



## Continental Divide Research Learning Center

### Project Spotlight: Citizen Conservationists

Weed pulling is not supposed to be fun. But this summer, fifteen volunteers from Rocky Mountain National Park found out how much fun it can be. The volunteers travelled from Rocky to other Colorado National Park Service units to help with critical natural resource management activities.

The Continental Divide Research Learning Center (CDRLC), based at Rocky Mountain National Park, assisted these parks by providing volunteers, paying for travel and campground costs, and coordinating the efforts. The staff of the CDRLC recruited volunteers at Rocky, which has one of the largest volunteer programs in the NPS (more than 2400 volunteers and 90,000 hours in 2003).

At Florissant Fossil Beds, two Rocky employees, eight volunteers from Rocky, and two Florissant employees worked for ten hours each. The group mowed Canada thistle and pulled yellow toadflax on Saturday. On Sunday, one volunteer mowed Canada thistle, three dug weeds along the entrance road, and the remaining pulled oak-leafed lamb's quarter near the new amphitheater.

At Great Sand Dunes, two Rocky employees and six volunteers from Rocky spent five hours collecting Indian rice grass seed before being chased inside by lightning.

At Bent's Old Fort, one Rocky employee and six Rocky volunteers spent ten hours in the field. On Saturday, the group hand-pulled Canada thistle under peach-leaved willows on the Arkansas River and thinned a grove of cottonwoods near the fort. Saturday, four returned to the Canada thistle and three dug exotics along the path to the fort.

#### Measureable Results

This project treated approximately ten acres in three units and contributed 472 hours of volunteer time. At Florissant, the volunteers treated 4.5 acres of noxious weeds in two days. During the summer of 2002, four NPS employees treated fifteen acres total over the course of the summer. At Great Sand Dunes, the trip allowed the park to send approximately five pounds of seed to the Natural Resources Conservation Service to start their revegetation program. At Bent's Old Fort, the volunteers treated one acre of cottonwoods, one acre of Canada thistle, and 1300 linear feet of weeds along the trail to the fort.

#### Non-Measurable Results

The receiving parks benefited by getting 210 hours in the field, extending their natural resource capacity. The park employees shared experience and expertise. The volunteers traveled to less visited Colorado parks (this was the first trip to these parks for a majority of the participants), learned about Colorado's ancient environments and cultural history, and understood first-hand the natural resource challenges that park managers face. A majority of the volunteers expressed interest in future trips; park staff at all three visiting parks requested return visits. This project demonstrated the power of partnerships, not only among parks but also with citizen-conservationists.

For more information on the park's research program, see <http://www.nps.gov/romo/resources/research.html> or contact Cheri Yost, at [Cheri\\_Yost@nps.gov](mailto:Cheri_Yost@nps.gov) or (970) 586-1302.



Top, pulling yellow toadflax at Florissant; middle, collecting seed at Great Sand Dunes; bottom, thinning cottonwoods at Bent's Old Fort (NPS-RMNP photos)