



# Guardians of the Range

*Dedicated to the Multiple Use of Public Lands & the American Way of Life*

Newsletter No. 103

November 2012



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## SNF Draft Forest Plan Comment Period Extension November 26, 2012

The official 90-day comment period began August 4th. With continued public interest and requests for an extension, the SNF has extended the comment period for the Land Management Plan Revision Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The comment period now ends November 26, 2012.

## Friendly Dues Reminder

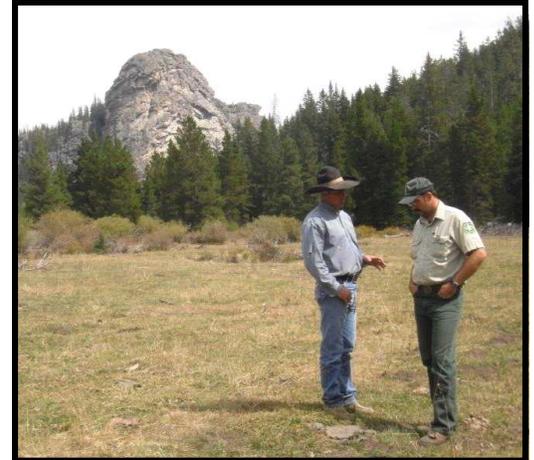
Just a friendly reminder and request to any members who have not paid their 2012 dues. If you are unsure, please contact Todd Rhodes, Treasurer at 307-347-8329 or Kathleen Jachowski, Executive Director at 307-587-3723. We thank you most sincerely!

## Annual Meeting Alert: Possible Date Change in 2013

The Guardians normally hold our annual meeting in February. In 2013, there is a possibility the meeting will be in January. The month and day are subject to availability of keynote speaker. We'll have the details worked out by the December newsletter! Stay tuned!

## 68th Annual Wyoming Weed & Pest Council Fall Conference

Guardians Executive Director will attend this November conference. Our interest is in the discussions of cheatgrass and the efforts underway to address its encroachment. We are especially interested in looking at the economics of treating landscapes that are under siege, or have already fallen victim to its dominance. We'll report back to you next month.



*Pepper Fipps, Sheridan area rancher and Zachary Palm, Forest Rangeland Management Specialist with the Bighorn National Forest at Lamberger Rock. Photo courtesy Carrie Rogaczewski, Sheridan County Conservation District.*

## Monitoring Pilot Project

~ by Zachary Palm, Forest Rangeland Management Specialist with the Bighorn National Forest; & Carrie Rogaczewski, Sheridan County Conservation District; & Clarke McClung, Tongue District Ranger, Bighorn National Forest

In 2011, Orrin Connell with JC Ranch Inc. approached the Bighorn National Forest (BNF) and the Sheridan County Conservation District (SCCD) about potential range monitoring assistance on cattle allotments within the BNF. After numerous discussions, all involved permittees, the BNF, and the SCCD agreed to move forward with the project. SCCD received funding, appropriated by the state legislature, and administered by the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA), to conduct a Rangeland Health Assessment pilot project in 2011.

*Please see **Monitoring** on page 2*

**"You know, farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil,  
and you're a thousand miles from the corn field."  
~ Dwight D. Eisenhower, General and American President**

**Monitoring** continued from page 1

Wyoming Stock Growers Association (WSGA) facilitated the disbursement of the funds for this pilot project. The goal was to improve collaboration among the Permittees, the BNF, and the SCCD with the specific purpose of providing credible and comprehensive monitoring data to be considered in management decisions. The pilot project included the development of a monitoring plan and annual use monitoring.

Annual use monitoring was completed before and after grazing by livestock and consisted of photo points, ocular transects, and stubble height measurements. The 2011 monitoring was completed jointly by BNF and SCCD personnel with assistance from the Permittee. The pilot project also included a review of existing data to evaluate the extent of available data and methods used previously. To fully validate the monitoring plan developed in 2011, the SCCD, BNF, and Permittee requested and were awarded additional funding for 2012.

Scheduling conflicts, quick management decisions in response to actual use levels, and/or livestock moving to another pasture on their own made it difficult to complete monitoring within the desired interval and limited staff's ability to fully meet the Permittee's request for monitoring while livestock were actively grazing a pasture. As a result, the Permittee, BNF, and SCCD determined that a private contractor or dedicated position would help to reduce scheduling conflicts, improve coordination, and provide better service to the Permittee.

The SCCD, BNF, and Permittee worked together to review submitted cost proposals, from various entities and individuals, for a monitoring contract for the 2012 grazing season. In June 2012, Grouse Mountain Environmental Consultants (GMEC), based in Buffalo, WY, was awarded this monitoring contract. After an initial site reconnaissance, GMEC was responsible for coordinating grazing rotations and monitoring schedules. GMEC communicated directly with the Permittees and provided data/photos and other information to BNF and SCCD.

