

## Promoting Forest Resilience - One Acre at a Time | Newsletters | Publications | Forestry | Extension

Megan Dettenmaier

11/20/2018

### Promoting Forest Resilience - One Acre at a Time

Utah Landowner, Curtis Rex is taking forest restoration on his 680 acres of property in Northern Utah seriously – one acre at a time. Currently underway is a 5-year, 70-acre restoration project made possible through a unique cost-sharing partnership between the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rex. The 680-acre property belonging to Rex lies in the Upper Bear River Watershed in Northern Utah and has been frequented by Rex and his family for multiple generations. Currently a resident of Evanston, WY, Rex grew up in Randolph, UT, and his family has spent time recreating and ranching in the mountains on this family property since the 1920s. Recently he noticed many of the trees were dead and falling each year. He became concerned for the longevity and the health of the forest and wanted to be proactive in his effort to protect the land. Because of this, Rex reached out to Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands Bear River Area Manager, Blain Hamp, to discuss options for improving the health and resilience of the forested areas, especially those surrounding the cabin they had recently built. Hamp supervised an inventory of the forest in 2011 to gain a better understanding of the current condition and composition of the forest. Together they created a Forest Stewardship Plan with the following objectives:

1. Increase tree diversity
2. Improve wildlife habitat
3. Reduce forest fuel loads
4. Apply a holistic ecosystem based approach to forest management.

Rex worked closely with NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist Aaron Romesser to find appropriate cost-sharing options to help get the restoration work off the ground. Romesser successfully linked Rex with special funding from the NRCS, specifically within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to initiate the work. This voluntary EQIP program helps landowners initiate conservation actions that benefit both the producer and the environment. They were successful in leveraging the comprehensive Forest Stewardship Plan and a silvicultural prescription created by Hamp. Rex began working shortly after receiving the funding support.

Starting in 2016, Rex and his team created a firebreak surrounding the cabin and successfully thinned three acres of dead trees. He aims to thin another 10 acres before the end of 2018 and will continue these efforts until 2021. By clearing the dead and dying trees, he is chipping away at objectives from the stewardship plan: creating wildlife habitat and reducing fuel loads. These actions promote regeneration of aspen, Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine, open up areas for understory growth, and as a result, provide forage for wildlife and livestock.

Additionally, Rex is a member of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) Walk-in Access Program (WIA). The Walk-in Access Program is a unique partnership between the UDWR and private landowners where landowners (enrolled in the WIA program) receive monetary compensation in exchange for public access to hunt, trap or fish on their land. Improving wildlife habitat on the property has numerous benefits for both Rex and the public. Rex has committed to monitoring any changes in wildlife activity he observes; initial observations suggest that a significant amount of grass and forbs have started growing in the areas that have been thinned – which is a good sign for wildlife and potential livestock operations.

A Catastrophic Wildland Fire Reduction proposal has recently been submitted to help with [Balsam Woolly Adelgid \(BWA\) concerns](#). If awarded, these funds will help to assess the impacts of this pest, and offer a funding mechanism for additional silvicultural practices that will help meet the objective Rex is hoping to accomplish.

Rex's habitat improvement is a long way from being finished – in fact he has until 2021 to complete the work - but the multiple partnerships and success he has observed so far are encouraging. He has no plans to slow down or taper off these restoration efforts, in fact he plans to seek additional funding to expand these efforts well into the future. Rex believes that:

Rex recognizes the steps he's taking on his property in northern Utah may amount to a drop in the bucket when it comes to large-scale forest restoration, but perhaps his contribution may inspire other landowners to find similar opportunities for forest stewardship and habitat improvement. This collaboration is one example of what is possible when landowners leverage the best available science, resources, on-the-ground experts, and funding sources possible. To learn more, visit the following websites:

- [Catastrophic Wildfire Risk Reduction](#)
- [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#)