities for riparian restoration!



Photo: The wetland project, mid-construction, with the wetland embankment completed (denoted by arrows)

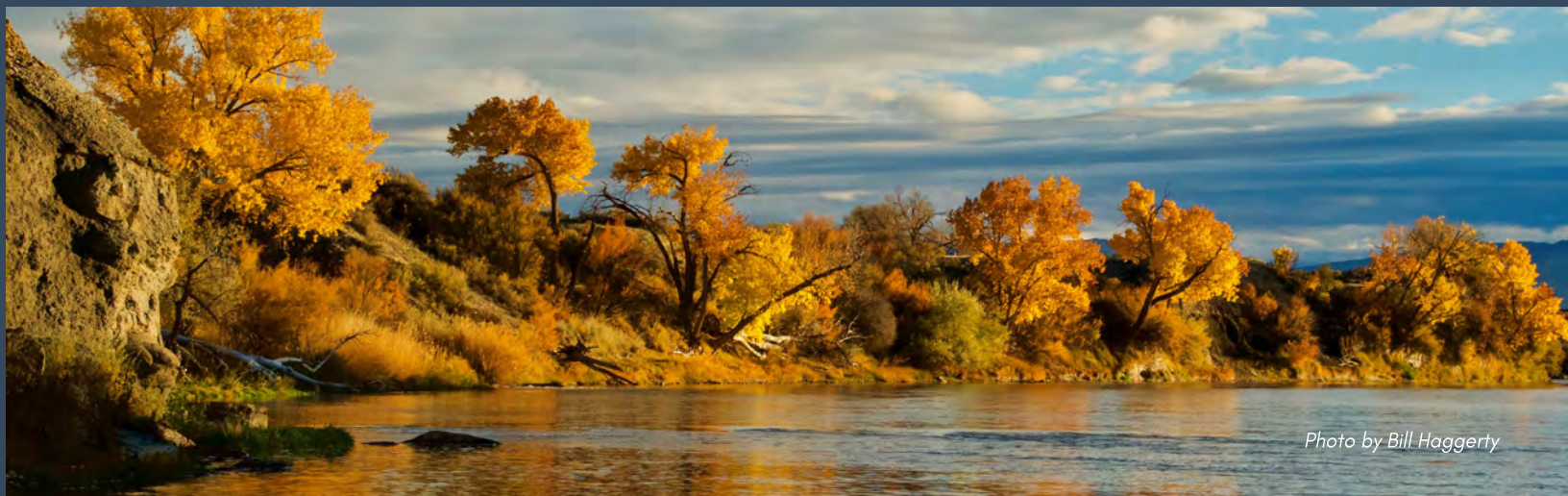


Photo by Bill Haggerty



Kathy Haas

LANDOWNER SPOTLIGHT KATHY HAAS

Kathy Haas recently purchased a neglected agricultural property along the Colorado River. She is an avid boater and pictures her stretch of the river corridor to be productive and useful habitat for wildlife, a welcome space for recreational boaters, and a functioning agricultural field. Upon her first visit to the property, she recognized the tamarisk and Russian olive trees dominating the riverside canopy. She knew she needed to do something about it but didn't know where to start. So, she called RiversEdge West.

Our Private Lands Biologist conducted a site visit with Kathy to determine Kathy's objectives, concerns, and hopes for the site. Several more site visits took place to inventory the property and to get to know the plants and animals using the site, how they might be impeded from fully utilizing the riverside corridor, and determining what options were available for restoring habitat function. Kathy was able to join in on these inventorying trips to learn more about how cool her new property was!

When asked what motivated her to take on this type of project, Kathy said "not only are we doing this to help in conservation efforts, but to also encourage native wildlife habitats to thrive and re-grow to allow native plant and animal species to use the land."



View overlooking Kathy's property

MAKING A PLAN

After the inventorying process was complete, the information was used to develop restoration practices with landowner objectives in mind. These restoration practices were then mapped out on the property with a timeline, and voilà, Kathy's Conservation Plan was born. The Conservation Plan outlines a multi-year process that will begin shifting her riverside habitat which is heavily dominated by tamarisk and Russian olive, to one dominated by native species and utilized by a diverse array of animals.

Restoration and conservation projects are most successful when they occur on a biological timeline (i.e. allowing time for native vegetation to establish, weed management, etc.) rather than a calendar year or funding cycle. Fortunately, the NRCS's financial assistance has more flexibility with individual landowners to do projects over this biological timeline. Since Kathy is instrumental in implementing this plan, it is created unique to her, her land, and her objectives. And through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program, she was able to receive funding for implementing her plan.

