



## News Release

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests &  
Thunder Basin National Grassland  
<http://fs.usda.gov/mbr>

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### **Aerial Spraying of Cheatgrass Planned for Squirrel Creek Wildfire Area**

**(LARAMIE, Wyo.) Aug. 16, 2016** – The Laramie Ranger District and the Wyoming Game & Fish Department (WGFD) are planning to treat cheatgrass within the 2012 Squirrel Creek Wildfire area through the aerial application of herbicide (Imazipic/Plateau).

Aerial spraying with a helicopter is scheduled to begin Aug. 20 on approximately 3,200 acres of the Medicine Bow National Forest. Treatment units are on the eastern side of the Snowy Range, on the southern end of the Sheep Mountain unit, east and south of Lake Owen, and north of Highway 230.

Treatment should take place over 4-5 days within a 7-10 day window, and weather-permitting, is anticipated to be completed prior to big-game archery season, which begins Sept. 1.

The helicopter will be based at Forbes/Sheep Mountain Wildlife Habitat Management Area. Public access to the parking lot will be closed during the duration of the project, from Aug. 20 until Aug. 31. Foot traffic onto the property will be allowed.

The emphasis is on controlling non-native, annual cheatgrass on critical big-game winter ranges, enhancing native vegetation species, stabilizing soils, and reducing erosion. Treating cheatgrass also greatly minimizes the risk of a second wildfire in this area by the reduction in fine fuels and diminishes the threat of shorter fire intervals in the future.

In the summer of 2012 the Squirrel Creek Wildfire burned approximately 10,587 acres in the treatment area, which allowed for the inception of cheatgrass as dominant vegetation.

Remote sensing images and field data were used by Colorado State University PhD candidate Amanda West, in a coordinated effort with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), to map cheatgrass probability within the fire scar. The finished product is now being used to better focus the aerial application efforts and for treatment efficacy.

This project has been spearheaded by the Forest Service and WGFD's Sheep Mountain Mule Deer Initiative. Additional funding and assistance for the project was provided by Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Muley Fanatics Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust, Albany County Weed and Pest, and Albany County - Secure Rural Schools.

Cheatgrass is a particularly aggressive invasive species that many agencies and landowners in the western United States are struggling to control. It is a prolific seed producer, thrives in disturbed areas and can displace native plants within grassland communities.

"Along with our partners, we recognize the need to be able to treat large areas that are infested with cheatgrass," said Laramie District Ranger Frank Romero. "We now have aerial herbicide application as a treatment tool, which will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our efforts to control the spread of cheatgrass.

"Previously our options were to spray by hand or with ATVs, which is unsafe and time-consuming in steep, unstable terrain. We are certain that aerial spraying will be our best means for controlling cheatgrass on the large acreages and steep slopes of the Squirrel Creek Wildfire area."

The ability to spray aerially on the Squirrel Creek Wildfire area is a result of the Record of Decision for Invasive Plant Management signed one year ago by Dennis Jaeger, Forest Supervisor for the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin National Grassland.

"This is a collaborative effort between the Forest Service and the Game and Fish Department that resulted from the Sheep Mountain Mule Deer Initiative. We're happy to be partnering with the Forest Service on this project to improve habitat conditions for mule deer and other big game animals," said Corey Class, WGFD Wildlife Management Coordinator for the Laramie Region.

Specific questions about the project should be directed to Jackie Roaque (USFS), 307-745-2340 and Ryan Amundson (WGFD), 307-331-0787.

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