The Wildfire Conservation Group (WCG) was organized by a group of mostly ranchers who are volunteer firefighters residing in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Winnemucca District in northern Nevada. With continual threat from wildfires, typically occurring on cheatgrass-infested rangelands, the WCG evolved as a group dedicated to preemptive actions to prevent wildfires, protect native habitats, and work on restoring fire-ravaged areas that have converted to invasive cheatgrass.

Over the past 8 years, the WCG has worked ardently to form partnerships with organizations committed to similar goals. Among the cooperating partners are local, state, federal agencies, researchers, individual landowners, and non-governmental organizations. The list of partners continues to grow.

Following several catastrophic fires over the past 15 years, the WCG determined that a partnership effort to preempt wildfires through application of sound fuels management and post-fire rehabilitation is needed. Also, ranchers were confident that livestock could play an important role in helping to reduce the fuels generated by cheatgrass and the excessive buildup of dry native biomass on overgrown sagebrush-dominated range.

A grant was secured from the BLM to work with interested allotment permittees to conduct wildfire risk assessments and to prepare cooperative fuels management plans. Professional consultants retained by the WCG and in cooperation BLM developed fuels management plans on 11 allotments covering nearly 500,000 acres. The partnership effort was strongly supported by Bob Abbey, then Nevada BLM Director and presently BLM Director in Washington, D.C.

SPONSOR

Given its successful beginning, the WCG was invited by Senator Reid to prepare an appropriation request for a grant to continue their efforts to combat cheatgrass invasion and wildfires. The WCG successfully secured three grants through Senator Reid to continue with its mission. The WCG is most appreciative to Senator Reid for his support.

MISSION

The mission of the WCG is to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires through methods for reducing cheatgrass and other fuels, and implementing effective pre-fire fuels management and post-fire reclamation practices. This mission will be achieved through collaboration with willing landowners, organizations, and agency partners utilizing applied research, demonstrations, and public education.

PARTNERS

Private Landowners
Nevada Association of Counties
USDA Agricultural Research Service
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
University of Nevada Reno College of Agriculture, Biotechnology, and Natural Resources
Nevada Division of Forestry
Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Nevada Department of Wildlife
USDI Bureau of Land Management
US Forest Service

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Organized partnership with landowners, organizations and agencies.
- Completed fuels management plans for private ranch holdings with implementation presently underway. New plans are underway.
- Planned and established more than 400 acres of demonstration areas with multiple practices addressing wildfire risk areas and challenging soil conditions. UNR and USDA-ARS scientists are actively involved in these demonstration treatments and plantings.
- Additional demonstration areas are underway in locations that allow for testing and viewing of different resource conditions and needs.
- A major mining company offered 640 acres to WCG and partners to evaluate a potential demonstration area for restoration on burned-over cheatgrass range. The team is responding to this challenge.
- WCG has introduced the Lawson Aerator, a brush treatment implement, to the region to compare its effect to other equipment.
- WCG has established a 40-acre Lawson Aerator treated plot on US Forest Service lands to compare it to the Dixie Harrow, a different type of equipment used for improving range.
- Established a Science Committee of recognized scientists in the state to provide review and oversight to public land allotments fuels management plans prepared by WCG.
- WCG has been invited on several occasions to present updates to the Nevada Legislature's Public Lands Committee and other organizations regarding their activities and accomplishments.
- Initiated and co-sponsored the 2007 Great Basin Wildfire Forum which brought together experienced range scientists to analyze the cause of catastrophic wildfires in the Great Basin and create recommendations to address the issue. An Experiment Station Bulletin summarizes this unique and very successful forum. It can be found online at http://www.cabnr.unr.edu/naes/wildfireforum.pdf.
- Thousands of hours of volunteer time and out-of-pocket costs dedicated to the WCG goal.

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WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- Install fuel breaks to reduce vegetation continuity
- Manage/control vegetation to reduce fuel loads
- Plant fire-resistant species that meet livestock and wildlife habitat needs
- Restore burned areas to prevent cheatgrass infestations
- Join with us to begin the process of restoring Great Basin habitats in Nevada.

For technical assistance with installing these practices, contact the WCG or your local office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Financial assistance may also be available from the NRCS.

Nov. 2010

WILDFIRE CONSERVATION GROUP

Reducing catastrophic wildfires through pre-suppression, progressive land management and education.