

Utah Forest News

Utah Forest Landowner
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Bulldozing Aspen to Grow Aspen

For the past few years Utah landowner Mike Siaperas, has been bulldozing openings in his mature aspen forest to grow a younger and more pure aspen forest on the Tavaputs Plateau southeast of Price. Siaperas, who received the Forest Landowner of the Year award in 2011, was concerned about how subalpine fir trees were taking over his aspen and he sought the advice of Natalie Conlin, Southeast Area Forester for the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands.

First contacted by Siaperas in 2009, Conlin visited his property and was impressed with what she saw. Conlin provided information on aspen regeneration techniques, and upon researching the topic discovered a document published by the USDA Forest Service that studied bulldozing as a technique to stimulate roots that respond by sending up young aspen sprouts. Conlin secured supplemental funding to assist Siaperas in expanding his efforts, resulting in a long and meandering opening that covers 13 acres. Today, this area is densely covered in thousands of

aspen sprouts, and serves as a natural firebreak near his cabin site.

Siaperas is pushing over aspen and other trees to create openings in what is otherwise a fairly



Mike Siaperas is accompanied by his dog Boston while operating a bulldozer during the treatment.

continuous forest of aspen being taken over by fir trees. Aspen is a pioneer species, meaning it is one of the first plants that grows after a disturbance. Aspens eventually shade the forest floor, creating an environment better suited to fir trees, which are shade tolerant and tend to crowd out the aspens over time. Forests develop this way in a process called succession.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- USU's New Range Extension Specialist
- 12th Annual Timber Harvest Tour
- USU Forestry Club

Western aspen most often reproduces from the roots through vegetative sprouting, or suckering. The lack of disturbance on much of the Tavaputs Plateau, and in much of Utah's forests means that there is a lack of young aspen forests. Many bird and mammal species depend on young aspen for breeding and foraging habitat. Wildlife biologists tend to be concerned about the lack of young aspen on Utah landscapes overall.

Siaperas is using his dozer to set back succession. He said that by manipulating the depth of the machine's blade, the result can be either lots of aspen regeneration or none. The sweet spot in his experience is between 6-11 inches deep; if you go less than 8 inches, or more than 14 inches, very few aspens shoot up, but in the target range of 6-11 inches, the result is thousands of stems per acre.

Siaperas' goal is to attract wildlife to his property. When he purchased his 600 acres in 2007, his goal was to manage it for hunting. That is what did, but now he has stopped hunting on the property. For the most part, he is trying to attract and build a bigger mule deer herd. In fact, he even reported kicking a friend off of the property after the friend inappropriately shot a young buck near his cabin, a buck that had struck up a friendship with his beloved golden retriever, Boston.

He describes feeling an admiration for the critters he sees and doesn't want them taken for food or fun. He evidently spoils Boston, as evidenced by the roll-cage extension he had the local shop weld onto the back

of the cab of his dozer, creating a platform for Boston to lay right behind the driver's seat.

In the forest openings Siaperas is making, the trees that are big enough are being removed as saw timber. In some cases he is choosing a few of the better specimens to leave

and creating openings around these, which

makes them stand out from the surroundings and features their stately splendor. He piles the rest of the material and burns the piles, and then buries the remains of the burn pile. The results are very clean and aesthetically pleasing openings that look a little bit like a golf course in the forest.

The openings that he intends to keep as meadows he is fertilizing and reseeding with a custom seed mixture to attract wildlife. He plans to grow new aspen forest in the other areas. This creates more diversity of canopy cover, with some young stands mixed in with the majority of older stands. In what is perhaps the biggest compliment and validation for his work, he has been contracted to do the same for the neighboring property, which happens to belong to the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.



A rainbow breaks near the treatment area.

As it turns out, Siaperas is not the only person in Utah to try this approach to aspen regeneration. USU Extension Agent for Iron County, Chad Reid, reports that a landowner on Cedar Mountain has been doing something similar, again with the result of excellent aspen regeneration. Reid also reported noticing a similar effect in a 2001 aspen clear cut on Cedar Mountain. Where the tractor that was cleaning up and piling the slash after the harvest dug a little deeper with its blade, they had the most vigorous sprouting.

It must be noted that this activity has been limited to level ground or very gentle slopes. The soil erosion risk would be very high on steep slopes. Furthermore, if there were significant populations of deer and especially elk present, they could eat all of the young trees. These positive results are worth reporting and in some cases worth a landowner's consideration to promote aspen regeneration.

by Darren McAvoy

-Special Thanks to Mike Siaperas for all his help and for providing photos.



