

UI Extension in Fort Hall demonstrates successful cheatgrass management

AT A GLANCE

Cheatgrass has threatened Shoshone-Bannock tribal rangelands for decades. UI Extension in Fort Hall demonstrated a successful management approach that the Tribe is now expanding to 1,500 acres.

The Situation

The Fort Hall Reservation is home to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, whose ancestral ties to the land continue to shape cultural, environmental, agricultural and economic priorities. Healthy rangelands are essential for livestock production, wildlife habitat, traditional plant resources and the long-term stewardship of tribal lands.

The University of Idaho Extension's area livestock educator works with tribal departments, land managers, livestock producers and partner agencies to provide research-based education and technical assistance supporting sustainable rangeland management.

For decades, the Fort Hall Reservation has experienced widespread infestations of downy brome (cheatgrass), an invasive winter annual that has displaced native vegetation across thousands of acres. Cheatgrass typically germinates in the fall, grows rapidly in the spring, and produces abundant seed, allowing it to spread aggressively.

Once established, it outcompetes native perennial grasses, reduces forage production, increases wildfire risk and makes restoration of native plant communities increasingly difficult. Effective management



Before and after comparison depicting cheatgrass reduction.

strategies are needed to protect the productivity and ecological health of tribal rangelands.

Prior to treatment, an ocular vegetation assessment estimated the demonstration site was composed of approximately 65% cheatgrass and 35% native perennial grasses. Photo points were established to document vegetation changes over time and provide a baseline for evaluating treatment effectiveness.

Our Response

Recognizing the growing threat, the area livestock Extension educator developed a demonstration project to evaluate the herbicide Rejuvra® for cheatgrass control and native grass recovery.

The area livestock Extension educator collaborated with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, tribal departments and John Frason (Wilbur-Ellis) and coordinated all aspects of the demonstration.

A highly visible one-acre treatment site was selected near the Interstate 15 Fort Hall exit to maximize educational opportunities and allow community members and leaders to observe treatment results. UI Extension coordinated tribal approvals, site selection, herbicide donation and acquisition (John Frason, Wilbur-Ellis), treatment planning and educational outreach. The project:

- Provided research-based education on cheatgrass biology, impacts and management.
- Coordinated safe and effective herbicide application with tribal personnel.
- Documented pre-treatment vegetation conditions using ocular assessments and photo-point monitoring.
- Demonstrated practical methods for restoring native perennial grasses on cheatgrass infested rangelands.

Program Outcomes

Within one growing season, photo-point monitoring documented excellent cheatgrass control and a noticeable increase in native perennial grasses. Although long-term vegetation monitoring is continuing, visual assessments indicated that reducing cheatgrass competition created favorable conditions for perennial grass recovery. The successful demonstration generated significant interest among stakeholders and increased confidence that larger-scale restoration efforts could be successful. The project outcomes included:

- Successfully controlled cheatgrass (95+% control) in test plots on the one-acre demonstration site.
- Reduced invasive annual grass dominance while promoting recovery of native perennial grasses.

- Increased awareness of invasive annual grass management among tribal departments, producers and community members.
- Provided the confidence and technical foundation for the Tribe to initiate treatment of 1,500 acres of cheatgrass infested rangeland.
- Established a long-term restoration strategy with the potential to improve more than 90,000 acres of tribal rangelands.
- Enhanced the potential for increased forage production, improved wildlife habitat, reduced fine fuel loads and lowered wildfire risk.

The Future

Managing invasive annual grasses requires long-term commitment and collaboration, and integrated vegetation management. UI Extension will continue to:

- Expand cheatgrass management using the Natural Resource Conservation Service and other funding opportunities.
- Monitor treated areas and provide education on invasive plant management and rangeland restoration.
- Strengthen partnerships with tribal departments, landowners and livestock producers.
- Support additional restoration projects that improve the health, productivity and resilience of tribal rangelands.

Through research-based education, demonstration projects, and collaborative land stewardship, UI Extension is helping restore resilient tribal rangelands that support livestock production, wildlife habitat, cultural resources and long-term sustainability.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

John Frason, Wilbur-Ellis; Shoshone-Bannock Tribes; Agricultural Resource Management and Range; Land Use Policy Commissioners; and Tribal livestock producers and landowners

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Danielle Gunn, Area Livestock Extension Educator • U of I Aberdeen Research & Extension Center • 208-397-4181 • dgunn@uidaho.edu
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