River Restoration Adventures For Tomorrow

Mission:
River Restoration Adventures for Tomorrow seeks to aid in the restoration, conservation, and research of important river corridors, while fostering responsibility through environmental stewardship and education in order to preserve our watersheds for the future.

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A Letter from Jennie

Program Director

This year was all about learning the ropes. It was exciting to dive into projects! We encountered many bumps in the road, but had many successes as well. To me, those success moments are the victories of the summer, and the challenges are what will drive us to achieve our goals for next season and beyond, to continually improve our systems and grow our organization.

One success worth noting is the fact that we started the summer with just a rough outline of a few tentative trips on the calendar and one boat to RRAFT’s name. We ended it by rolling up three of RRAFT’s own boats for storage and parking our trailer after eight trips without any incidents or near-misses.

The support that we have received from friends, family members, volunteers, and total strangers continues to amaze me. Starting at the very beginning of the year, Dan and I raised over $2,600 from over forty-five individual donors for RRAFT through the Grand Traverse ski race, and the momentum of followers only seemed to grow from there. We were able to connect with outfitters, individual sellers, and product retailers by telling our story and mission and began accumulating a small horde of discounted river gear. River aficionados Dr. Bob and Carol Dorsett, and Bill and Paula Keele generously donated two rafts and accompanying rowing gear to RRAFT in August, without which we would likely be begging, borrowing, and bartering for boats for many years to come. I am glad to be able to put these boats to use for a conservation purpose, after a hiatus from their years and years of rafting adventures with some of the finest river stewards.

We accumulated enough river gear to be able to outfit multi-day trips, but that’s not the whole story. Operating in a small workspace, Dan and I had to get creative with some of RRAFT’s systems. Our raft guides come from all over the state to help us out, our supplementary gear comes rented or borrowed from generous donors, our shuttles are contracted out to local services or family members, and our volunteers drive for hours to come on trips with us! Despite checklists, careful safety and contingency plans, repair kits, and driving directions, we had some minor hiccups. In my opinion, a very small handful of hiccups considering our young age as an outfitter. After all, what’s a rafting trip if you don’t have to improvise on something?

My point here is that the few setbacks we had this season are far outweighed by both the overwhelming support we cultivated for river conservation, and the work we were able to accomplish on the river! My successes this summer were measured in the smiles of students engaged in educational discussions, and in the sense of accomplishment resonating from participants doing their part in river conservation work with us. From here, it’s hard not to dream big about next season.

Sincerely,

Jennie Noreen
Program Director
OVERVIEW

2015 In Review

RAFT’s second year in operation and first season running programming went very smoothly. Between May and October, RAFT sent out eight different educational and/or conservation-based trips in five different riparian areas across Colorado and Utah. This season, restoration projects included Cottonwood tree planting, Russian Olive removal, riparian campsite clean-ups and invasive weed mapping. Educational-based trips with the University of Puget Sound and the Ditch and Reservoir Company Alliance also demonstrated the real potential for an environmental education-based program within RAFT.

With a mix of grant awards and direct project support from various organizations, RAFT was able to grow the core volunteer staff to a team of two part-time paid staff and a mix of six other rotating paid river guides and sawyers. Through fundraising efforts such as the Grand Traverse Ski Race and the Microbreweries for the Environment event in Boulder, CO, RAFT raised over $4,000 to put towards initial integral safety gear and conservation equipment purchases.

RAFT has also continued to develop partnerships and project opportunities with a number of other organizations, including the Southwest Conservation Corps and Conservation Legacy, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Tamarisk Coalition, Ditch and Reservoir Company Alliance, and Desert Rivers Collaborative.

Key Successes

• Determination as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization
• Engaged 70 participants on river trips, including 34 youth
• Affected 93 river miles in conservation work and GIS data gathering
• Received $43,853 in grant awards from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the American Canoe Association/ L.L. Bean Club Fostered Stewardship program
• Established new partnerships with the Colorado Canyons Association, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Tamarisk Coalition, Desert Rivers Collaborative, and the Bureau of Land Management
• Expanded conservation and rafting equipment inventory
• Covered by five different media stories

Key Challenges

• Operating with a small core team and without full-time paid administrative staff
• Expanding programs and recruiting a wide base of returning volunteers
• Maintaining records, policies and procedures for program operations
• Spreading awareness to new organizations and individuals
• Raising money to fund general operating expenses
• Developing an environmental education program without funding
• Finding adequate and efficient storage space for large gear items such as rafts, frames, oars, etc.
SNAPSHOTS

Projects from 2015

Students from Delta High School’s AP Environmental Science class and community volunteers helped plant 200 Cottonwood Trees in the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area between Pleasure Park and Delta. This project was part of a grant from L.L. Bean and the American Canoe Association.