Well Known Advocate of Utah Forests Passes

Dr. Jim Bowns speaks while Chad Reid holds a speaker at an Aspen Decline field trip in June of 2004.

Jim Bowns, considered by many to be the grandfather of range and forest ecology in southwestern Utah, recently passed away at the age of 81. James Emerson Bowns, Jr., a loving husband and father, died peacefully in his sleep September 14, 2013.

As a young man, Dr. Bowns studied at and graduated from Utah State University. He worked as an Extension rangeland specialist, and performed other Extension work for over 40 years. Serving on the State of Utah Wildlife Board, Bowns was known for helping landowners with a variety of issues.

Bowns greatly impacted the lives of many individuals, including the students he taught about forestry and range management at Southern Utah University from 1965 to 2012. His influence will be greatly missed.

USU's New Range Extension Specialist

USU Extension recently hired Dr. Eric Thacker as the new Extension range specialist. The post was previously held by Dr. Roger Banner, who retired last winter after many years in the position. After we discussed the abundant fly fishing opportunities in Cache Valley, Thacker described how he decided to study range management while growing up in Duchesne County, "By the time I was part way through high school I knew I wanted to do something in natural resources, so I considered wildlife and range. I got more interested in the plant community and the animal interactions." From there, he decided to earn both his Bachelors and Masters degrees in Range Sciences at Utah State. For his PhD, Thacker stayed at USU to research the impacts that habitat treatments had on sage grouse, as well as trends in sage grouse winter diet selection.

Thacker spent three and a half years working on postdocs in Oklahoma, but is glad to be back in Utah. He mentioned how his family, including a wife and six children, missed the many recreational opportunities available here in Utah. He said, "We enjoy the mountains, and more importantly the public land."

The complexity of land management here in Utah is something Thacker understands well. Some of the most difficult conflicts to resolve occur when management objectives from public, private, and different agencies cross paths. In reference to wildlife, and especially elk, Thacker said, "The Forest Service is concerned about aspen regeneration and over utilization of aspen as browse. So you have a group

of elk managed by the state on the same land as cattle owned by a lessee. Both are foraging on publically held and federally managed lands."

With such complex issues, land managers and others can find assistance from the different Extension offices, and Thacker hopes people will contact their Extension agents and specialists. "Our role as Extension specialists is to provide the most current and tested science available. I'm there to provide information to help land managers and landowners meet their objectives, not to sway people one way or the other."



Eric Thacker, Range Extension Specialist.

When asked about his primary message to landowners and managers in Utah, Thacker said, "The most important thing for landowners is to help them identify their management objectives. They may only be interested in pounds of beef produced on each acre, or huntable wildlife species. However,

hopefully they are interested in sustainable land management. First I would help them identify their operational goals and management objectives. The second thing would be to help landowners critically evaluate their current management to make sure that it's meeting their goals and objectives."

Thacker said that landowners and managers often become sidetracked when trying to achieve their goals. He said, "Identifying management objectives, critically evaluating current management practices, and seeking information to find the proper management to get to those objectives; I think those

three things would make huge inroads to improving range management in the state.”

Overall, Thacker wants landowners to recognize that they can improve the condition of the rangeland, which benefits everyone. He describes how “when rangelands are in good condition and functioning

as they should, there are good riparian areas, clean water, fish and wildlife, and sustainable grazing operations.” The Extension Service is a great resource for everyone, and Thacker hopes he can help landowners implement the best management available.

by Sam Nielsen

12th Annual Timber Harvest Tour

The 12th Annual Timber Harvest Tour took place on September 5, 2013, in forests east of Cedar City with 39 people participating. It was a cooperative effort between USU Extension, the Dixie National Forest, the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, and the Society of American Foresters. We started the day off with a stop just east of the Navajo Lake overlook on Highway 14. Patrick Moore, forester with the Dixie National Forest, explained the management approach on two different forest stands, one a sanitation removal, or clean-up, after a spruce beetle epidemic, and the other an aspen regeneration harvest, one on either side of the same road. On one side of the road the work was nearly done, and on the other it was still in progress, giving participants a feel for the various stages of the process. Then we stopped at another ongoing harvest on National Forest System lands, and appreciated the many fine trees selected to be left standing after the harvest.

