



# Neighbors team to control RUSSIAN OLIVE

By Bob Parsons

Flows from the Shoshone River in northwestern Wyoming prior to 1900 shimmered through open rangeland spotted with cottonwood trees and small willow stands.

Annual spring runoffs scoured trees and shrubs from river banks that would otherwise outcompete natural willows and other riparian species like rushes and sedges.

Buffalo Bill Reservoir, completed in 1910, controlled the annual spring runoff preventing the natural scouring of stream banks. The introduction of Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia* L.) in 1930 found a natural home for its aggressive procreation along these stable soils. By the 1990s, a silver-green forest of thorny, small-leaved Russian olive trees lined most of the 50-mile stretch of river from Cody to the river's confluence with the Big Horn River. Intermixed with the Russian olive were patches of saltcedar – another highly invasive shrub.

Landowners along the river banks the last 10 years could no longer view or access the river and associated wildlife. In a habitat that would normally teem with wild turkeys, waterfowl, and other wildlife, the river corridor was becoming dominated by Russian olives, a monoculture that provides little habitat for these wildlife species.

## Russian Olive Designated Noxious Weed

Park County Weed and Pest Control District personnel joined efforts with many other Wyoming weed and pest control districts to add Russian olive to the Wyoming noxious weed list in 2007 ([www.wyoweed.org/statelist.html](http://www.wyoweed.org/statelist.html)). Weed and pest control districts also worked to remove Russian olive from the list of trees sold for shelter breaks and erosion control.

Though this species has been used in the past for shelterbelts and erosion control, its ability to survive Wyoming's harsh conditions eventually became a liability

as it has spread, forming monocultures that displace native trees, consume alarming amounts of water, and provide little habitat diversity for wildlife. The listing made selling the trees illegal and also allowed weed and pest control districts to help fund control and removal programs with taxpayer dollars.

Local landowners realized they could not control Russian olives without the expertise of local weed and pest control and conservation districts. Landowners were also seeking funding sources to help cover the cost of treatment and removal of the trees and replacement with native species. The result was the formation of the Shoshone/Clarks Fork River Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) group. A CRM is an approach to improve cooperation and coordination amongst resource owners, users, and managers in decision making about the best use and management of natural resources. It is a voluntary, usually landowner-initiated planning process that establishes resource goals by unanimous consent.

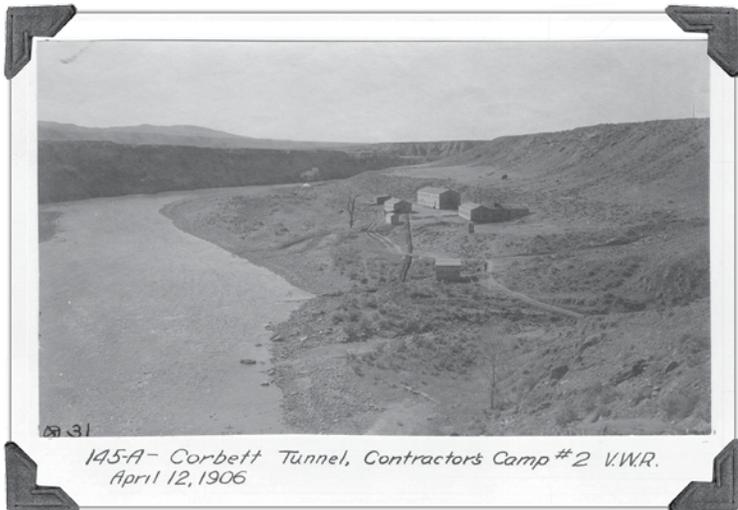
The Park County Weed and Pest Control District and the Powell/Clarks Fork Conservation District sent a letter to all 235 Park County landowners with property adjacent to the Shoshone and Clarks Fork rivers announcing an informational meeting to possibly initiate a CRM.

## Coordinated Resource Management Group a Reality

The first meeting was last October followed by several others that included landowners with properties adjacent to the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River in Park County.

The group was interested in initiating a program to help remove Russian olives along the river bank and replace them with natives such as cottonwoods and willows. By January, the Shoshone/Clarks Fork CRM became a reality.

A volunteer steering committee worked to write a grant application for funding from the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust and used grants from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and volunteer work from existing



*The Shoshone River in northwestern Wyoming prior to 1900 shimmered through open rangeland spotted with cottonwood trees and small willow stands.*

*A silver-green forest of thorny, small-leaved Russian olive trees line most of the 50-mile stretch of river today.*

CRMs from around the area as a match to receive a \$300,000 grant from the trust.

This funding allowed the CRM to establish a program to help landowners defray some of the cost of controlling Russian olives and saltcedar (also known as tamarisk) on private land. The agreement provided a 50-percent reimbursement to landowners for treatment and removal of Russian olives not to exceed \$350 per acre.

If the landowner applied for and received other grant funds, such as from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the CRM would offer reimbursement to the point the landowner was reimbursed 85 percent of the total cost for the first year's treatment. The agreement also provides support for controlling re-growth the second year up to a maximum of \$200 per acre.

### **Success Dependent Upon Volunteers**

The CRM steering committee reviews all applications for financial support. The success of this organization is totally dependent upon the hard work of volunteers who offer their time to review applications, survey proposed projects, and document completion of the individual projects.

The original \$300,000 grant is estimated to have generated an additional \$1 million in matching funds from other grants such as NRCS funding, cost-share of herbicides from the Park County Weed and Pest Control District, in-kind services for labor provided by landowners, and cash support.

All applicants to the Russian olive program are also required to meet with NRCS personnel to see if they qualify for any other program funding from the agency. In the future, the NRCS could have as much as \$1 million available to help control Russian olive and saltcedar.

The support for this CRM program has been amazing. More than 30 applications were received the first month. Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) and Trout Unlimited have provided support and additional grant funding to augment the program. NWTf provided a \$2,000 grant to help fund the purchase of a waterjet stinger to make holes for planting willows and cottonwood trees as part of the reclamation process after Russian olive and saltcedar removal. Additional grant and financial support will be sought from groups such as Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, and other associated groups.

### **Demands on Volunteers Increasing**

The success of the CRM has created a major demand in personal time from volunteers. Members of the steering committee and employees of the Park County Weed and Pest Control District have recognized a provision must be made to hire a coordinator to run the program. The committee is considering applying for additional grants from NGOs, including the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, to fund this position.

The future success of this CRM is limited only by time and money to fund future projects.

We will probably never see the Shoshone and Clarks Fork rivers totally free of Russian olives but our adamant desire is we will see a return of the diverse habitat that supports a healthy mix of wildlife along the river corridors as well as a river corridor once more accessible to people for recreational opportunities.

*Bob Parsons is supervisor of the Park County Weed and Pest Control District in Powell. He can be contacted at (307) 754-4521 or at [pcwcp@wir.net](mailto:pcwcp@wir.net).*