University of Puget Sound’s Southwest Semester Students joined local experts from Trout Unlimited and the High Country Conservation Advocates on the Gunnison River in Gunnison, CO to learn about local water use issues.

Members from the Ditch and Reservoir Company Alliance attended an informative meeting in Grand Junction, CO, followed by a field trip float on the Colorado River to learn about invasive weed control methods, applications, and current projects in the area.
A crew from the Southwest Conservation Corps Ancestral Lands worked with the Park Service to map invasive weeds in Canyonlands National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area on an 8-day trip down Cataract Canyon. This project is one of two trips made possible by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Employees from WhiteWave Foods helped the BLM with two riparian clean up and fire-ring mitigation trips on the Colorado River between Pumphouse and Rancho Del Rio. This project was supported by WhiteWave Foods and the Bonneville Environmental Foundation.

As part of a grant from L.L. Bean and the American Canoe Association, Community volunteers helped the BLM remove invasive Russian Olive Trees from three miles of riverbank in the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area near Pleasure Park.
Project Spotlight

Cataract Canyon Invasive Species Monitoring

A PROJECT SUPPORTED BY A GRANT FROM THE NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

Cataract Canyon is high up on any boater’s list of big water and desert views. The 112-mile section of the Colorado River winds its way gracefully through Canyonlands National Park and drops steeply into Glen Canyon National Recreation Area – eventually spilling into Lake Powell. Any area so well known for wildlife, towering sandstone cliffs, and big rapids, it is no wonder that this remote canyon is so heavily used by a wide assortment of recreationalists.

Because of its remote location, Cataract Canyon offers little information about the types of plant species and state of ecological health – that is, until October 2015. This past Fall, RRAFT partnered with the Southwest Conservation Corps Ancestral Lands Program and the National Park Service to conduct an eight-day monitoring trip in this remote section of the Colorado River. The purpose of the trip was to map infestations of noxious and highly-invasive plant species that can negatively impact the health of these fragile desert river ecosystems. On October 19, 2015, three NPS staff, five Navaho and Zuni youth, an SCC supervisor, and four RRAFT guides launched from the Potash Boat ramp just south of Moab, UT. Equipped with GPS units, raingear, and enough food to feed an army, our group set out for eights days in the remote river canyons of Utah.

The first three days of the trip were spent floating through Canyonlands National Park and trying to stay as dry as possible in the face of significant rain events. An upside to all the wet weather was the large number of seasonal waterfalls thundering off of the once-dry canyon walls. On the fourth day, the weather cleared and the crews began their GPS surveys of popular campsites, hikes, and critical areas along the Colorado. Day four and five also gave the group some exciting rapids (all the rain had bumped up the river level, so the whitewater could be compared to levels only seen during Spring runoff events!). The remaining days were full of monitoring at the various campsites, popular side canyons, and other areas that might house the targeted noxious plants.

The data collected from this trip will provide the informational base from which the Park Service will initiate a series of treatments in Cataract Canyon. One of the biggest ecological problems noted during the exploration was the rapid expansion of Tamarisk in areas of the river that were once under the forty feet of reservoir. Popular campsites were also being consumed by the ravaging Tamarisk trees and became difficult to even pitch a tent. With such dramatic change inside the canyon, the NPS and SCC crews will have their work cut out for them over the next few years – but with the help of continued partnerships and RRAFT support, we can continue to make a positive impact deep in Cataract Canyon!
FINANCIALS

Total Expenses 2015: $17,388.21

Expenses
In 2015, RRAFT’s expenses primarily went to employee wages and equipment purchases. Program expenses consisted of trip food, shuttles, etc. and operational expenses included certifications, insurance, advertising costs, etc.

Total Revenue 2015: $20,259.74

Revenue
RAFT primarily received funds in the form of direct project support from groups paying directly in full or for a portion of a project or trip. In addition, RRAFT also received a significant grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, as well as a large amount of donations from individual supporters, fundraising events, and a grant from the L.L. Bean/ American Canoe Association’s Club Fostered Stewardship grant program.
UPCOMING FOR 2016

FUNDRAISING EVENTS
RAFT will organize several fundraising events throughout the year that will target different audiences and raise funds for programming expenses. These events will contribute a small amount of income to the overall budget, and at the same time will engage community members and continue to increase awareness of the organization.

GRANT DONATIONS
RAFT will continue to seek funds from private foundations, government agencies, and individual donors in order to finance operations.

