

Wildlife in the Uncompahgre Watershed

The Uncompahgre Watershed Planning Partnership, in collaboration with the San Juan Corridors Coalition, is hosting its fifth workshop on water resources in the Uncompahgre River. This final workshop will examine values that the River corridor provides for wildlife. The forum entitled “Land Uses in the Watershed: Wildlife,” is scheduled for Thursday, April 8, 5:30-8:15 p.m., at the Ridgway Community Center, Railroad Avenue in Ridgway. Food and refreshments will be served at 5:30 p.m. This event is free and open to the public.

Speakers for this event will be Steve Boyle of Bio-Logic Environmental in Montrose, who will provide an overview of the Uncompahgre River’s past and current importance to wildlife; Jim Garner of CDOW, who will address the wildlife corridors in the watershed; Peggy Lyon of Colorado Natural Heritage, who will describe and explain the crucial importance of wetlands and riparian zones; and Dan Kowalski of CDOW, who will discuss the conditions in the river for fish. Each topic will include some discussion of current threats to these environments and possible mitigations.

People have long recognized that riparian zones, or streamside areas, are the lifeblood of the western landscape. Riparian zones provide critical habitat for many plants and animals in the arid West. Eighty-five percent of native animal species are dependent on riparian zones for all or part of their life cycles. Agriculture, grazing, development, reservoirs, water diversions, and mining of minerals and gravel have had tremendous impacts on riparian zones throughout the Uncompahgre River Basin. Although the rate of riparian zone and wetland loss in the Uncompahgre River Basin is difficult to quantify, it is clear that many of the watershed’s wet areas, especially along the Uncompahgre River, have been destroyed or profoundly altered from their pre-settlement state.

As population grows, so do the demands on our natural resources. The Uncompahgre Watershed Planning Partnership seeks balance between the wildlife protection, land owner rights, and wise use of a limited resource. Working together, we can ensure that our rivers and wildlife habitat last through the ages.

The Uncompahgre Watershed Planning Partnership is a volunteer group seeking to involve citizens and organizations in the Uncompahgre Watershed. Its mission is to protect and restore water quality in the Uncompahgre River through coordinated community and agency efforts sustaining a beautiful, healthy river in a thriving community.

The San Juan Corridors Coalition (SJCC) is a volunteer group whose goal is the protection of wildlife habitat and corridors in the northwest San Juan region. SJCC offers free monthly sessions on *Living with Wildlife* of which this is the April presentation. The final spring *Living with Wildlife* on May 13 will feature Sheelagh Williams on the wildlife and land management practices that she observed on her recent trip to Mongolia as compared to our local conditions.

There will be no monthly *Living with Wildlife* presentations during the summer months, but they will resume in September.

For further information and to offer suggestions for this series, please contact Sara Coulter (626-4496, scoulter@towson.edu) or Shirley Jentsch (240-1319, sjentsch@montrose.net).

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