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“Water is
Community”
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RIVERSIDE STORIES

STAN YOUNG

Contractor on Dolores River, CO —————

STAN YOUNG IS the fourth generation of his family to live along the Dolores and Colorado rivers in western Colorado - and for a century that land has been healthy enough to sustain a thriving farm operation. Back in 2009, Stan began recognizing an invasive newcomer along the main creek near his 450-acre farm. It was a solid wall of tamarisk--a non-native plant species, also called salt cedar, known for overtaking usable land and a majority of other shrubs and foliage in riverside areas. As a result, access to a vital water source was made increasingly more difficult.

“Before we started on removing the tamarisk, that was all you could see,” Stan recalls. “You could not water the livestock; you could not see the beauty of the river--it was a dead area.”



It wasn't long before Stan became acquainted with the Tamarisk Coalition (TC), and the TC-led Desert Rivers Collaborative (DRC). The DRC works to protect, restore, and maintain the native river corridor habitats in Mesa and Delta counties through the development of community partnerships. With their knowledge and support, Stan set about tackling the removal of the tamarisk which was choking his farm, experimenting with a number of methods that included burning, bulldozing, and mulching. When mulching proved to be the most effective, he invested in his own mulching machinery.

"We excavated only on my place to begin with--I just wanted to get rid of all the tamarisk here," Stan says. "But then there was a call for work in other places. The Bureau of Land Management saw what we were doing, and the TC put the word out about the machine I had, so I just started working for individuals. It gives a person something to do other than sit on his couch and eat bonbons," Stan chuckles.

Before long, Stan was also working for Garfield County, Mesa County, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Nature Conservancy as a contractor. A majority of his removal work has been done along the Colorado River and the Dolores River, where tamarisk had taken over considerably. His days are long, but fortunately Stan is the epitome of a morning person. Waking up at 3:30am every morning, Stan has his machines up and running and mulching tamarisk long before dawn while the temperature is still nice and cool. In the afternoons he tends to his machines and admires the beautiful landscapes he is helping to restore to their former glory.

Stan has also turned a portion of his farm into a cottonwood plantation with help from the TC. Cottonwood trees are native to these riparian areas, and crucial in revitalizing the land post-tamarisk removal. With nearly 16,000 cottonwoods planted a year on Stan's farm, his plantation is serving as a vital resource for other private-landowners

This is part of the Riverside Stories series, brought to you by the Tamarisk Coalition in partnership with the Desert Rivers Collaborative, and funded by the Walton Family Foundation.

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and restoration organizations to utilize.

Perhaps one of the most rewarding aspects of Stan's job is working alongside the Conservation Corps and the young people they employ. "It's a great program for the young people. It gives them a job, teaches them how to work, how to live outside, how to take care of themselves and actually put in a day's work and earn a living," Stan says. "I run into past crew members and they always shake my hand or give me a hug. It's

always very positive when I run into them; they are just a great group of kids."

While still an ongoing process, all of the work Stan has done has made an incredible impact upon the land he loves. Along with vastly improved scenic views, now, there is better grazing land, natural grasses springing back up, and the ability to access the water for recreational boaters, hikers, and ranchers with their livestock.

When asked why this work is so important, Stan replies, "Without the water, there would be no community. We have got to take care of our rivers and our riparian areas, or we don't exist. I don't think it could get any more important than that." ■

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