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Kathy's Conservation Plan covers the span of 6 years, and progress will feel slow, but knowing that the entire REW community is following her progress will help! In 2022, Kathy worked on finishing up the first phase of Russian olive removal in the hay pasture, field borders, and surrounding a seasonal pond. Stay tuned as we will continue to check in periodically with Kathy throughout the years of her project.

"NOT ONLY ARE WE DOING THIS TO HELP IN CONSERVATION EFFORTS, BUT TO ALSO ENCOURAGE NATIVE WILDLIFE HABITATS TO THRIVE AND RE-GROW TO ALLOW NATIVE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES TO USE THE LAND."



KEEPING TRACK OF OUR PROGRESS

Restoration is a process that happens over time, almost always extending beyond the timelines of individual projects. To know if our efforts are successful or on the right path, we conduct vegetation monitoring at sites where work has been done or will soon occur. When monitoring is conducted and the data are analyzed over time, we can measure how a site has changed and plan for future restoration projects.

How exactly does this work? Data (e.g., percent cover of native and invasive plants) are collected using our [Rapid Monitoring Protocol](#) and recorded in the field with a system such as ArcGIS Survey 123, then hosted in geodatabases or online maps for long-term storage and use. Maintaining a streamlined geodatabase helps reduce lost institutional knowledge and ensures that new employees and partners have access to the data they need to continue the project. An outward-facing geodatabase that is available online to the public can also help to keep the curious public and interested parties informed of restoration progress.

Monitoring and project data management require investments of time and funding. In the long term, they reduce overall project implementation costs and deliver better (and measurable) restoration results for funders. In addition, the geodatabase data can be used to create project reports for partners and funders.

RiversEdge West maintains geodatabases for the Desert Rivers Collaborative and the White River Partnership. In addition, RiversEdge West helps maintain the 4Rivers Geodatabase and has customized it for other projects and watershed partnerships. Originally developed by the [DIGIT Lab](#) at the University of Utah, the 4Rivers Geodatabase stores and analyzes data for four watershed partnerships across the Colorado River Basin:

- [Dolores River Restoration Partnership](#)
- [Escalante River Watershed Partnership](#)
- [Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition / Friends of the Verde River](#)
- [Gila Watershed Partnership of Arizona](#)

These four groups have contributed to this shared geodatabase for almost ten years! RiversEdge West is currently synthesizing these data, with a preliminary report anticipated in 2023. [These data are publicly available to be used for research and for reference at https://riversedgewest.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=97ac2c12e029436986a284ef3df5c7ed.](https://riversedgewest.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=97ac2c12e029436986a284ef3df5c7ed)



Photo: Dolores River partners monitor a site to assess restoration progress.



Photo: REW staff using GIS to record the locations of newly planted native plants. In this project, three different planting techniques were used. Staff will return to these locations to determine planting success and monitor revegetation progress.

INTEGRATING & BOLSTERING SCIENCE TO IMPROVE RESTORATION OUTCOMES

TAMARISK BEETLE

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

RiversEdge West has been a leader in monitoring and sharing critical information about tamarisk beetles since 2007 by:

- Providing annual tamarisk beetle distribution maps and data
- Maintaining a resource library hosting the latest research
- Conducting presentations and workshops about tamarisk beetle impacts
- Collaborating in research to improve our understanding of risk and efficacy

