



Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

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2017 Native Plant Society of New Mexico Grant Report

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The Upper Gila Watershed Alliance (UGWA) was awarded \$1,500 in 2017 to assist in our ongoing effort to eradicate salt cedar (*Tamarix* spp.) along the Gila River. Salt cedar removal has been a priority of the invasive species management team of the Gila National Forest for several years. Eradication treatment by the Forest Service has focused primarily on the uppermost stretches of the Gila River, mainly on the East Fork, in an effort to control the downstream spread of this invasive tree into the Gila Wilderness Area. Because wilderness areas are reserved for foot, horseback, and non-motorized boat access, removal of invasive species is challenging and time-consuming.

In 2016 and 2017, UGWA received funding from the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, the Center for Biological Diversity, Secure Rural Schools (a federal program) and the Native Plant Society of New Mexico to pursue salt cedar eradication.

Our work area originated at Grapevine Campground, located a few miles from the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, downstream more than 40 river miles to the Mogollon Creek confluence.

To eradicate the salt cedar, small crews hiked, rode horses, and floated rafts into the Gila Wilderness Area, starting at various access points. A comprehensive search for salt cedar ensued in the floodplain and in historic channels on both sides of the river. When salt cedar stands were found, the crew took GPS readings, pre- and post- treatment photos, counted the number of stems to be treated, and categorized them into diameter classes. Using hand tools, the crew cut the stems, treated the stumps with herbicide, and piled the cut stems out of the floodplain so they wouldn't be washed down to sprout elsewhere.

In 2016, an astounding 383 tamarisk stands were located and over 8,000 stems were treated! Because salt cedars re-sprout from stumps and are notoriously difficult to kill, all of the areas were again surveyed and treated in 2017. Our re-survey effort revealed an 84% mortality rate, which is considered to be quite respectable in the salt cedar eradication world. UGWA plans to continue our tamarisk removal efforts in the coming years along the main stem of the river, as well as expanding our efforts into the upper reaches of the West and Middle Forks. This way, the salt cedar can be cut and treated before it flowers and the seeds are dispersed.

The funding received from the Native Plant Society of New Mexico assisted in the purchase of hand tools, payment to our contractors, the use of horses and mules, mileage, and project administration.

We are very grateful to the Native Plant Society of New Mexico for funding this important project as we work to keep our free-flowing Gila River free of salt cedar!

The Upper Gila Watershed Alliance is a non-profit watershed protection and conservation organization working to promote the long-term health of the Upper Gila Watershed and its communities of life. Through advocacy, education, research and restoration projects, we are striving to build communities of stewards in more locally based economies.