

Project Year-End Summary Report 2020

Title of Project:

Begin your answers in the box right beside each question and the space will expand to accommodate. Limit your report to two pages if possible. More detailed presentations, articles or posters are welcome separately.*

1. Organization or Individual who Received the Grant: Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

2. Amount of Grant: \$ 1500

3. Was additional outside funding obtained? (check box that applies) Yes No
Source(s) if you checked "yes."

4. Briefly, how was the grant money from the Carter Conservation Fund used? We removed tamarisk along the Gila River in the Gila National Forest.

5. Write an abstract or summary of the activities performed and the progress that was made this year on your project. Save any conclusions, lessons learned, and benefits achieved for the final section 6.

From 2019 Final Report: After three years of collaborating with the Gila National Forest Wilderness District on tamarisk removal on the Gila River, we were informed that our project could not proceed in 2019. Although no circumstances had changed on the ground, the Forest Service informed us that they had neglected to do the required consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service that they should have done prior to any tamarisk removal work, unbeknownst to us. Their concern is protection of the Narrow-headed garter snake, which may or may not occupy habitat along the Gila River in the Gila Wilderness Area, where we had planned to remove tamarisk. Because the Forest Service hasn't done any surveys, their legal obligation is to assume that the riparian area is occupied habitat for this endangered snake. Further, the Gila National Forest's annual budget and projects had been finalized, and no staff person had been assigned to do the requisite consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Services.

2020 Update: To date, the Forest Service still has not completed its consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Services to treat tamarisk along the Gila River in the Gila Wilderness Area. Fortunately, they completed the clearance to treat tamarisk several miles downstream on the Gila River, in the Gila Bird Area and Research Natural Area. An UGWA staff person spent two days in September backpacking two miles downstream of the Bird Area, walking in the river and along the floodplain to locate and inventory tamarisk stands, including taking photos and GPS readings. Using these data points, UGWA's contractor cut and treated 186 tamarisk stems of various sizes in a 2-mile stretch of the river in November 2020, after the end of the breeding season for the endangered Yellow-Billed Cuckoo.

Unfortunately, he located a large stringer of tamarisks at the end of his allotted time, and we hope to return to treat these salt cedar in 2021. In addition, Don and Wendy Graves of the Gila

chapter of the Native Plant Society notified us of a large tamarisk they encountered while hiking in the Saddle Rock Riparian Area, a tributary of the Gila River in the Gila National Forest, and UGWA's contractor cut down that tree.

Please see the attached treatment area map, spreadsheet of treatment areas, and photos for more information.

6. State any conclusions. Include any lessons learned that would assist others. What benefit to you, the community or the environment has resulted or do you hope will result from your use of our funding?

From 2019 Final Report: We are requesting that NPSNM allow us to retain this funding into 2020. We will consult with the Gila National Forest to determine whether we can proceed with our tamarisk removal project. If not, perhaps we can repurpose the grant to work on removal of another invasive plant species or some other worthy plant project. We will talk to the Forest Service and then ask the NPSNM board whether we can use the grant for another purpose or if we should return the grant funding. At the risk of sounding cynical, the lesson we have learned from this experience is that one cannot be too vigilant when working with a large bureaucracy like the Forest Service! We thank NPSNM for your vote of confidence and patience. We will be in touch soon about plans to use this funding in 2020.

2020 Update: As you know, 2020 was rife with obstacles, and the tamarisk eradication project was no exception. Fortunately, we were able to achieve our objective of treating tamarisk on the Gila River by working in another area of the Gila National Forest where treatment was permitted. In partnering with the Forest Service, we've learned that persistence and patience can pay off. The native trees and shrubs of the Gila riparian corridor, as well as the resident wildlife, have definitely benefited from the removal of non-native tamarisks which often replace cottonwoods and willows. With well over 1,200 native plants, the flora of the Gila National Forest is second to none, and we are pleased to help preserve its riparian biodiversity.

Please send your completed form as an email attachment to cartergrantapps@gmail.com.

* To remain in good standing for any future funding from the Native Plant Society of New Mexico, plan to write an article (600-1000 words) for our quarterly newsletter, **or** create and present a poster at our annual statewide conference, **or** send us a copy of a published article connected with the past year's work, **or** work with a local chapter of NPSNM to make an illustrated, educational presentation.

Our next state conference is scheduled for August 20-22 in Alamogordo. Contact our Otero chapter for additional information. Find information about our regional chapters on our website www.npsnm.org. Write to cartergrantapps@gmail.com at any time with questions.