

# 2025 FIRE RESPONSE FUNDING



**Joint Appropriations Committee**

**09 December 2025**



## BACKGROUND

In 2024, a series of fires were ignited in northern Wyoming by a single storm event that carried hundreds of lightning strikes, burning nearly one million acres of private rangelands in what can be categorized as a regional catastrophe. Several aspects of these fires were unique. It has been historically uncommon for a single storm event to cover the extensive acreages that were ignited in 2024, perhaps exacerbated by high fuel levels due to significant moisture and a mild winter the previous year. High winds carried these fires through fuels that may have historically caused the fire to lay down. Perhaps most importantly, a steady transition of native grasses to invasive annual grasses created a fuel source that is virtually impossible to contain.

Invasive annual grasses have been identified as a primary threat to sagebrush and grassland ecosystems for decades. In the Great Basin, historically productive rangelands have been converted to monocultures of cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), many of which have allowed a shift in fuel loads where fires become an annual event, and soils scorched to mineral earth where even the invasives no longer grow. Wyoming residents felt they were immune to these challenges, primarily due to a shorter growing season, less receptive soils and a much higher elevation. However, plants, and especially annual plants, can adapt genetically in a very rapid fashion. Such has been the case in the past 30 years. And, other invasive annual grasses have appeared in northern Wyoming, including Medusahead, Ventenata and Bulbous bluegrass.

In 2020, a team lead by Governor Mark Gordon published the results of a year-long analysis to identify potential impacts from invasive plant species. That team consisted of 32 experts on the topic, and combined concurrent analyses from a policy and technical perspective into a comprehensive and detailed set of recommendations. The primary conclusions were that Wyoming was at dangerously high risk of invasion by annual grasses statewide, but particularly in the northern tier of counties, and that a concerted effort to support control of invasive annuals was essential. In 2023, the Governor requested \$20 million in funding to supplement existing resources to address invasive annuals; \$9 million of that request was approved for Fiscal Year 2024, with the expectation that the remainder would be funded in FY 2025. The remaining \$11 million for preventive statewide invasive treatment was approved by both the House and Senate in the 2025 supplemental budget, but that budget died due to a failure of the bodies to reach concurrence.

To address the catastrophic impacts of 2024 fires, Governor Gordon recommended funding \$130 million for fire response to address the full range of impacts from the 2024 fire season, including lost infrastructure (e.g. fencing, water systems), treatment of invasive annuals, restoration of habitats impacted severely by intense fire, erosion control, deferment of grazing, loss of winter forage, and restoration of key habitats for wildlife. That recommendation was

reduced to an appropriation of approximately \$49.5 million for fire response, including mapping and monitoring, invasive treatment, erosion control, and vegetation restoration. Funding was directed to the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT), a state agency with vast experience in project development, funding and management.

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO DATE

The WWNRT and other local, state and federal agencies have been aggressively targeting invasive annual grasses for more than a decade. As shown in the table below, nearly \$70 million has been allocated to this effort, with nearly \$13 million of that from WWNRT (a leverage of 4.7 to 1.0).

