

Cache ranchers use helicopter to control weeds

Press release

Created *Sep 24 2010 - 12:14pm*

PARADISE -- Ranchers in Cache Valley used a helicopter this week to help in the control of Medusahead Rye.

Ranchers have joined forces and enlisted the help of a helicopter in controlling Medusahead that has infested an estimated 6,000 acres in Cache Valley. The weed was first seen in the valley 15 years ago and has grown from a small patch to the thousands of acres in Cache and Box Elder Counties. The weed has been targeted as a major problem in the valley because it is so competitive and it cuts use of rangeland 80 percent.

Ranchers in the county have come together to form a weed prevention project. This is one of the first of its kind in the state.

Commissioner Leonard Blackham said, "This is a great template for other weed projects to follow throughout the state." The project includes around 30 different landowners from the south end of the valley that have rangeland that has been affected by Medusahead. "This is one of the best organized and cooperative groups of landowners in the state." Said Blackham. The group has been highly successful in organizing and working together to control the spread of the weed. "They have made more progress than any other group of landowners I have seen." Said David NRCS. The landowners have a board that is made up of different landowner and experts from the ARS to help to direct the project.

The project also has the help of many different government organizations and experts in range health. Agriculture Research Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Utah Association of Conservation District, Extension, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, The Grazing Improvement Program, Cache County, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Blacksmith Fork Conservation District are all involved in the project. Because this is such a new problem in the state there has not been as much research done in Utah as is need and experts from all of these government agencies are being used to find the best way to deal with the problem.

A lack of perfect treatment plans and answers has not stops researchers from looking for answers and has not stopped to landowners from moving forward in fighting this noxious weed. The treat that it posses to the rangeland in Utah is great. It has the potential to covering millions of acres in Utah. This would not only cause the grazing ability to be cut by 80% but also it would cause great damage to the ecosystems in those areas.

Areas in the South Cache that were once covered by many different species of plant life are now no more than a thick blanket of Medusahead Thatch. Because of the thatch no other plants will grow in a high density area of Medusahead. Because of the lack of biodiversity in these areas wildlife suffer. The plant is high in Silica with makes it unpalatable to most livestock and wildlife. Medusahead has an extremely noticeable impact of the environment.

Medusahead has rancher concerned for another reason. Fire has always been a concern in Utah. Utah is the second driest state in the nation. Because of this wildfires burn thousands of acres each year. But with the right vegetation fire danger can be lowered. But Medusahead increases the risk of fire. With years of dry thatch on the ground Medusahead patches become a firefighter's nightmare. It burns fast and will start very easily. This is yet another reason why Medusahead has become a problem with a high priority.