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A voluntary partnership with private landowners

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Cover photo courtesy of Natural Resources Conservation Service.

GLCI News

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

Stopping the Spread of Cedar

Early control is best for minimizing eastern red cedar invasion into productive grasslands.

By Kindra Gordon

Eastern red cedar can be considered a friend or foe – depending on who you ask. For some landowners this shrubby evergreen tree has been a popular, hardy species for windbreak plantings and wildlife habitat. It is estimated that 1.2 million eastern red cedar seedlings were planted annually from the 1980s through 1990s in Nebraska.

But, the lack of fire – which historically controlled the encroachment of cedar into grasslands – has created an eastern red cedar invasion across much of the Great Plains today. Thus, to more and more landowners eastern red cedar is a foe that competes with grasses for light, water, and nutrients and ultimately reduces forage production and land values.

"Fire suppression over the years has allowed eastern red cedar to invade prairies," says Amy Ganguli, an Oklahoma State University Ph.D. candidate researching the subject. She adds that birds have transported eastern red cedar seed to a wide range of areas, and cedars can establish anywhere from shallow, rocky sites to productive grasslands.

While eastern red cedar is relatively easy to control – unfortunately too many landowners have done nothing and the infestations have choked out entire land tracts.

"The key to preventing eastern red cedar invasion is early detection and prompt action," says Ganguli. "It's an easy species to control because it's not a re-sprouter."

University of Nebraska weed scientist Stevan Knezevic agrees and says, "It is important to control cedars while they are small seedlings." He reports red cedars can grow an average of 1 ft./year, which means without management they can quickly get out of control.

Knezevic frequently gets calls from landowners in Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin wondering how to get rid of cedars encroaching on their land. His advice is to use an integrated approach. "There are several control strategies: cutting, mowing, fire, goats and herbicides. Each has benefits and concerns, but using a combination of methods will get the best results," he says.

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Stopping the Spread of Cedar

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Control Options

Knezevic says determining the management control strategy used on red cedars should be based on size of the tree.

For effective herbicide control, trees should be no more than a couple feet tall. Knezevic says broadcast herbicides, such as Surmount, Grazon P+D and Tordon 22K, work well when applied according to the label. These herbicides also work for individual treatment of trees up to 6 ft. tall.

Less severe infestations of trees up to 2 feet can be pulled or dug up. These short trees can also be mowed with mower blades set close to the soil surface or below the lowest branches. Knezevic suggests doing this shortly after the regular haying process.

Periodic prescribed fire is the least expensive option to help eliminate small red cedars and other noxious weed seeds. Knezevic says to burn once or twice in a three- to five-year period to control seedlings.

A prescribed fire break. The fire break should be about 8 feet wide so that the fire doesn't jump to additional acreage.

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Prescribed fire is a complex tool. Only a certified fire prescriptionist should be allowed to burn.

Pasturing goats with cattle can also help eliminate small trees. Goats will eat cedars and noxious weeds, but won't compete with cattle for grasses, Knezevic says.

For trees 6 to 10 feet or taller, cutting appears most economical, according to Knezevic. Treating individual trees with chemicals or using fire can also be used but will leave the dead tree standing for several years.

Another option, producers can reduce tree populations and prevent further cedar spreading while maintaining a wildlife habitat by cutting out only female, or berry-producing, trees.

Montana's Unique GLCI Campaign

Cowboy Up with Conservation
It can save your grass

Brand names are commonplace for products to build a reputable image with consumers. We drive Fords and Chevys, wear Levi's and Wranglers and eat McDonalds or Burger King. All are brands with which we are familiar.

In 2003, the Montana GLCI committee decided it should build a campaign to develop a "brand" for the Montana GLCI. The thinking was that the brand would help create new awareness for GLCI activities as well as reinvigorate the GLCI effort after nearly 15 years in existence.

