

INVASIVE SPECIES MITIGATION FUND



Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS

Cheatgrass

bromus tectorum



Photo credit: Utah State University Extension

Cheatgrass, also commonly known as downy brome, is an annual growing up to 2 feet tall. It germinates in the fall, or early spring, flowers in early summer, matures and dies by midsummer. It has tiny soft hairs on leaves and sheaths and forms clusters of drooping flowers at the stem ends. Flowers can be greenish, red or purple. It grows in various climates and elevations, and is especially well adapted to the arid West. Because it forms many seeds and a large root system, it can completely replace native plants, creating huge populations of dense cover.



Utah's War on Cheatgrass

In August 2008, the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food awarded \$2 million in Invasive Species Mitigation Funds to 10 different projects to control cheatgrass infestations throughout the state. The weed has fueled catastrophic wildfires throughout Utah and the West.

Cheatgrass makes a perfect wildland fuel – growing in early spring, forming dense cover, maturing and drying by midsummer, ready to flare with the first spark or lightning strike. Worse, after a fire, large areas of land are left devoid of vegetation and ready for even greater cheatgrass populations or other noxious weeds. This fact sheet highlights one of many projects throughout Utah aimed at reducing cheatgrass in vulnerable wildland areas.

Promontory, Box Elder County

The Northern Utah Conservation District has developed 200 miles of firebreaks 150 feet wide at Promontory. Box Elder County has provided excavation equipment to clear the soil and prepare it for seeding. The strips have been treated with Plateau® herbicide to clear the strips of cheatgrass and noxious weeds. It will now be aerially seeded with forage kochia, alfalfa and other fire-resistant plants.

The objectives of the conservation district are to reduce the size of catastrophic wildfires in the area and to protect structures, homes, and a Doppler radar site located in the area. The entire project has occurred on private land requiring the cooperation of 50 different landowners. The group plans to build more firebreaks in summer 2009, and seed them the following fall and winter.

Cooperating with the conservation district in the project are Box Elder County, Utah Forestry Fire and State Lands, the Box Elder Fire Marshall, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and private landowners. The project was jointly funded by the Utah Department of Agriculture & Food (\$355,900) and Utah Forestry, Fire and State Lands (\$140,000). It will treat 2,900 acres and protect 200,000 acres.



Fire-resistant plants are seeded from the air (left). Box Elder County equipment operators prepare soil for seeding (above).

