

Tamarisk

The second most invasive plant species in the U.S.

Natural History

The second most invasive plant in the United States is the tamarisk, *Tamarix ramosissima*. The tamarisk, or saltcedar, was introduced in the early 1800s as an ornamental shrub from Eurasia. Now, naturalized and widespread throughout the United States, the tamarisk is found along streams, canals, reservoirs, and rivers.

Identifying Tamarisk

Tamarisk are evergreen shrubs or small trees five to 20 feet tall, with small leaves and scale-like, bark reddish brown bark. It is highly branched with slender stems, and pink to white flowers with five petals.



Tamarisk, *Tamarix ramosissima*, looks similar to species of willow found along river banks throughout most of the United States.

Effects on Riparian Ecosystems

Forming monocultures (one dominant plant rather than many) tamarisk severely limit riparian biodiversity. Loss of native plants, due to this insidious species, leads to loss of insect and bird biodiversity and is unpalatable for most wildlife. With no known predators or diseases, this shrub can spread approximately 12 miles per year. Mature plants can produce up to 250 million seeds that spread when windborne. Fortunately, these seeds only live a few months.

Tamarisk is well adapted to dry climates. Researchers estimate that tamarisk cover one to 1.5 million acres of land in the western U.S. and consumer between 2 and 4.5 million acre-feet of water per year. The larger plants can transpire up to 300 gallons of water per plant each day. Although able to drink massive quantities, the roots can lie exposed for up to two years without water. The

only species more invasive than tamarisk is purple loosestrife.

Distribution in Colorado

In Colorado, the tamarisk prefers an elevation range of 3,400 to 7,400 feet. In Roaring Fork Watershed, tamarisk has been found along the Crystal River. If you find tamarisk in the Roaring Fork Valley, please contact us at (970) 927-1290. Local counties and cities are working with the Tamarisk Coalition to help stop the spread Tamarisk in the Roaring Fork Watershed.

For More Information:

Tamarisk Coalition, www.tamariskcoalition.com
"Tackling tamarisk," by Paul Larmer, *High Country News*, May 25, 1998.

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