

Medusahead

Medusahead Scientific Publications

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Project Description

Medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*) is an invasive winter annual grass that grows 6 to 24 inches tall. It is sometimes confused with foxtail barley, but has awns that are longer, stiff and barbed. Its stiff awns prohibit any grazing, but medusahead grass also contains high concentrations of silica making it unpalatable to livestock and wildlife, and slow to decompose. Consequently, it builds up a thick layer of thatch and significantly increases the threat of wildfires.

Medusahead is extremely competitive, even crowding out undesirable species such as cheatgrass. Medusahead seeds germinate quicker and seedlings grow faster than desirable grasses, making them strong competitors for soil moisture and nutrients. It is not uncommon to find 10,000 medusahead seeds per square foot, with extremely high germination rates and unusual seed viability. Infested ranches have suffered 40 to 70% reductions in grazing capacity.

Given the threat of medusahead to rangelands and pastures, it is imperative to control existing infestations and prevent them from expanding. Control of small isolated infestations is especially critical. Without an aggressive, hard-hitting effort to prevent its spread into new areas, millions of additional acres of productive rangeland will be lost.

Medusahead has already invaded over 2000 acres in Cache and Box Elder counties. As such, concerned land owners in southern Cache County, along with personnel from several agencies, have again organized a Weed Prevention Area in an effort to control medusahead and attempt to prevent additional spread.

Our action plan includes four major steps. First will be a detailed area survey to identify and map medusahead infestations. Much of this work has already been accomplished. Second, all landowners having infestations have been, or will be, contacted and requested to

participate in our control efforts. Third, each land owner will be encouraged to develop a treatment plan with the assistance of involved agencies. Fourth, individual treatment plans will be aggregated into annual work plans to schedule events such as burning, herbicide treatments, and reseeding activities.

Treatment plans will be adapted to the unique conditions of each ranch, but will likely include prescribed burning (with permits), tillage where feasible, herbicide treatments for multiple years, seeding of desirable perennial grasses and forbs, and judicious grazing management. Our particular focus will be on the edges of infested areas adjacent to clean land. At this point, eradication is not a reasonable expectation, but landowners must do all that is feasible to slow the spread and minimize the impact of existing infestations with the hope that better control options will eventually be discovered.