Tamarisks Along the Colorado River

Starting in 1900, 150 Tamarisks were planted along the banks of the Colorado River to control erosion.

Tamarisks growth prior to 2000

Year	Number of Tamarisks along the Colorado River
1900	150
1905	289
1910	439
1915	600
1920	753
1925	919
1930	1,078
1935	1,276
1940	1,362
1945	1,600
1950	1,600
1955	1,811
1960	1,987
1970	2,109
1975	2,523
1980	2,344
1985	2,453
1990	2,705
1995	2,865

Tamarisks also known as Saltcedars. Saltcedars also deposits salt above and below the ground, forming saline crust inhibiting other plants from growing in its vicinity. In addition to outcompeting native species, this also enables the Saltcedar to cope with high concentrations of dissolved solids.

If you float through this 25 mile stretch of the river, it is easy to tell the areas that have had invasive species removed from the ones that haven't. The spots given assistance are filled with green willows and young cottonwoods, enhancing the view of the river.

The untouched areas are a lot less aesthetically pleasing and prevent native vegetation growth and limit wildlife habitats. The tamarisk patches can be very dense and many of the bushes have been stripped of a lot, if not all, of their leaves due to beetles that have attacked and defoliated trees over the past eight years or so. The bushes aren't very pretty to look at anyway, but their impact makes worsens the situation, leaving groves of black trunks marked by tangles of white branches protruding into the air.

From 2000-2001 scientists introduced beetles to eat the Tamarisks
This table shows the decline of the Tamarisk population.

Year	Number of Tamarisks along the Colorado River
2000	3,597
2001	3,503
2002	3,434
2003	3,302
2004	3,199
2005	3,027
2006	2,895
2007	2,801
2008	2,678
2009	2,602
2010	2,519
2011	2,389
2012	2,296
2013	2,201
2014	2,116
2015	1,998
2016	1,812
2017	1,694
2018	1,600

The beetles aren't native to the area. After extensive research, they were transplanted from Asia to different areas in the Rocky Mountain and along the West Coast. They arrived at the Colorado River near Moab in 2005, and by the following year, they had successfully defoliated eighteen miles of tamarisk. The beatles only feed on tamarisk plants, and after repeated defoliation over a three-to-five year period, the average shrub loses its ability to survive.

"The beetles are doing their job," Schnurr said.

"During a heavy winter with a lot of snow, we burn the piles," WCCC Director Trevor Wickersham added.

The cleared areas are then replanted with natural vegetation. Cottonwood and willow starts are surrounded by cages to protect them from wildlife, along with a piece of rebar for support.

"We haven't had real good luck with the willows," Schnurr admitted. "But the cottonwood are good if you can keep the beaver off them."

Members of the BLM office does some of the work themselves, including seeding, but the WCCC is used for the bigger clearing jobs.