

Nature Mapping Newsletter, July 2014



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How a Lowly Grass Cheats Wildlife – Amy Collett – Teton County Weed & Pest

Cheatgrass, also called downy brome (*Bromus tectorum*), is an annual or winter annual invasive grass, originally from the Mediterranean region. Growing from 4-to-30 inches high, it has dense hairs on its leaf sheathes, dangling spikelets, and long, sharp awns enclosing each grain. Cheatgrass has an early lifecycle, beginning to grow immediately after snow melt. In Teton County, it begins to cure out by June, and by mid-June or July it has completely dried out. This aggressive, quick-growing life cycle not only gives cheatgrass a competitive advantage over other plants, but also makes it a fire hazard for much of the year.



The

first recorded appearance of cheatgrass in Teton County was in 1927 in the hills east of the National Elk Refuge (Rocky Mountain Herbarium, 2013). Today this grass infests a little less than 10,000 acres, mostly on south or south-west-facing slopes. While this infestation is not nearly as severe as those of other counties, it still negatively affects our wildlife, which relies on native grasses and shrubs to get through the winter. The Jackson Hole Weed Management Association received a three-year grant in 2011 through Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust to map, track, and treat cheatgrass in Teton County.

Cheatgrass can overtake natural areas and make it difficult for native plants to re-colonize. It can also increase the likelihood of fire and further degrade natural areas. As cheatgrass takes over there is less forage for ungulates, and ultimately, less sagebrush. These changes disrupt the entire ecosystem and will continue to impact deer, elk, sage grouse, raptors, etc. for years to come. Cheatgrass is a very real threat to wildlife of all kinds and native plants, as well, because of its ability to out-compete native plants. Eliminating and reducing the spread of invasive species, specifically cheatgrass, will improve native plant resources and thus improve year-round nutrition for game.

Map Invasives JH – Nature Mapping is proud to partner with Map Invasives JH, a new initiative of Teton County Weed and Pest. Focused on invasive plants and linked to a national data base, different than our Nature Mapping program, Map Invasives JH helps to protect the wildlife in Jackson Hole by identifying, mapping, and then controlling exotics plants that are drastically changing habitat for many of our native creatures. It seeks to involve citizen scientists, such as your selves, who enjoy hiking into the backcountry. We hope you will consider participating in the workshop listed below.

June 2014 Data—Paul Hood

Total Observers: 30 Most Observations: Louise Haberfeld (71) and Susan Marsh (60)

Mammals:	122 observations	24 species	582 individuals
Birds:	245 observations	75 species	499 individuals
Amphibians:	0 observations	0 species	0 individuals
Total:	401 observations	99 species	1081 individuals

Projects: Backyard -191, Casual Observations - 191, Osprey Project - 18, Field Education - 1

Notes: Reviewing the list of observations, moose still are most recorded: 40 this month, with many fewer observations than in May of elk (19) and Bighorn Sheep (4), species which have migrated to higher ground. Both mule deer (28) and white-tail deer (6) were reported in numbers, along with a rare documentation of badger. Many birds were sighted: western tanagers (5), three species of hummingbirds, great gray owl (3), black-headed grosbeak (7), osprey (21) and a rare avocet and poorwill. Small mammals such as marmots, ground squirrels, red squirrels, and chipmunks are under reported, and Tanya would love more reports of pika -- a focal species! Finally, the lowly amphibians have slipped from our mind. Remember, we appreciate the common species, as well as the more unusual. Keep on mapping!

Volunteers

New Nature Mappers: We welcome six new Nature Mappers: Sarika, David, Cathy, Kegan, Loren, and Victor, who learned the latest Nature Mapping methods from a revised powerpoint presentation at the Teton County Library.



Children Try Nature Mapping:

On a beautiful day in July, over 60 summer-school 5th and 6th graders hiked up to Crater Lake looking for nature. This field trip was sponsored by the Teton County public middle schools and JH Wildlife Festival. The Wildlife Festival provided small digital cameras, and Nature Mapping provided simple maps and entry forms for nature mapping. Our volunteers helped the kids find, identify, and document several male western tanagers, red squirrels, and a young family of turkey vultures. Children enjoyed taking pictures of wildflowers and butterflies. We thank Sarika Khanwilkar of JH Film Festival for inviting us to participate in this nature outing for kids.

Opportunities:

- **Wildlife Expeditions Tours** – We are looking for Nature Mappers to volunteer on Wednesdays for half or full days. Your assistance is needed as the expert guides do not have time to log species while showing their guests the incredible wildlife. National Park scientists often do not get to report these particulars either. Please contact Jared Baeker: Jared.baeker@tetonscience.org with cc to Frances: frances@jhwildlife.org to set up your trip. This valuable space is donated by Teton Science Schools. Take advantage of the opportunity!
- **Snake River Floats** - What could be better than an early Sunday morning float with expert oarsmen of A.J. DeRosa's Wooden Boat Tours, while Nature Mapping? Birds, beaver, and an occasional moose are typical observations. We usually work in pairs: one observing (birding skills required!) and one recording the data. Please contact Anya Tyson for available mornings! Anya Tyson, anyamtyson@gmail.com, 719-231-2450

Calendar of Events:

Wednesday, July 30, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Teton County Library. Map Invasives JH—Amy Collett. Teton County Weed and Pest Control (TCWP) has a new volunteer initiative. Now you can help protect habitat for our native plants and wildlife by helping TCWP and its Western-state partners prevent the spread of invasive plant species. In this indoor workshop you will learn to identify 12 top-priority noxious weeds and map them while you are out hiking this summer. This information will help professionals stay ahead of invasive species infestations while there is a high potential for eradication. Space is limited to 20/class. **Please call Amy Collett at 307-733-8419 ASAP** to sign up. More information will *soon* be posted on their website: <http://www.tcweed.org/Map-Invasives-JH.php>

Thursdays, 6:30 p.m. Harlow Seminar Series sponsored by University of Wyoming and National Park Service at the AMK Ranch. Dinner (\$5 donation) starts at 5:30, with talk at 6:30. Expert visiting scientists present their research on wildlife, geology and more! AMK Ranch near Leeks Marina. Well worth the trip! <http://www.uwyo.edu/uwnps/summer-seminar-series-2014>

Teton Plants: The Wyoming Native Plant Society – Teton Chapter -- sponsors fieldtrips and a "what's in Bloom" website on native plants. www.tetonplants.wordpress.com will connect you to their information, or just google "tetonplants".

Nature Mapping is a program of the Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation and is sponsored by the Meg and Bert Raynes Fund and other generous contributor.
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