Working with NRCS public affairs specialists, the clever tag line "Cowboy Up With Conservation: It can save your grass" and a logo were developed as the starting point for the Montana GLCI brand initiative. A conservation packet with fact sheets on grazing research, booklets on different Montana ranch success stories, range plant identification books, and a complete list of people resources to contact in the state for technical grazing assistance was also put together for private landowners to request, either through postcards or on the web at www.mtglci.org.

Then, the updated Montana GLCI program and its "Cowboy Up With Conservation" slogan were introduced in December 2004 at the Montana Stockgrowers annual meeting. Jon Chandler, an author, singer and ardent supporter of conservation issues was tapped as a special spokesperson for radio and TV ads to promote the revised program.

Carla Lawrence, who serves as a partnership grazing lands coordinator for Montana through NRCS, reports that the new campaign has been met with overwhelming success.

"We've increased awareness of the grazing assistance available to private landowners, and we've created new enthusiasm within our state GLCI," she says. She reports that they've had over 250 requests for the "Cowboy Up" conservation packets, and are continuing to get the message out with some new radio spots featuring Montana ranchers talking about their grazing successes.

Lawrence says Montana would willingly work with other state GLCI coalitions to help them develop similar campaigns. "There's no sense in reinventing the wheel," she says. She does advise that before embarking on a mission to revamp a state's GLCI efforts that the entire state committee sit down and establish the goals that they want their state coalition to achieve. "You've got to do the groundwork before you can implement something like this," she says.

For anyone seeking more information about the MT GLCI, contact Lawrence at Carla.lawrence@mt.usda.gov or phone: 406-587-6952.

In addition to their new efforts, the Montana GLCI has continued to fund grazing-related research demonstrations at ranches, host tours to showcase grazing management practices, and they've even developed a special curriculum for schools to bring grazing education to elementary students in the state.

30th Anniversary of South Dakota Youth Range Camp Celebrated

Special awards given to longtime supporters, 2005 youth participants

The 2005 Youth Range Camp was held June 7-10 in Sturgis, S.D., with this year marking the 30th anniversary for the event. Nearly 50 high school students participated in the annual three-day camp, which provides an opportunity to learn about rangeland resources in the state.

In addition to daily educational activities, a special 30th Anniversary Banquet was held Wednesday evening June 8 to honor past participants and supporters of Range Camp. Janet Ortley, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) state conservationist for South Dakota, and Gary Lemme, new dean of the College of Agriculture at South Dakota State University (SDSU), were both on hand to accept recognition for NRCS and SDSU's ongoing support of youth range education. Jim and Emily Jennings of Sturgis were also given special recognition for their contribution to an endowment fund established in the 1970s to help fund Range Camp and scholarships for five South Dakota teams to compete at the National Land and Range Judging Competition held annually in Oklahoma City.

Jim O'Rourke of Chadron, NE, and former president of the Society for Range Management (SRM), gave a keynote address for the evening emphasizing the importance of professionalism in range. O'Rourke pointed out that events like Range Camp help students early on distinguish between a job and a future career. And, even for students who may never go into range management, activities like Range Camp can have a profound impact on educating them as they become tomorrow's voting public. To that end, he expressed the importance of supporting state events such as Range Camp.

Rod Baumberger, Jim Johnson and Mike Sterling were also given a special award for their involvement with youth education in range management over the past three decades.

Throughout the week hands-on activities included learning about range plant identification, ecological sites, soils and geology, stocking rates, as well as information on careers in natural resources. The US Forest Service Office and the DC Booth Historic Fish Hatchery, both in Spearfish, also provided participants tours. At the conclusion of the week -long camp, a range judging competition was held.

Bainter Receives Wyoming Award

Everett Bainter, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Rangeland Management Specialist, was awarded the Outstanding Range Professional Award for 2005 by the Wyoming Stock Growers Association. Bainter was recognized at the Wyoming Cattle Industry Convention and Trade Show held June 8-11, at Cheyenne's Holiday Inn.

The Outstanding Range Professional Award is given in recognition of the valuable contribution to the livestock industry made by range professionals who exemplify high professional standards coupled with a dedication to building strong working relationships with livestock producers.

