

# Cheatgrass Challenge Guidance for NRCS Planners in Idaho

## Planning and Programs



The Cheatgrass Challenge is a proactive strategy developed to halt the transition of sagebrush steppe plant communities to annual grasslands. The strategy was developed collaboratively by federal, state, and local partners in Idaho and can be defined as: (See Tackling Idaho's Cheatgrass Challenge)

Defend the Core Grow the Core Mitigate Impacts

Project areas should be developed through local community-based partnerships. A landscape level approach is encouraged to create measurable outcomes and provide additional resources for planned treatments.

### Identifying Resource Concerns

For the Cheatgrass Challenge an initial assessment of project areas will be used to identify possible threats to sage-steppe ecosystems by annual invasive grasses (BRTE, TACA8, & VEDU). The threat-based approach will help identify need for project areas, prescribe conservation practices, and provide documentation for program funding. Additional Inventory and Assessment protocols should be completed for site specific treatment areas and development of conservation plans.

Project areas will be assessed using "Threat-Based Land Management in the Northern Great Basin: A Manager's Guide – PNW722 9/2019". This document provides a framework to identify threat to sagebrush ecosystems through use of a simplified state and transition models. The states are developed based on presence or absence of functional groups to and relationship to resilience of plant communities to disturbance. <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/pnw722>

The field documentation form will be provided as a summary for each project area with approximate percentages of Intact Core, Transition Zone, or Annual Grass regions.

### Planning and Implementing Conservation Practices:

All conservation practices necessary to facilitate improved management or address documented resource concerns can be planned and applied in conservation plans developed for the Cheatgrass Challenge. The level of invasion can assist planners with initial alternatives developed for landowners (See Cheatgrass Management Handbook – UW-CSU 8/2013) – <http://www.wyomingextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B1246.pdf> .

### Recommended Practices:

Level 1 & 2 (States A, B, C-dual) – Monitoring and Rapid Response

- 528- Prescribed Grazing- Documentation of existing grazing strategy, baseline inventory, development of monitoring plan to identify invasive in early stages for EDRR treatments. (528 monitoring scenario being developed for Fiscal Year 2021 cost list).
- 315- Herbaceous Weed Treatment – currently available for multiple treatments and application methods on annual grasses.
- 645- Upland Wildlife Habitat Mgmt – available in all areas where landowner has a wildlife habitat objective.



Level 3 & 4 (State C-IAG, E-dual)- Adaptive management, multiple treatments, facilitating practices, accelerating practices

- 528 Prescribed Grazing – Evaluation of existing grazing strategies and development of alternatives to adjust time, timing, intensity, and frequency of grazing disturbance. Development of monitoring plan and adaptive management alternatives.
- 315- Herbaceous Weed Treatment – multiple treatments and methods, develop integrated plan (315 targeted grazing scenario being developed for Fiscal year 2021 cost list)
- 383-Fuelbreak or 394-Firebreak – location and type recommended by Fire Management Staff
- 382- Fence – Wildlife Friendly
- 516- Pipeline, 614-Trough, additional water development practices depending on site
- 550- Range Seeding – appropriate species selection for site. Would encourage use of natives whenever possible and feasible. Include forbs and shrubs identified in ecological site description.
- 645- Upland Wildlife Habitat Mgmt- available in all areas where landowner has a wildlife habitat objective
- 314- Brush management – reduction of shrub canopy to improve establishment of desirable perennial bunchgrasses based on ESD and habitat requirements

Level 5 (State D-IAG, D-dual)- Restoration

- 315- Herbaceous Weed Treatment – multiple treatments and methods, develop integrated plan (315 targeted grazing scenario being developed for Fiscal year 2021 cost list)
- 383-Fuelbreak or 394-Firebreak – location and type recommended by Fire Management Staff
- 550-Range Seeding, 342-Critical Area Planting – goal of establishing perennial plant community
- 314 – Brush management – reduction of overstory shrubs for establishment of perennial bunchgrass community
- 528- Prescribed Grazing – Development of alternative plan and strategies reduce fine fuel loads, reduce competition from annuals, and facilitate improvement in health and vigor of perennial species. Monitoring plan developed to identify trends and implement adaptive management strategies to meet desired outcomes.
- 382-Fence, 516-Pipeline, 614-Trough, Water development – to facilitate improved grazing management and allow for rest and recovery for treated areas

### Public Land Guidance –

See Fiscal Year 2019 Public Land Guidance-Will update to Fiscal Year 2020 -

Several recommended practices are not approved for cost share on public lands. Local Working Groups and Community Partnerships with projects submitted and planned for inclusion in the Cheatgrass Challenge may request a variance for implementation and financial assistance on planned practices on public lands from the State Conservationist.

