Invasive Annual Grass Management Successes - A Wildlife, Pollinator, and Wildfire Perspective

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Invasive winter annual grasses (WAGs) such as cheatgrass, medusahead, and ventenata continue to negatively impact Montana Rangeland. Impacts include displacement of species diversity, displacement of critical wildlife and pollinator habitat, and a drastic increase in fine fuels associated with wildfire. Since beginning in 2015 in collaboration with all the major Universities in the west including Montana State University, over 100 research trials and operational treatments have been implemented with a new WAG tool, Rejuvra. Rejuvra is a new mode of action to land managers that provides multiple years of WAG control with a single application. This allows for the depletion of the WAG soil seed bank, ultimately increasing our restoration success. One concern of land managers, ecologists, and wildlife biologists is the ever-increasing threat of WAGs, the possible permanent displacement of these in-tact ecosystems, and wildfire risk. Several research sites have included lowland, foothills and mountains properties that provide critical overwintering habitat for mule deer, elk, and other wildlife, and treated areas have provided the opportunity to answer several research questions of interest to land managers. Our research has shown that mule deer browse for seven different shrub species and forb forage dramatically increased where cheatgrass was controlled. Invasive WAG treated sites have also resulted in an increase in pollinator habitat and visitation, and fine-fuel loads are greatly reduced. These results reinforce the findings of field managers, that cheatgrass and other invasive WAGs pose a significant threat to the habitat and population of browse and pollinator species in the west.