RESTORATION PROJECTS

INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES TREATMENT ON THE COLORADO RIVER
Part two of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Called to Action Along the Colorado River grant award from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation consists of a second Cataract Canyon trip with the Southwest Conservation Corps and the National Parks Service. Using the data gathered on the mapping mission from 2015, RRAFT will assist the SCC and the NPS to begin implementation of a restoration plan to target and treat existing invasive species in the area.

RUSSIAN OLIVE AND TAMARISK REMOVAL
RAFT has several proposed projects for Russian Olive removal and Tamarisk removal work in the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and Ruby/Horsethief Canyons with the BLM. Pending grant funding, these projects will provide up to fifteen project days of work for a team of raft guides, sawyers, and volunteer swampers.

RIPARIAN CLEAN-UP
RAFT will continue to expand on opportunities with BLM field offices to provide volunteer services for work such as riparian clean up, dispersed campsite improvement and other restoration projects. These trips enable groups from corporations such as WhiteWave to get involved and help the BLM accomplish important projects along the river.

COTTONWOOD PLANTING
RAFT will also pursue Cottonwood planting projects in Ruby/Horsethief Canyons with the BLM. This will hopefully be a great opportunity to work with the Delta High School’s AP Environmental Science class again, and/or with other schools in the Grand Junction/Fruita area.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS
RAFT will continue to develop plans for it’s educational programs in 2016. RRAFT plans to build upon existing relationships as well as to seek out new opportunities for educational raft trips and make new connections with Universities, High Schools, and other community groups.
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

JOHN MCKENZIE
John McKenzie is a generational farmer, who’s family has owned land in Boulder County since 1893. John received a Masters in Agricultural and Resource Economics from Colorado State University and a J.D. from the University of Colorado Law School.
John currently serves as the Executive Director for the Ditch and Reservoir Company Alliance and is an expert in agricultural water use and economics. His organization is currently involved in the development of the 2014 Colorado Water Plan.

MERRILL WARREN
Merrill Warren grew up near Auburn, California, playing in the Sierra Nevada and the American River Canyon. Her adventures have since taken her around the world, including time living and studying in Spain.
Merrill graduated from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2012, with a B.A. in Anthropology. She has worked as a horse packer in the Sierra, a dog handler on the Mendenhall Glacier, Alaska, and as an intern for the US Forest Service, Range Department, in Gunnison, Colorado.
Since 2013, she has worked with clean water initiatives in Zambia. She is an active director on the board of The Kensington Conservancy, a land trust that works to protect lands and waters in northern Ontario. A two-time NOLS grad and a Wilderness EMT, Merrill lives in Bozeman, and works for Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation.

KEVIN NOREEN
Kevin grew up playing outside in Gunnison, Colorado and has spent a lot of time in water of all forms. He is currently finishing his undergraduate degree in his hometown and will graduate from Western State Colorado University in May of 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts in English.
Traveling has been a big part of his life, and he loves making connections with people of different backgrounds. Kevin has lived abroad in Switzerland and Cambodia and has also been involved in outdoor education as a student and a guide. He completed a semester-long NOLS course in Baja, Mexico and is passionate about the outdoors.
Kevin has recently gotten into journalism, and he is excited to help with media outreach for RRAFT. He is the editor of Western State’s student newspaper and has plans to go to graduate school so he can continue writing and reporting on social issues. Kevin intends to help foster greater intercultural understanding around the world.

TIM LEISHMAN- BOARD CHAIR
Tim graduated from Black Hills State University in 2010. He received his Bachelors of Science in Environmental History and a Minor in Outdoor Education. Tim worked seasonally for 8 years with the United States Forest Service on the Black Hills NF and the Gunnison NF. His seasonal work focused around timber management, timber stand improvement, timber sale administration, NEPA planning and implementation, and silviculture. In the Fall of 2014, Tim took a permanent Forester position on the San Juan National Forest based out of the Pagosa Ranger District and has been appointed as the field representative on the San Juan Forest Leadership Team.
Tim brings a strong background in inter-agency networking, monitoring, ecosystem analysis, project management, and habitat conservation to the RRAFT team. His passion and love for rivers and their ecosystems is contagious. Tim is the Board Chairman for the 2015 fiscal year and could not be more excited! Tim also has a strong environmental education background; he is a certified instructor in Project Wild, Project WET, Project Aquatic, Project Learning Tree, and the Aldo Leopold Land Ethic.
MIKE WIGHT

Mike spent five seasons with the Forest Service in Arizona while working towards his B.S. in Ecology and Natural History at Prescott College. His final studies included conducting Wild and Scenic river research in the Grand Canyon. Mike has directed small corps programs, served as Project Coordinator for RMYC (CO) and spent five years as Academic Director for an alternative high school focused on service learning and outdoor experience. Throughout this time he became more passionate about the Southwest’s amazing rivers and was also a river instructor with Outward Bound. Joining SCC as River Restoration Director was a culmination of Mike’s varied experiences. Four-years after beginning the position, he finds great value in engaging young adults in riparian restoration, while supporting watershed length, collaborative habitat restoration initiatives on the Dolores, Verde, Escalante and Gila rivers with five conservation corps programs and a wide host of partners.