To date, this pilot project has been effective in enhancing collaboration among the Permittee, the BNF and the SCCD. Annual Use data collected in 2011 and 2012 showed, in general, that livestock grazing on these allotments was, and can be, managed to meet BNF goals and objectives. This is credited to the proactive management of the Permittee and the collaboration with the BNF. Following the 2012 grazing season, it was determined that a minimum of two to three years of data are needed to establish a comprehensive data set, therefore, additional funding will be sought in 2013. ★



## The Ecology, Biology, and Control of a Biological Time Bomb

~ By Brian Connely,  
Reprinted with permission from *Backyards & Barnyards*

Cheatgrass, downy brome, bronco-grass - all common names for *Bromus tectorum*, a weed that has the potential to destroy whole ecosystems from Montana to New Mexico. This grass weed has already turned large areas of Nevada into "cheatgrass deserts."

What is cheatgrass? How does it permanently alter plant communities and ecosystems, and, most importantly, what can we do about it?

Cheatgrass is an annual or more often a winter annual. This plant germinates with fall precipitation and over-winters as an adult plant. This adult plant starts growing very early in the spring, giving it an advantage over our later-greening native grasses; hence, the name cheatgrass. It uses fall as a time to get started growing and then springs ahead in growth - cheating native grasses of water and other nutrients.

Cheatgrass is from the Mediterranean area and apparently first came to this continent as a contaminant in packing material. According to the book *Weeds of the West*, cheatgrass first showed up near Denver, Colorado.

The weed can out-compete native perennials in a variety of ways - prolific seed production (up to 18,000 per square yard); ability to form dense stands (12,000 to 15,000 plants per square yard); ability to germinate in fall or spring; tolerance of grazing; and ability to increase, tolerate, and encourage frequent fire events.

Cheatgrass can drastically change native ecosystems - it provides only limited forage for wildlife and livestock throughout the year (a couple of weeks in the spring), increases fire frequency, alters the water and nutrient cycling of an ecosystem, provided no hiding or thermal cover for wildlife, and readily adapts to its environment to out-compete other grasses. Cheatgrass can negatively affect virtually every plant and animal species in the affected area.

Cheatgrass can change the normal lightning-caused fire cycle in the sagebrush-steppe community (natural areas of sagebrush, grasses, and forbs) from once every 45 to 75 years, to once every three to five years! Once a fire sweeps through cheatgrass-dominated site, the cheatgrass has a competitive advantage and often will dominate a post-fire site. These solid monocultures are very stable and will remain solid cheatgrass until actively controlled by man.

Cheatgrass control and prairie rehabilitation and restoration are a relatively new science. New techniques and products are constantly being developed and investigated.

This is some of what is known about cheatgrass management at this time:

**Prevention** - Maintaining a thriving and healthy plant community is paramount in all weed control strategies. Preventing overgrazing and severe land disturbance from excavation / construction, fire, and vehicle traffic helps conserve good plants and prevent weeds from taking over.

Please see **Cheatgrass** on page 3



by Kathleen Jachowski

## Direct from the Director: Cumulative Effects of a Third Kind

One often hears that investing in real estate is a smart decision.....because they just aren't making any more of it! Well, that statement is correct.

However, where farming and ranching are concerned, it won't matter one iota how much land you own, or how much public land your grazing permits encompass, if the 'real estate' is losing ground or has already lost ground to things such as conifer encroachment, sagebrush dominance, or invasive weeds.

Conifer encroachment, sagebrush dominance, and invasive weeds are silent forage predators, if you will. They change the ecology, quietly and steadily. They aren't like a forest or grass-land fire streaming across the landscape, commanding the attention of man and beast alike! No, year after year, forage predators continue their silent march across allotments toward dominance of the rangeland.

Ranchers are always understandably concerned about the loss of both permitted and actual animal unit months (AUMS) on their allotments. All public land ranchers are required to meet healthy rangeland standards and guidelines of both the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service.

This simply means that livestock (cattle, sheep, and horses) must not overgraze the landscape. Fair enough.

However, it becomes harder and harder to meet the standards and guidelines when more and more of an allotment is taken over - not by too many livestock - but by forage predators.

The cumulative effect is a loss of land that produces forage that livestock and most wildlife can utilize. So while the allotment boundaries don't get bigger to compensate for loss of productive acres, livestock and some wildlife have less acres of productive forage from which to 'make a living'.

Paying close attention to the encroachment of silent invaders is very important. It is even more important to document with photographs, and have substantive discussions with your range con so a strategy can be developed. It makes good business sense to not wait until the ecology of the allotment has been changed by these invaders. Good adaptive management calls for attention and prevention.

Members are encouraged to contact the Guardians if you would like some help in partnering with the agencies to prevent the cumulative effects of a third kind.

