



Community Concerns

Controlling Wildfires Calls For Land Management

(NAPSA)—A decision on how best to control a weed on public land may result in more fire safety.

As of Nov. 2007, about 77,000 wildfires had claimed more than 9 million acres in the United States, according to the National Inter-agency Fire Center. Many of those fires were fueled by cheatgrass, a major threat to ecosystems throughout the West.

The recent fires in San Diego County uprooted more than 500,000 people alone, decimating thousands of homes, causing seven fatalities, billions of dollars in damage and millions of dollars in fire suppression expenses.

Now, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has issued a decision to help improve the health of public lands by enhancing the agency's ability to control and manage vegetation—including invasive and noxious weeds—and helping reduce fire-prone fuels, such as cheatgrass.

Many people have concerns about the impact of herbicides on lands in the West, dating back to old herbicide technologies that were not selective in controlling specific or targeted vegetation. However, it's said that today's herbicides have advanced well beyond these old formulations, and vegetation managers understand the importance of actively restoring native vegetation in areas where invasive weeds have been removed.

Officials in several states, concerned about the long-term impact of recurring fires, have joined forces to control the sources of wildfires. More governors are banding together to directly address cheatgrass. A working



Downy brome (also known as cheatgrass) is a fast-growing annual that competes with native grasses and sagebrush in the western U.S. and Canada.

group of agriculture, range management, wildlife and firefighting experts was created to explore ways to better utilize state and federal resources, and federal agency personnel have joined the fight, offering technological expertise and resources.

The public can do much to support efforts to manage cheatgrass and wildfires. On a personal level, individuals can create fire-safe landscapes at home. Locally, communities can support greenstripping efforts—vegetation-rich barriers around entire communities that actually slow fires down and create anchor points for firefighters to more safely fight fires. They can also recruit volunteers to plant native vegetation or help a wildlife group develop a grant for habitat restoration funding.

To find out how you can help, talk to your local BLM representatives or visit the Web site at www.vmanswers.com/fire.