



Aerial Application Program Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the purpose of these aerial application projects?

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service, together with our partners, have implemented a program to restore native plant communities at a landscape level. The primary purpose of these projects is to reduce continuous fine fuels in the form of invasive annual grasses. This reduces the overall risk of wildfire and helps provide protection from severe wildfires to rural communities and to wildland firefighters. The secondary purpose is to protect and improve wildlife habitats by treating both invasive annual grasses and noxious weeds, like spotted knapweed. Aerial herbicide treatment effectiveness on cheatgrass is excellent, with control consistently at or above 90 percent. We estimate that approximately 80 percent of emerging cheatgrass dies in the fall or early in the spring. Another 10 percent develops seed heads, but most of the seeds do not fully develop and are not viable.

Herbicide application control of spotted knapweed is well above 90 percent. Control of both species is evident the spring following a fall treatment and persists for around two years.

More detailed information on the project purpose, past implementation, partners, and documents referenced in this FAQ can be found under the Aerial Application Information header on our program website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r04/salmon-challis/natural-resources/forest-management>

2. Is this project safe?

The highest level of environmental analysis for the Forest Service was completed in July 2016 in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The highest level of environmental analysis for the BLM was likewise completed in 2016. These EIS's assessed a range of alternatives, disclosed potential environmental impacts and trade-offs, and addressed stakeholders' concerns. For implementation, we have a tested and documented protocol for aerial spraying operations. We operate when weather conditions, such as wind speed and direction and temperature, are favorable to avoid drift outside of target areas. We monitor throughout implementation and adjust on the fly if conditions change or if monitoring indicates a potential concern. We use a contractor and, through the contract, clearly define the parameters of operation. We provide contract oversight and project monitoring to ensure quality control.

Additional details on aerial application precautions taken and technical information can be found on our [website](#).

3. What is the herbicide you're spraying and are they safe for people and animals?

We are using Milestone and Plateau herbicides. These are some of the newest herbicides available for Forest Service and BLM use and are considered "practically non-toxic" by the

Environmental Protection Agency, which is the lowest toxicity designation. The pathways these herbicides exploit to kill plants are exclusive to plant cells. Animals and people don't possess the necessary metabolic pathways for the herbicide to act on us. Just as people can't turn sunlight into energy like a plant, animals and people cannot metabolize these herbicides. Milestone and Plateau, applied per label directions, do not cause any harm to humans or animals. These herbicides are recognized as having low use rates, little to no toxicity to humans, low toxicity to non-target organisms, and low potential for groundwater contamination.

Herbicide use proposals developed by the Forest Service and BLM specifically for aerial applications, can be found on our [website](#).

4. How do you monitor for drift and ensure you're not impacting non-target areas?

The implementation specialists and the pilot watch the winds closely to prevent the spread of the herbicide into areas not targeted for treatment. Drift cards that can detect tiny droplets of herbicide are placed in open areas to detect drift from the spray. Cards are also placed near streams to detect the likelihood of drift into water, near private land boundaries, and along slope changes where the wind is likely to shift. The Forest buffers around streams and other bodies of water consistent with the biological opinion requirements agreed to in consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These newer herbicides are very expensive, limiting the amount of treatment we can accomplish each year. Our drift card monitoring and monitoring of weed control after the application show very consistently that herbicide goes where it's intended. Our drift card monitoring protocol, an example drift card, and drift card monitoring results from 2021 and 2022 can be found on our [website](#).

The Forest Service and BLM best management practices state that private property should be buffered by 300 feet except where we have another agreement with the landowner. This requirement is a voluntary precaution, not a legal requirement for herbicide application.

Past monitoring has shown that this buffer is sufficient to prevent drift into non-target areas. The Forest Service and BLM work with our partners to fully meet the 300-foot buffering requirement unless we have a written agreement in place with the private landowner requesting we forgo the buffer adjacent to their property and we can do so without impacting an adjacent property owners' buffer.

5. Who is involved in planning and implementing Aerial Application cheatgrass control projects locally?

The Bureau of Land Management, Challis and Salmon Field Offices, Forest Service, and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Region 7, are the primary agencies responsible for planning and implementing these projects.

Our partners in resource conservation and habitat restoration have included:

- Natural Resources Conservation Service – Salmon Field Office
- Mule Deer Foundation
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation
- Idaho State Department of Agriculture

- Idaho Department of Lands
- Idaho Office of Species Conservation
- Salmon Valley Stewardship
- many private landowners, including adjacent ranch owners and range allotment permit holders.

Note that projects on private land are completed separately from work on public lands.

6. What is the public outreach strategy for this project?

The Forest Service, BLM, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and our partners communicate our annual plans in a variety of ways, including through mail, radio, newspapers, fliers, press releases, and online networking sites like Facebook or Twitter. Efforts may also include person-to-person contacts, meetings (virtual or in-person), site visits, and field trips. The exact combination of outreach efforts may vary year-to-year. Outreach with details of planned work is generally distributed several weeks before work begins in the fall.

7. In the future, what if I want the Forest Service and BLM to treat within the 300-foot buffer adjacent to my private land? Also, who can I contact about opportunities to treat my private land for cheatgrass and other weeds?

If you wish for the partners to treat within the 300-foot buffer adjacent to your private property when we implement future projects, you would need to complete an opt-in request and provide a map/description of your property to District Ranger Danelle Nance (danelle.nance@usda.gov) or District Ranger Chris Waverek (chris.waverek@usda.gov). Based on the information provided, we would determine if the request could be fulfilled while maintaining the buffer around other private properties. If your request could be accommodated, you would be asked to sign this written opt-in agreement form with the Forest Service, BLM, and relevant partners, where applicable.

The Forest Service and BLM do not treat private property for invasive plant species. However, we do have partners that may be able to assist interested landowners with available programs. These include the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Salmon Field Office, and the Custer and Lemhi Counties Weed Control Departments.

Inquiries about private land treatment opportunities may also be addressed to the Challis-Yankee Fork District Ranger Chris Waverek (chris.waverek@usda.gov), Salmon-Cobalt District Ranger Danelle Nance (danelle.nance@usda.gov), Bureau of Land Management-Salmon Field Office, Vince Guyer (vguyer@blm.gov), and Bureau of Land Management-Challis Field Office David Hilliard (dhilliard@blm.gov), who can further provide appropriate partner information, depending on location.