*Kathleen* Kathleen Jachowski, Executive Director  
307.587.3723 [guardians@hughes.net](mailto:guardians@hughes.net)

### CRAIG THOMAS GUARDIANS OF THE RANGE ENDOWMENT

Supporting this endowment is a wonderful tax-exempt way to show your support for the Guardians' effort, or to honor a family member or friend. Please contact a board member or Kathleen Jachowski (307)587-3723 or [guardians@hughes.net](mailto:guardians@hughes.net).

*Cheatgrass continued from page 2*

Overzealous applications of non-selective herbicides (an example is Roundup) or using selective herbicides too heavily can help pave the way for cheatgrass. Keeping cheatgrass from establishing in disturbed areas is very important for long-term prevention.

**Biological control** - There are currently no biocontrol insects or pathogens available for cheatgrass control.

**Mechanical control** (cultivating, mowing, grazing, burning) - In cultivating cheatgrass in preparation for reseeding, cheatgrass seed must be buried at least 2 1/2 inches to prevent germination. A moldboard plow is effective but not feasible in rocky conditions. Mowing is not effective as plants mowed before seed production tend to form new seed heads. Cheatgrass will adapt to mowing regimes and start producing seed heads below the cutting blade elevation. Grazing cheatgrass intensively in early spring can help stress the plants. Graze the plants twice in very early spring at three-week intervals.

Controlled burning at the proper time can reduce cheatgrass densities the year after the fire. Controlled burns must be conducted before seeds mature. The seed present on the soil is not totally destroyed by fire, and cheatgrass can recover in a few years if reseeding of perennial grasses is not successful; therefore, a controlled burn of cheatgrass must be followed by a successful planting and / or establishment of perennial grasses for control. Controlled burns must be planned with cooperation of local fire districts and land management professionals.

*Please see Cheatgrass on page 4*

## Join Guardians of the Range

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40 cents / head for sheep

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without federal grazing permits:

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Applicable to any new livestock operator membership that needs help within 90 days of joining the Guardians of the Range.

You may join on line:

[www.GuardiansoftheRange.org](http://www.GuardiansoftheRange.org)

To pay by check, please make checks payable to:

Guardians of the Range

mail to:

Guardians of the Range, P.O. Box 472, Worland, WY 82401

[www.GuardiansoftheRange.org](http://www.GuardiansoftheRange.org)

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**Cheatgrass** continued from page 3

**Chemical control** - Chemical control can be costly but is often the best initial alternative from controlling cheatgrass. First, determine the condition and goals for a management area. Survey the land carefully and determine if there are enough existing desirable grasses / forbs / shrubs in the area to meet management goals. Utilizing a local weed and pest control district, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES), and your local conservation district can be a big help in making this determination. If a good stand of desirable plants is in place in the cheatgrass-infested area, then one herbicide in particular has shown promise in selective cheatgrass control - Plateau. Plateau is only sold to governmental organizations such as weed and pest control districts, and others. These organizations can then redistribute to the public.

Plateau is labeled for "native grass establishment... on pastures, rangeland, and non-crop areas." It is only available through government entities such as some weed and pest control districts and is quite costly (about \$8 to \$14 per acre). Plateau is applied at 4 to 8 ounces per acre in the late summer or fall - late August to October. It is best applied to the ground before cheatgrass germination and in anticipation of the first fall precipitation. Plateau, when applied properly, will not kill most perennial native plants, and but it will prevent cheatgrass from germinating.

Plateau is applied at very low rates for cheatgrass. This means the equipment used to apply the chemical must be well calibrated.

If a survey of the cheatgrass infestation shows there are very few desirable plants present, then replanting and establishing desirable, adapted plants will be necessary. A pre-plant chemical treatment is necessary to assure establishment of the planting. Journey herbicide can be applied in the fall to control cheatgrass and prior to either a fall or spring planting. Journey can be purchased through some weed and pest districts and agriculture supply stores (about \$10 per-acre-treatment cost).

Glyphosate (the active ingredient in Roundup) can be applied to young cheatgrass plants in the spring, followed by a spring planting. Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide and will kill most desirable plants. If reseeding is necessary, then glyphosate or Journey should be considered.

Reading, understanding, and following label directions is essential when using herbicides. Cheatgrass control is a relatively new science and can be complicated and confusing; however, control is very possible if we learn all we can about this grass and its control.

Below are some good links to information on cheatgrass control.

Calibrating hand or single-nozzle sprayers: [http://ces.uwyo.edu/PUBS/MP93\\_Series/mp93-4.pdf](http://ces.uwyo.edu/PUBS/MP93_Series/mp93-4.pdf)

Caolibrating boom sprayers: [http://ces.uwyo.edu/PUBS/MP93\\_Series/mp93-3.pdf](http://ces.uwyo.edu/PUBS/MP93_Series/mp93-3.pdf)

Brian Connely is the education coordinator at the Natrona County Weed & Pest Control District and can be reached at 307.472.5559 or at [brianwp@alluretech.net](mailto:brianwp@alluretech.net). ★