"This award acknowledges your dedicated years of service to resource enhancement that has benefited countless Wyoming agricultural producers," said Jim Magagna, Executive Vice President of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association, during the presentation.

Bainter is headquartered at the NRCS state office in Casper, Wyoming.

- submitted by Nancy Atkinson, WY NRCS

Seven cattle operations win environmental award

Seven regional honorees have earned the U.S. beef industry's top environmental stewardship awards. Honorees are selected by nomination and recognized for exemplary, long-term stewardship of their land. The national winner will be announced at the 2006 Cattle Industry Convention in Denver, CO, in February.

The seven regional honorees include:

Region 1 — Li'l Ponderosa Enterprises, Carlisle, PA; nominated by Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Assn.

Region 2 — Lightsey Cattle Co., Lake Wales, FL; nominated by Florida Cattlemen's Association

Region III: Faris Farms in Mount Ayr, IA; nominated by Iowa Cattlemen's Association.

Region IV: Richards Ranch in Jacksboro, TX; Nominated by the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Assn.

Region 5: Simms Cattle Company LLC in McFadden, WY; nominated by Wyoming Stock Growers Association.

Region 6: Prather Ranch in Fall River Mills, CA; Nominated by California Cattlemen's Association.

Region 7: Gates Angus Ranch in Coldwater, KS; Nominated by Kansas Livestock Assn.

The Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP), established in 1991 by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, showcases the stewardship and business practices that exist together on progressive farms and ranches. Now in its 15th year, ESAP is sponsored by Dow AgroSciences, LLC and the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

2005 Grazing Events

Oct. 18-20: Noble Foundation Grazing School, Ardmore, OK. To register, contact Melissa Castleman at 580-224-6411 or email mdcastleman@noble.org. Cost is $200.

Oct. 20-21: King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management Holt/CAT Symposium, Texas A&M University-Kingsville. For information call 361-593-5401 or visit krirm.tamuk.edu.

Nov. 29-30: Western Hay Business Conference & Expo, Loveland, CO. For commercial hay producers and marketers. $150 per person to attend. FMI Cindy Kramer at 952-851-4698.

Promoting Grassfed

Grassfed enthusiasts can turn to the American Grassfed Association (AGA) to learn more about producing and marketing grass-finished products. Formed in the summer of 2003, the AGA was founded to promote the grassfed industry through government relations, research, concept marketing and public education. A group of producers, food service industry personnel and consumer interest representatives banded together to form the association.

Among the AGA's top priorities are working with the USDA to establish a legal definition for grassfed meat and to implement a labeling program that benefits producers by allowing them to acquire a premium for products that meet the criteria of a grassfed product. In addition, the AGA strives to communicate the value of grassfed products to associated industries and consumers and provide a network within its membership to share information and direct consumers wishing to buy grassfed products to the suppliers nearest them.

The AGA defines grassfed products from ruminants, including cattle, bison, goats and sheep, as those food products from animals that have eaten nothing but their mother's milk and fresh grass or grass-type hay from their birth. For non-ruminants, including pigs and poultry, to achieve the "grassfed" label, grass would be the large part of their diets.

The association is currently headquartered in Kiowa, CO and hosts an annual conference. For more information, contact the AGA at 1-877-774-7277, or email aga@americangrassfed.org. Or, visit the AGA website at www.americangrassfed.org.

THE CHAIR'S CORNER

Bob Drake

We welcome Howard Straub of St. Johns, Michigan, as a member of our National GLCI Steering Committee. Howard represents the dairy industry and fills the position that was vacated by Jack Laurie. We also thank Jack for his many years of service to GLCI. Howard will be joining us all for GLCI's fall business meeting Sept. 8-11 in Sarasota, FL. Look for more details from the meeting and tours in the next GLCI News.

Bob Drake, Chairman
National GLCI
Steering Committee

To have your GLCI activities or upcoming events highlighted in this newsletter, contact Kindra Gordon at phone 605-722-7699 or kindras@gordonresources.com

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Visit the GLCI homepage at http://www.glci.org

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