

Invasive Species

What are Invasive Species?

Invasive plants are plants that have been introduced into an environment in which they did not evolve and thus usually have no natural enemies. “These plants are characteristically adaptable, aggressive, and have high reproductive capacity. Their vigor combined with a lack of natural enemies often leads to outbreak populations.” (USDA)



Capital Press- Goats grazing Leafy Spurge

What are the Impacts of Invasive Species?

Invasive plants have degraded wildlife habitat & forage, there is an increase of soil erosion and stream sedimentation, a depletion of soil moisture and nutrient levels, and fire tendencies have been altered.

For example, prior to the invasion of cheat grass in sagebrush steppe ecosystems, fires occurred between 60 to 110 years; however, cheat grass has changed the fire frequency to 3 to 5 years (Baldwin, Review of Livestock Grazing & Range Management in Utah). This change leads to the more desirable native plants diminishing and the exotic species recovering from the fire quickly and then invading and taking over.

How does Livestock Grazing Manage Invasive Species?

Prescribed livestock grazing can provide more effective and lasting weed control than herbicides, it will also have less effect on non-target species. The goal of using livestock to control weeds is to thin vegetation to place a target plant at a

competitive disadvantage relative to other plants in the community.

There are two approaches to this—“1) use grazing management that harms the target weed by grazing at the time and frequency when the weed is most vulnerable, and 2) modify the grazing behavior of

animals to cause them to concentrate their grazing efforts on the target weed.” (Frost & Launchbaugh “Rangelands Prescription Grazing”).

Invasive Species found in Idaho-

Medusa Head, an annual grass which originated from the Mediterranean. Its impact on rangelands is, it crowds out native species and forage for livestock.

Medusa Head contains silica which is harsh and

unpalatable to livestock, except during early growing stages (pictured above).



When it has matured it starts to dry out and has stiff awns and hard florets that can injure the eyes and mouths of grazing animals. (pictured right).

Medusa Head @invasive.org



It spreads quickly because of its lack of palatability to livestock & the abundance of seeds because seed-eating birds won't eat Medusa Head.

Downy Brome- an annual grass commonly known as **Cheat Grass**, a native of Europe & Asia.

Impacts are it crowds out native grasses and creates wildfire hazards.



Cheatgrass @invasive.org

Like Medusa Head, cheat grass is eaten in its growing stages then when it dries out, it can injure livestock and other animals and they don't like to eat it.

Ventenata, also known as **Wiregrass**, originated from the Mediterranean region. It is relatively new to the Pacific Northwest.

Impacts are it rapidly infests newly seeded or poorly managed grass areas. It has no known forage value for wildlife and livestock; it causes soil to be prone to erosion due to its shallow rooting depth, limits the flow of waterways and reduces land value.

Brought to you by the Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission with information from the following- Cheatgrass & Medusa Head-United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), & Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Ventenata- University of Idaho Department of Rangeland Management & Ecology- Tim Prather & Junipers- "Biology, Ecology, And Management of Western Junipers" by Oregon State University.

Ventenata may be grazed in early spring, however the stems harden and become unpalatable.

Ventenata grows 6-18 inches tall and is very distinguishable with its vibrant green stems, dark red or black nodes, and

Ventenata by NRCS



shallow roots in the early season. In the late season it is silvery-green to tan, and stems become wiry with few leaves.

Junipers-a native plant to Idaho. Usually native plants do not become invasive however, during the past 100 years or so, once-open woodlands of western juniper have become dense stands. Control of natural wildfires is thought to be one of the causes of this dramatic change in this ecosystem.

Impacts of Junipers are, they crowd out tasty, nutritious understory plants that cattle and wildlife could otherwise graze or browse. Soil erosion occurs and there is a decrease in soil nutrients

Junipers @cnr.uidaho.edu



Junipers are a coniferous tree that can grow to a height of 80 feet or more. Have needlelike or scale like leaves, small blue colored berries, and seed filled cones.