After sharing lunch and a few stories at the beautiful Cascade Falls Overlook, we went to a site on the Webster Flat Road that featured plentiful head-high regeneration from a 2001 aspen harvest on private land that was owned by Eddie Larsen at the time. Finally, we wrapped up the day with a stop at a very



The group attending the 12th Annual Timber Harvest Tour pauses for a picture on the Dixie National Forest.

old ponderosa pine that was surrounded by aspen and had a discussion on the place and potential of ponderosa on Cedar Mountain. Thanks Chad Reid, USU Iron County Extension agent, and many others for helping to organize and promote this event.

by Darren McAvoy

Forestry Club at USU Starts a New Year Strong

On September 14th of this year, a group of 15 students from the USU Forestry Club participated in an Engelmann spruce research project led by the club's president, Jason Brown. The forest being observed is the T.W. Daniel Research Forest, near the top of Logan Canyon. The club also visited the research forest and learned about T.W. Daniel's legacy in forestry research here in Utah (See UFN Summer 2004). The students then helped to preserve an important cabin on the forest.

Over the past couple of years, students from the college have worked to restore the cabin after it fell into neglect. Difficulties still persist in preserving the site. Motorized recreationists have gotten into the habit of traveling off of established trails, heavily damaging the soil and vegetation near the cabin. Students and alumni grew concerned with the damage and decided that action was necessary. They elected to build fences to confine vehicles to the established trails.

After lunch on the field day, the club learned the finer skills of fence-building and participated in the

construction of fences meant to reduce the impact of wayward off-road enthusiasts. The instruction and materials were graciously provided by the Logan Ranger District. Many hands make light work, so the project was finished within an hour.

The USU Forestry Club has been recently revitalized by a new presidency. The number of students in the forestry program is small, but the dedicated few have decided to make their presence felt. The club wants students from all disciplines to come to activities and experience what forestry is all about. Students typically attending club activities come from various fields of study including Wildlife Science, Conservation and Restoration Ecology, and Rangeland Resources.

The club has prepared a team to compete in the Quiz Bowl at this year's Society of American Foresters (SAF) convention in Charleston, South Carolina. The last team from Utah State University to take first place at the national convention was in 2008, and this year's team hopes they can help return the title to USU.



Photo by Chad Wyatt

Members of the Forestry Club help construct a fence intended to reduce negative impacts on portions of the T.W. Daniel research forest.

Utah Forest News

So far this school year, the club has sponsored several activities including:

- Opening Social
- Informational Session with Davey Tree Expert company
- Tree Climbing Demonstration with USU's Arborist
- Hands on Forest inventory field trip

Upcoming events include:

- Fireside lectures in Logan Canyon with local forestry professionals
- Campus Tree Tour
- Annual Christmas Tree fundraiser
- Annual Loggers' Ball

The new presidency is excited about the potential the future holds. They are looking ahead to next year's SAF convention that will be held in Salt Lake City in

conjunction with the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO) World Congress. The conference will be attended by foresters and

students from around the world, with the goal of sharing knowledge and building relationships among national and international colleagues.

Overall, the Forestry Club is going strong, and students are excited about the opportunities being offered. Whether the club's activities persuade students to study forestry, or just improve their awareness of the opportunities in the field, the Forestry Club will have fulfilled its purpose of advancing students in their pursuits of career and education.

by Sam Nielsen



Photo by Chad Wyatt

Graduate student Justin Britton demonstrates how to properly measure the diameter of an Engelmann spruce on the T.W. Daniel Forest.

For more information regarding any of the information presented in this newsletter, please call Darren McAvoy at Utah State University, 435-797-0560, write to him at 5230 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-5230, or email darren.mcavoy@usu.edu.

To get on our list for email delivery of this newsletter go to <http://forestry.usu.edu> and click on Join Our Mailing Lists. For back issues visit <http://forestry.usu.edu> and click on Publications and Utah Forest News.

The Utah State University Forestry Extension website, found at <http://forestry.usu.edu>, is an excellent source of technical forestry information for woodland owners.

State of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands service foresters for your area can be contacted by calling 801-538-5555.

Ideas and written contributions to this newsletter are encouraged. Send your contributions or comments to the return address above or call 435-797-0560, or email darren.mcavoy@usu.edu.



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Utah Forest News

COMING EVENTS

Restoring the West Conference -- Change Agents and Forest Resilience: October 16 & 17, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. See www.restoringthewest.org to register.

Society of American Foresters National Convention: October 23-27, North Charleston, South Carolina. Visit www.safnet.org/calendar/ for more information.

IUFRO World Congress: October 5-11, 2014, Salt Lake City, Utah. Visit <http://www.iufro.org/events/congresses/2014/> for more information.



Darren McAvoy and others witnessed an unusual aspen seeding event this summer on the Tavaputs Plateau. Aspen usually reproduce via suckering; seeding of this magnitude is uncommon.