

Taking Back The Grand Canyon from Tamarisk (Saltcedar) Infestation



Removing saltcedar in the Grand Canyon.

Grand Canyon National Park has some of the nation's last remaining native desert riparian ecosystems. The side canyons and tributaries that line the Colorado River are especially valuable to hundreds of wildlife species. Since the 1930s, when tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*), more commonly referred to as saltcedar, reached the Grand Canyon area and started growing densely along the river's slopes, this precious ecosystem has been jeopardized.



The National Park Service has been managing saltcedar in Grand Canyon National Park since 2002.

Challenge:

Saltcedar, a non-native shrub from Asia and Africa, is a highly aggressive invasive species. The average saltcedar tree produces 600,000 seeds, and one acre of living saltcedar trees consumes 977,553 gallons of water per year. Because saltcedar has been growing in Grand Canyon National Park for more than 70 years, it has impacted water availability in side canyons and tributaries to the Colorado River, as well as crowded out native riparian plant species, such as willow and cottonwood.

Solution:

In 2000, the Grand Canyon Park Service staff conducted an environmental assessment to evaluate the impact of saltcedar in the park. The assessment revealed the devastation of saltcedar on the biodiversity in the area, which led to a tamarisk management and tributary restoration project. The Arizona Water Protection Fund

Commission funded all or a portion of this project. Work crews comprised of staff and volunteers began monitoring saltcedar infestation locations and levels. In 2002, teams began removing saltcedar through a combination of mechanical and chemical means, including manual removal and various single-plant targeted herbicide application methods. The labor-intensive work continues today from September to March every year, thanks to the efforts of hundreds of volunteers from all over the country.

Result:

Since beginning the saltcedar management effort, Grand Canyon staff and volunteers have removed 119,498 seedlings, 42,892 saplings and 13,294 mature plants, for a grand total of 175,684 removed saltcedar trees and a 99 percent reduction of saltcedar coverage in the project areas. The staff also closely monitors any impact to other vegetation, wildlife, water or soil in the area. Preliminary results show a resurgence of native plant species. Using the saltcedar removal project as a model for future projects, Grand Canyon staff has begun controlling other invasive exotic species within the main Colorado River Corridor. They hope to manage these infestations before they spread into the adjoining side canyons.



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Learn More:

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