



Cheatgrass: The Forever Fire Fuel

(NAPSA)—Cheatgrass is an explosive fire source that just won't go away.

In August 2005, more than 30 large fires scorched the West, claiming more than six million acres of land. Firefighters in Nevada faced a record fire season because of an invasive weed known as cheatgrass.

A wildfire near St. George, Utah, got out of hand because of cheatgrass. What could have been a small fire quickly became a 65,000-acre wildfire that caused a great deal of damage.

Cheatgrass is an extremely flammable, non-native weed. It competes with native plants for water and other resources. Cheatgrass ultimately wins, growing rapidly and choking out desirable plants. In the hot dry months of summer, cheatgrass transforms into an explosive fuel. As one expert recently said, growing cheatgrass "is a lot like growing gasoline."

When a fast-burning plant like cheatgrass invades and alters the environment, wildfires are inevitable. A cheatgrass-fueled wildfire is more intense, more severe and harder to fight than other brushfires because its flames burn taller and spread quickly.

Even after the scorching heat of a cheatgrass fire, cheatgrass is not eliminated. Thousands of seeds are left behind in the seedbed. As a result, cheatgrass can return heartier after a fire, creating another, even more dangerous fire hazard the following season. That's why it's critical to



According to fire safety experts, cheatgrass is considered "growing gasoline."



Defensible space has saved areas such as Carson City, Nevada from devastation by cheatgrass-fueled wildfires.

reduce or eliminate this fuel in the fall, before the cheatgrass seeds begin to germinate. Here's how you can help:

- Create a defensible space around your home. As little as 30 feet wide may be adequate.
- Remove cheatgrass by mowing, mulching, cutting, raking or applying selective herbicides that target cheatgrass and restore desirable vegetation.
- Plant landscape vegetation so that fire cannot spread to a structure or surrounding vegetation.
- Keep surrounding vegetation at a level where it can be pruned if needed.
- Clean up dead vegetation, including what may collect on roof surfaces and in gutters.

In addition, several agencies monitor cheatgrass problems and seek to halt its spread, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (www.nrcs.usda.gov), the Department of Natural Resources, your state game department and others. Encourage them to tackle cheatgrass this fall to reduce the fire danger for next year.

Eliminating cheatgrass and making communities safe from fire will benefit everyone, but it will take many efforts to win the fight.

More information on wildfire prevention is available from www.nifc.gov and regional Bureau of Land Management offices. For more information on cheatgrass and successful efforts to control its spread, visit www.vmanswers.com.