

Invading weed, prompts weed and range tour in Southeastern Idaho

The Situation

In the fall of 2008 several ranchers in Bear Lake County who own private range in Caribou County found a growing influx of a new plant in their range and surrounding areas. This plant seemed to replace grass that livestock and wildlife utilized. As they assessed their range, they also found poisonous plants on the range. These plants had been blamed for several livestock deaths in recent years. Range is an important component of raising livestock in this area of Idaho. Without quality range ground, most livestock producers would not be able to sustain their operations for the long term. These ranchers contacted the Bear Lake County Extension Office asking if there was anything that could be done to help with the invasive and poisonous plants on their range.

Our Response

The plant in question was sent to the USDA Agriculture Research Service (ARS) in Logan, Utah and was identified in the fall of 2008 as Slender Cinquefoil (*Potentilla gracilis*). While this plant is native to the area, conditions were right for the plant population to explode beyond its normal capacity.

After the plant was identified there was discussion about holding a range tour. In early April of 2009 the range tour started to take shape with a meeting between the land manager, range rider, Bear Lake County Weed Superintendant, and the Bear Lake County Extension Educator.

A tour and educational field day was organized for any and all livestock producers in Bear Lake County and surrounding areas. The tour was to show people the problem plants and allow them to see the problem that arises when these plants invades a range situation. Speakers from the Poisonous Plant Labora-



Red-tinted plant is slender cinquefoil. Photo by Joel Packham

tory at the USDA ARS were contacted and invited to the tour to discuss poisonous plants found on this particular range. These poisonous plants included tall larkspur (*Delphinium occidentale*), and lupine (*Lupinus argenteus*). The tour also included a discussion about managing pastures with poisonous plants and the methods used to collect samples from dead animals to correctly diagnose plant related deaths. A range scientist from the University of Idaho discussed range management and the interactions between the grazing animals and different plant species. Wildlife specialists from the Idaho Fish and Game were also invited to discuss the interactions of wolves, game, fish, and grazing livestock.

Program Outcomes

The planning group met each month to discuss the tour and find speakers to present the necessary material. The Weed Superintendant felt the need to do a weed control demonstration plot on the range

ground using several different chemicals and mixtures of chemicals. Sponsors were found to help defray the costs of the noon meal, bus transportation, and refreshments for the tour. As plans were made, other Extension personnel from other states became interested in the tour and asked if the tour could count as a Tri-State Weed and Range Tour. This brought more sponsorship and allowed the group to have a covered area for the noon dinner that was prepared.

The Future

The tour was attended by 44 producers listening to the following topics for the tour: Range Management – Managing to Optimize Your Resources, Livestock Data Collection and Management for the Future, Spike Treatment on Sagebrush, Poisonous Plants and How to Manage Them, Interactions of Livestock with Wolves and other Endemic Wildlife and Yellow Toadflax Control on the Range. Those who attended rated the overall tour a 4.47 out of a possible 5. They rated new information gained a 4.13 and also rated the usefulness of the tour and information given on the tour a 4.21 out of a possible 5 points.

In the days following the tour, several steers died of an apparent plant poisoning on the range that was evaluated. Due to the information gained on the tour, the rider, autopsied the animals and quickly sent the necessary tissue samples to the ARS Poisonous Plant Laboratory. They were able to quickly diagnose the problem and save many other animals from the same fate. Immediately following the autopsies, the other live steers were quickly moved to another pasture. As it turned out, the animals were suffering from an overdose of selenium caused by eating several different asters (plants in the rangeland complex) that accumulate the mineral. The animals were grazing on reclaimed land that was formally a phosphate mine.

The rider for the grazing association stated, “The tour really prepared me to take the necessary action to get an accurate diagnosis.”

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

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