

# Lessons From the Partnership

## Facing Challenges, Seizing Opportunities

Ten years ago, the concept of the Escalante River Watershed Partnership might have been unthinkable. A partnership among local citizens and businesses, multiple federal and state agencies, local government representatives, and non-governmental organizations? These groups were unaccustomed to collaborating and did not necessarily trust each other's motives, values, and strategies.

How has the ERWP been able to bring together diverse stakeholders and carry out extensive ecosystem restoration? How has the partnership handled sensitive issues about which partners disagree? How has it funded its wide-reaching initiatives?

*Several key strategies and conditions have helped the partnership succeed:*

### Members Find Common Ground

From the start, Russian olive provided a clear rallying point that ERWP members could strongly agree on. The ERWP conducted highly visible Russian olive removal demonstration projects, building early support for the project.

### Meetings Designed for Trust

All ERWP meetings are open and professionally mediated. Decision-making is by consensus, not majority—a hugely important element in building trust. To date, all ERWP decisions have reached 100% consensus or have been tabled.

### Action Plan Maintains Focus

The ERWP is an action-oriented partnership. ERWP's Conservation Action Plan guides and focuses efforts, and adaptive management (monitor/assess/adapt) ensures that the plan remains responsive and relevant.

### Membership Creates Stability

The broader the partnership base, the more expertise, perspectives, buy-in you have. Plus, pooling resources helps the ERWP to act on its mission.

### Outreach Builds Support

ERWP outreach takes many forms—field trips, workshops and festivals, meetings with local landowners, presentations to local business leaders and school groups, and more.



ERWP field trip participants visit a Russian olive removal demonstration site on private land in Boulder.



At 1.3 million acres, the Escalante River watershed is relatively small, compared with other tributaries of the Colorado River (the San Juan River watershed covers nearly 7 million acres). That smaller size helps the ERWP accomplish its mission.

Alyssa Angus

## Questions for the Future

How can the partnership better engage the long-term local residents in the watershed? How will the watershed respond to climate change, and how will the ERWP adapt to those changes? As the partnership moves forward it will address emerging issues as it always has, from a foundation of mutual respect and creative problem-solving, rooted in rigorous science.

## Healthy Rivers, Healthy Communities