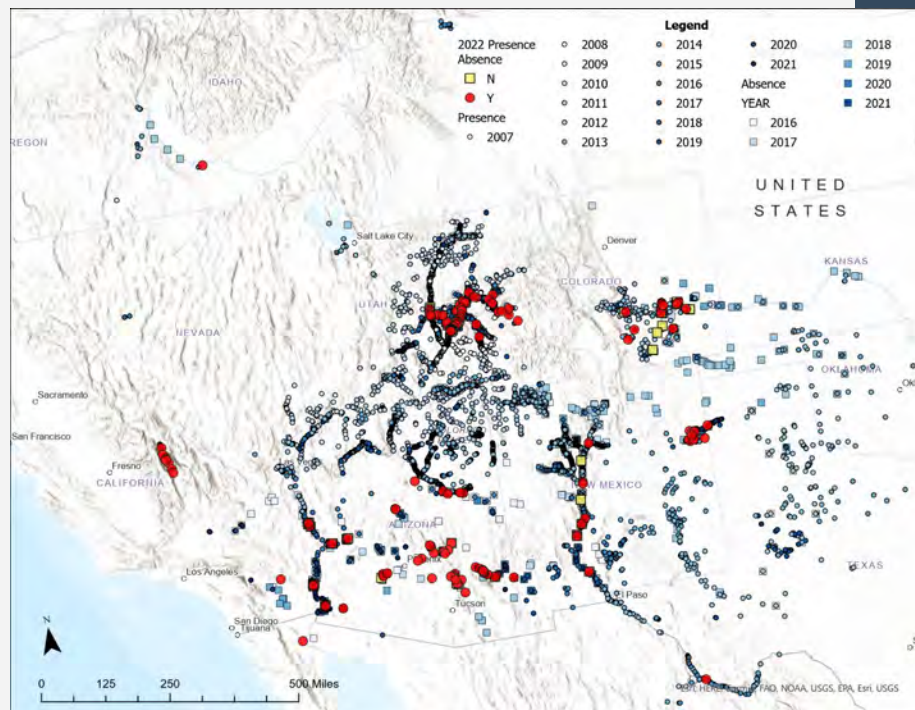


Photo: Observation map detailing tamarisk beetle movement.

In 2022, RiversEdge West collected almost 1,000 observations, documenting presence and absence (in the map above: red circles and yellow squares, respectively). Many populations were reported present where they have been reliably established for many years (historical presence and absence in circles and squares respectively, by year from white to blue), for example, in Grand Junction and Moab. In some areas along the Rio Grande in New Mexico, some areas are seeing very patchy or absent populations where they existed previously. Newly established tamarisk beetle populations were found moving west along the Gila River from eastern Arizona, as well as populations moving in from the east. We have also learned that the northern tamarisk beetle (*D. carinulata*) has made it east of Phoenix, while the subtropical tamarisk beetle (*D. sublineata*) made it as far as Ft. Thomas, Arizona. Thank you to our many partners for collecting and sending in this data!

SURVEYING FOR SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER

RiversEdge West collaborates with researchers across sectors to gather data and investigate applied questions that inform restoration objectives. In 2022, we continued to support tracking tamarisk beetles, but also expanded our collaborative efforts to include surveying for the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) and testing for mycorrhizal (beneficial root fungus) associations with willows. For example, we are tracking interactions between tamarisk beetle species, especially to see whether or how different tamarisk beetle species impact tamarisk differently. This could also mean different impacts on habitat of the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.

You can find more information and research about improving flycatcher habitat, including the [SWFL Habitat Viewer](#), in our online [Resource Library](#). The Resource Library provides resources to land managers focusing on flycatcher conservation, including Best Management Practices, soil rehabilitation, vegetation restoration, project funding, ecological improvement, and socio-economic advocacy. In 2022, the repository hosted over 500 pages of content, and was visited over 5,098 times in the last year.

2022 STAFF

Amanda Stahlke
Staff Scientist

Cara Kukuraitis
Communications & Education Director

Christine Prins
Private Lands Biologist

Everitt Merritt
GIS and Monitoring Program Manager

Joe Leohnard
Restoration Coordinator

John Leary
Restoration Coordinator

Kate Hampson
Business and Grants Manager

Montana Cohn
Restoration Coordinator

Rica Fulton
Restoration Coordinator

Rusty Lloyd
Executive Director

Shannon Wadas
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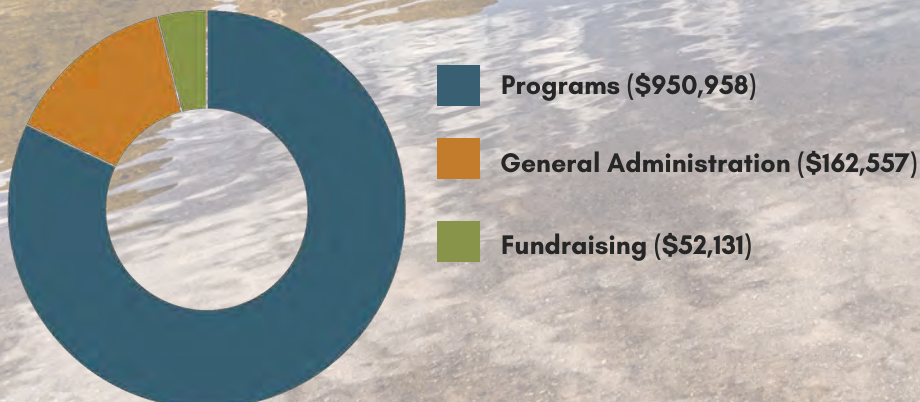
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INVEST IN RIVERS!



GIFTS FROM INDIVIDUALS LIKE YOU ARE CRITICAL TO KEEPING OUR MISSION AFLOAT.

Your donation will improve the health of riverside habitat through the management of invasive species and planting of native plants, coordination of restoration partnerships, engaging the next generation of stewards, and so much more.

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RIVERSEDGE WEST
DONOR, SCAN BELOW:**