LEO MALLOY

Leo is the high-school Outdoor Education teacher at Gunnison High School. Over the years he has developed a rich and comprehensive program for young students based on experiential learning and field based education in the outdoor playground of the Gunnison Valley. Throughout his courses, Leo always makes a point of including leave-no-trace ethics in the curriculum and works to instill a sense of place, often doing community service work as an addition to the recreational aspect of a trip. His experience comes from many backgrounds, including time as an Outward Bound instructor, AMGA certification, and his work as an author of the Gunnison Valley’s complete rock climbing guide, Gunnison Rock, amidst a long list of other
STAFF

DAN OMASTA- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND GUIDE
Dan graduated from the University of Colorado-Boulder with a Political Science degree focused on Environmental Policy and Land Management. He has extensive experience working with various environmental programs and non-profit organizations, including: the CU Environmental Center, Boulder County Parks and Open Space, and the Crested Butte Land Trust. In addition to raft-guiding in both Colorado and New Zealand, Dan also works with the US Park Service in the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge as a Biological Restoration Technician. His devotion to environmental conservation is infectious and unmistakable!

JENNIE NOREEN- PROGRAM DIRECTOR AND HEAD GUIDE
Jennie grew up playing in the mountains of Colorado. Her passion for rivers, mountains, and the environment stemmed from her upbringing and has carried her through four years of professional raft-guiding in Utah, Oregon, and New Zealand. Her experience with leadership in the outdoors takes many forms and has perpetuated her desire to conserve beautiful wilderness areas. With a degree in Studio Art and Environmental Policy and Decision Making, Jennie brings a creative, environmental mindset to the table.

ELLIE BARBER- ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION TEAM AND INTERPRETIVE GUIDE
Ellie comes to RRAFT with passion and experience in environmental education. She graduated from the University of Puget Sound where she earned her degree in Science, Technology, and Society and a minor in Environmental Policy. She has since worked for the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies as a Naturalist leading interpretive tours as a Certified Interpretive Guide and teaching environmental field classes for kids. Ellie also spent time working trail maintenance and restoration for the Student Conservation Association with a band of high schoolers by her side. She has always found joy inspiring and teaching others about the importance of nature, all while having a good time doing it!

EMILY KATZ- ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION COORDINATOR AND GUIDE
Emily is another passionate outdoor educator and raft guide who lives for rivers, ridge lines, and kids. She graduated from University of Colorado-Boulder with a degree in Geography. Since moving to Colorado she has been extremely active in the outdoor and environmental education community working and volunteering for organizations such as Teach for Sustainability, Thorne Nature Center, Colorado Outdoor Education Center, Gunnison Public Lands Initiative, and Crested Butte Land Trust. She received her Master of Leave No Trace from her NOLS Alaska Outdoor Educator Course. Emily brings a deep respect and stewardship for the Earth to RRAFT as well as spunky sense of wonder and good-hearted fun!

CARRIE FRICKMAN- ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION TEAM AND INTERPRETIVE GUIDE
Carrie graduated from the University of Oregon with a degree in Environmental Studies, with a focus on design and education. In Oregon Carrie began her journey as an Educator climbing 100 feet up into old-growth Douglas fir trees to teach about ethnobotany and forest ecology. Since then Carrie has worked as an Environmental Educator for Sierra Outdoor School in California and the Keystone Science School in Colorado. Carrie has a strong passion for environmental stewardship, place-based education, and Colorado water management!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU!

VOLUNTEERS FROM 2015:

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Trent Lieber  Emily Katz
Ben Sachdeva  Jesse Kruthaupt
Scott Noreen  Julie Nania
Kevin Noreen  Delta High School's AP
Tim Leishman  Environmental Science Class
Ellie Barber
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L.L. Bean
American Canoe Association
Bonneville Environmental Foundation
WhiteWave Foods
University of Puget Sound
DARCA
Tamarisk Coalition
Leader Accessories
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