Ron Mabry, Ouray County Weed Manager, explains a riparian restoration project in Rollins Park to Ridgway 4th graders.

Special to the Plaindealer
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On Friday, Apr. 20, Ridgway Elementary fourth graders gathered at Rollins Park in downtown Ridgway to celebrate Earth Day. The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership coordinated the event in collaboration with fourth grade teachers, Ms Javoronok and Ms Silver.

The celebration began with a picnic lunch beneath the cottonwoods adjacent to the Uncompahgre River. The fourth graders then participated in a scavenger hunt designed to encourage exploration of the plant and animal communities that comprise a riparian ecosystem. Throughout the afternoon, students collected litter and made certain that it was disposed of properly.

The fourth graders were also able to participate in an Earth Day service project at the Ouray County 4H Event Center. Ron Mabry, county weed manager, gave a brief presentation highlighting the differences between native and non-native plant species. Students then helped prepare four seed beds, broadcast seed the sites with a Rocky Mountain Wildflower seed mix and spread mulch to protect the seeds while they germinate. The wildflower mix, donated by Ouray County Weed Control Department, contained more than a dozen native wildflower species including Siberian wallflower, perennial lupine, sweet william pinks and Rocky Mountain penstemon.

By overwhelming consensus, the best part of the afternoon was the ice cream generously donated by Suzy Ulrich of Café Ridgway. The only divisiveness of the day occurred when heated debate erupted among students as to the merits of sprinkles versus crushed M&M’s as the superior ice cream topping.

The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership would like to thank everyone who helped make this Earth Day celebration a success.