



RIVERSIDE STORIES

DOUG KING

Landowner on Dolores River, CO

DOUG KING'S RANCH sits right near the confluence of the Dolores and Colorado Rivers. Having lived on the land for the entirety of his life, Doug has witnessed the evolution of the river through the decades. Over the years, invasive plant species--primarily tamarisk (saltcedar) and Russian knapweed--have taken over the river banks and choked out many of the natural grasses and trees. These unwelcome intruders, along with a changing climate and prolonged drought season, have Doug concerned about one thing in particular--*water*.

"Water is absolutely critical," Doug says. Tamarisk, Russian olive, and other invasive plants compete with native plants for precious water resources and often win the battle.

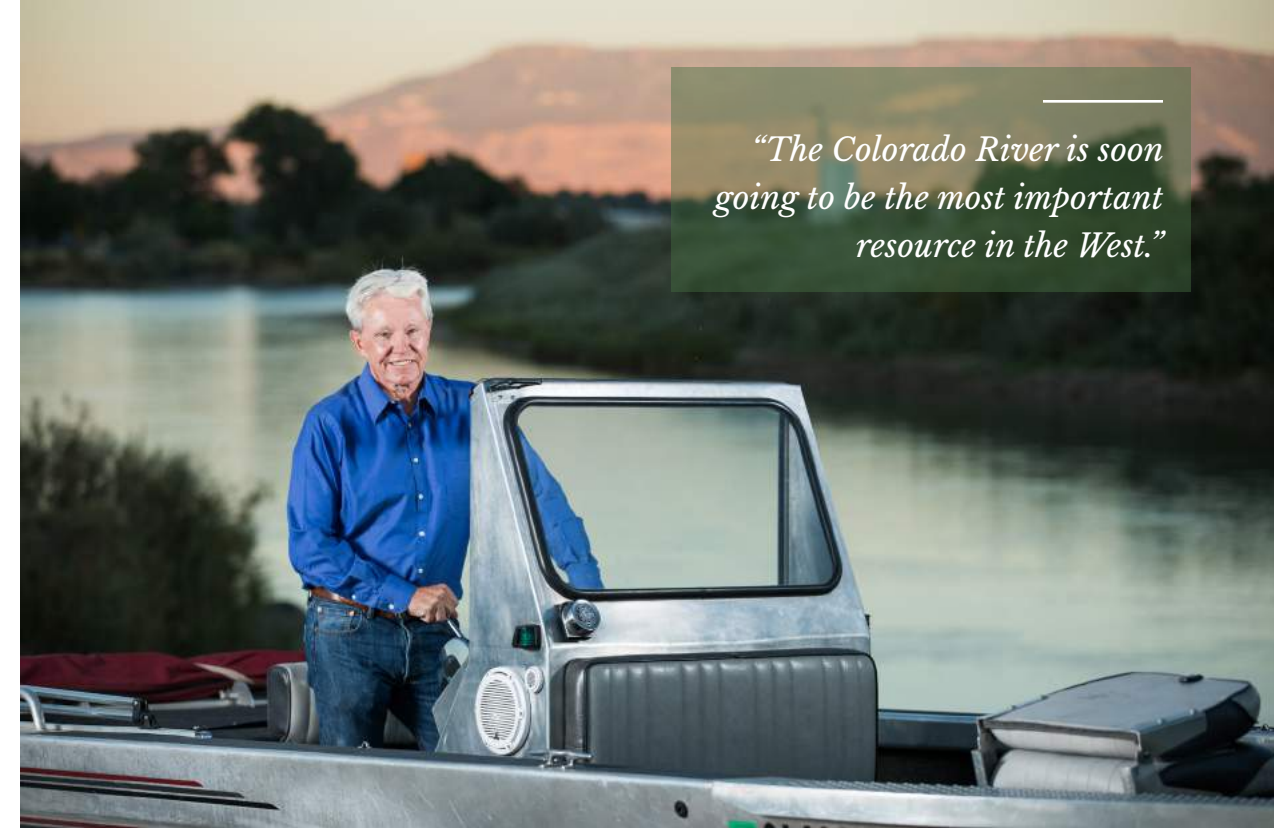
*"We Are
Caretakers"*

Native plants are essential for protecting the river's natural ecosystem; their presence along the river impacts how the river floods, how much sediment it carries, and the type of habitat that the river and riparian (riverside) area can support for wildlife. "The Colorado River is soon going to be the most important resource in the West," he explains. "Removing tamarisk and Russian knapweed is a high priority in improving the health of our rivers."

There used to be far less tamarisk and far more snow run-off than exists now--it wasn't until the 80s and 90s that he realized how much invasive species and climate change were impacting the riparian ecosystem. Today, Doug owns a cherished river boat that has been a source of enjoyment for the King family, but the rivers have been too low the past couple of years to take it out on the water

at all. But, with all of the work he and the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) have done on the Dolores River, things are slowly improving. Doug cheerfully boasts that his ranch is in great shape now, and that the ecosystem is following suit.

Alongside extensive water conservation efforts on his own property--including drilling wells and setting down a three-mile pipeline--Doug began working with the DRRP to treat the tamarisk and Russian knapweed along the banks of the river. Efforts included removal by hand, with heavy machinery, and Doug's favorite: the use of the tamarisk beetle. The tamarisk beetle plays a large role in the management of tamarisk via leaf defoliation, and, as he is quick to point out, by nature of our winding, sometimes remote, rivers throughout the West, this method can reach areas that would



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This is part of the Riverside Stories series, brought to you by the Tamarisk Coalition in partnership with the Dolores River Restoration Partnership, and funded by the Walton Family Foundation.

To learn more about other individuals doing great work along rivers, visit <http://tamariskcoalition.org/about-us/riverside-stories>.

Photography Credit: Zach Mahone



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otherwise be impossible to access with machines.

Doug's ranch has been around since the 1930s. It was first owned by his grandfather, then his father, and he has seen it drastically evolve over his 68 years. With 300-600 cattle on his property, work on the ranch is dictated by the seasons, and the winter range along the Dolores River is Doug's favorite part of the land. "It's beautiful--I call it John Wayne country," Doug says, proudly. "I'm the third generation on the land, my son will be the fourth generation, and his son will be the fifth."

First and foremost, Doug King is two things: a grandfather and a caretaker. The former of which comes with age and experience; the latter is a responsibility he has been imparting on all of his children and grandchildren from day one.

"I have a theory that we should leave the land better than how we got it,"

Doug proposes. "I passed this idea down to my children, and they are passing it down to the next generation. It's kind of rare to be a fifth generation; we are just caretakers. You are only going to be here 50-60 years and then somebody else is going to have this land. Once you get here and see this high-desert--it's absolutely gorgeous, and I think taking care of our country is so important right now." ■

