

RIVERSIDE STORIES

SARAH HENRY

Teacher in Bedrock, CO

SARAH HENRY, EDUCATOR at the Paradox Valley Charter School in the small town of Bedrock, Colorado, knows just how important the health of the nearby Dolores River is to the local community. So for the last few years, she's been working closely with the Tamarisk Coalition and the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) to introduce her students to the impacts of non-native plant species to the local ecosystem and to the DRRP's river restoration efforts. Yet, her influence doesn't end with her students. As a local landowner and someone who's dependent on the river, she's also been working hard to involve her entire town in the process.

*“What a
River Needs”*



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located 120 miles southwest of Grand Junction, Bedrock has a population of only a few hundred residents. "We probably have a combined community of 200 people. I teach high school, and this year I have nine students in the whole high school. We graduated our first senior last year, and this year we have three," Sarah chuckles. "We're growing!"

In such a small school, Sarah works with her students individually, and focuses on trying to make the most positive effect possible. It is this unique approach to teaching that ultimately brought her and her students in alignment with the DRRP and the Tamarisk Coalition. "I kept seeing the Conservation Corps kids go down to the river and use chainsaws to remove the tamarisk (salt cedar). I was curious, because I lived on the river, and I asked Daniel Oppenheimer [from Tamarisk Coalition and DRRP] if he could do something with our students. We started taking the kids out, planting native plants, and teaching them - both in the classroom and the field - about the importance of removing invasive species along rivers."

Her goal is to have her students learn on an applied level, with hands-on experiential education, and for Sarah, this means taking them outdoors. "People in general need to be outside. It's not good for people to sit inside eight



hours a day. Also, it's grounding. We need this planet to survive if we're going to survive," she states. "To me, it's common sense." Driven by this passion for teaching under the sun, she's developed a curriculum which aims at educating her students on the riparian (riverside) ecosystem in their own backyard. "This is my first year that I'm going to offer an outdoor science class," she says. "I really think involving the Tamarisk Coalition and water ecology will have a great influence on the students."

As Sarah has been living on the river for multiple years, the riparian system's health has also had a considerable effect on her own livelihood. On her property, she has a small orchard for which she draws water from the river, and she's tirelessly working on developing systems for better use of the water she's been given. She also has a front-row

seat to the positive effects that the DRRP's removal of non-native, invasive plants and revegetation has had.

"As somebody who's lived on the river," she says, "I love the pathways the DRRP create through the tamarisk. It opens up a whole new path, where I can get across the river, and explore places that I haven't had access to," adding, "When the DRRP goes in and makes these tunnels so that wildlife and livestock can get to the river, I think that's important for the students to understand. It just gives them a better understanding of how invasive species can negatively affect an ecosystem."

It isn't just these ongoing projects that will save the river, as Sarah suggests, but a shift in the paradigm of how we look at these river systems. "I think we often concentrate

on actions," she explains, "which are great, but even just to take that minute when you're sitting by the river, to thank the river for being there. Just take a second, and realize that without that river, there isn't life in that area. Think about what a healthy river needs. I think that's what I'm trying to learn and teach to my students." ■

This is part of the Riverside Stories series, brought to you by the Tamarisk Coalition in partnership with the Dolores River Restoration Partnership and funded by the Walton Family Foundation.

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Photography Credit: Zach Mahone