Invasive Annual Grasses Funding 2018-2025										
Number	Name of Project	Location	Type	Sponsor	Total Cost	Request	Funded	STATUS	PAID	BALANCE
03-18-026	Thunder Basin Habitat	Converse	Rng	WGFD	\$ 1,005,240.00	\$ 190,000.00	\$ 108,000.00	DONE	\$ 108,000.00	\$0.00
03-18-029	Sheridan Medusa-Ventenata	Sheridan	InS	SCWP	\$ 430,000.00	\$ 195,000.00	\$ 94,500.00	DONE	\$ 94,500.00	\$0.00
09-18-023	Sublette Cheatgrass	Sublette	InS	SCWP	\$2,465,595.00	\$ 750,000.00	\$ 300,000.00	partial	\$ 181,170.15	\$118,829.85
03-19-002	Sublette Cheatgrass II	Sublette	InS	SCWP	\$ 2,840,595.00	\$ 450,000.00	\$ 200,000.00			\$200,000.00
03-19-020	28 Ranch Revegetation	Johnson	Rvr	WGFD	\$ 52,460.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	DONE	\$ 5,000.00	\$0.00
03-19-021	Britania Cheatgrass	Platte	InS	WGFD	\$ 107,200.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	DONE	\$ 30,000.00	\$0.00
03-19-027	Oil Creek Cheatgrass III	Weston	InS	WGFD	\$ 247,640.00	\$ 124,000.00	\$ 57,102.92	DONE	\$ 57,102.92	\$0.00
09-19-005	Sheridan Access Area Ventenata	Sheridan	InS	WGFD	\$ 425,248.00	\$ 195,000.00	\$ 180,000.00	DONE	\$ 180,000.00	\$0.00
09-19-021	Sheridan Invasive Grasses II	Sheridan	InS	SCWP	\$ 1,555,000.00	\$ 600,000.00	\$ 446,000.00	DONE	\$ 446,000.00	\$0.00
03-20-002	Baggs Invasives	Carbon	InS	LSRCD	\$ 388,000.00	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 80,000.00	DONE	\$ 80,000.00	\$0.00
03-20-008	Crazy Woman Cheatgrass	Johnson	InS	WGFD	\$ 380,000.00	\$ 149,000.00	\$ 120,000.00	DONE	\$ 120,000.00	\$0.00
03-20-022	South Teton Cheatgrass	Teton	InS	TCWP	\$ 342,750.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	DONE	\$ 50,000.00	\$0.00
09-20-013	Sheridan Walk-In Areas II	Sheridan	InS	WGFD	\$ 324,608.00	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 150,000.00	DONE	\$ 150,000.00	\$0.00
09-20-015	Torrey Rim Cheatgrass	Fremont	InS	WGFD	\$ 53,200.00	\$ 23,000.00	\$ 23,000.00	partial	\$ 16,326.04	\$6,673.96
03-21-019	Mullen Cheatgrass	Carbon	InS	MFF	\$ 1,175,968.00	\$ 190,000.00	\$ 190,000.00	DONE	\$ 190,000.00	\$0.00
03-21-021	East Big Horns Invasives	Johnson	InS	WGFD	\$ 206,200.00	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 80,000.00	partial	\$ 38,660.00	\$41,340.00
09-21-010	UW Invasive Monitoring	Statewide	InS	UW	\$ 81,200.00	\$ 53,200.00	\$ 53,200.00	DONE	\$ 53,200.00	\$0.00
03-22-013	Baggs Invasives II	Carbon	InS	LSRCD	\$ 264,036.00	\$ 115,536.00	\$ 115,536.00			\$115,536.00
03-22-021	Crazy Woman Cheatgrass II	Johnson	InS	WGFD	\$ 202,548.00	\$ 75,000.00	\$ 75,000.00	DONE	\$ 75,000.00	\$0.00
03-22-026	Thorne/Williams Cheatgrass	Albany	InS	WGFD	\$ 153,200.00	\$ 29,000.00	\$ 29,000.00	DONE	\$ 29,000.00	\$0.00
03-22-027	Thunder Basin Habitat	Weston	Rng	WGFD	\$ 832,100.00	\$ 175,000.00	\$ 175,000.00	DONE	\$ 175,000.00	\$0.00
03-22-035	S Wyoming Range Invasives	Lincoln	InS	LCWP	\$ 212,655.00	\$ 67,352.00	\$ 33,676.00	DONE	\$ 33,676.00	\$0.00
09-22-002	Heart Mountain Invasives	Park	InS	TNC	\$ 77,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00			
09-22-004	Pole Mountain Cheatgrass	Laramie	InS	LCCD	\$ 411,856.00	\$ 111,606.00	\$ 111,606.00	DONE	\$ 111,606.00	\$0.00
09-22-005	Kirby Invasives	Hot Springs	InS	HSCWP	\$ 95,830.00	\$ 49,520.00	\$ 49,520.00			\$49,520.00
03-23-013	Crazy Woman Cheatgrass III	Johnson	InS	WGFD	\$ 104,098.00	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 40,000.00	partial	\$ 38,979.25	\$1,020.75
03-23-019	Hoback Cheatgrass	Teton	InS	TCWP	\$ 334,355.00	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 40,000.00	DONE	\$ 40,000.00	\$0.00
03-24-006	Absaroka Front Cheatgrass	Park	InS	PCWP	\$ 959,000.00	\$ 290,000.00	\$ 290,000.00	partial	\$ 123,985.50	\$166,014.50
03-24-010	South Wyoming Range Invasives	Lincoln	InS	LCWP	\$ 871,810.00	\$ 399,999.00	\$ 249,540.00	partial	\$ 233,816.00	\$15,724.00
03-24-014	Blackhall Cheatgrass	Carbon	InS	CCWP	\$ 210,686.00	\$ 70,000.00	\$ 70,000.00	partial	\$ 41,353.80	\$28,646.20
03-24-016	SW Mule Deer Cheatgrass	Sweetwater	InS	MFF	\$ 1,733,900.00	\$ 399,999.00	\$ 200,000.00			\$200,000.00
03-24-017	Richeau Hills Cheatgrass	Platte	InS	PCWP	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 36,000.00	\$ 36,000.00			\$36,000.00
03-24-032	Golden Willow Ventenata	Sheridan	InS	WGFD	\$ 143,917.00	\$ 44,000.00	\$ 55,000.00			\$55,000.00
09-24-001	Alkali Creek Invasives	Big Horn	InS	BHWP	\$ 368,808.00	\$ 180,000.00	\$ 180,000.00			\$180,000.00
09-24-006	Natrona Core Cheatgrass II	Natrona	InS	WGFD	\$ 1,784,500.00	\$ 884,000.00	\$ 884,000.00			\$884,000.00
09-24-008	Niobrara Cheatgrass	Niobrara	InS	NCWP	\$ 342,731.70	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 250,000.00			\$250,000.00
09-24-013	Wind River Front Cheatgrass	Fremont	InS	FCWP	\$ 3,534,890.00	\$ 883,720.00	\$ 883,720.00			\$883,720.00
09-24-018	Western Wyoming Cheatgrass		InS	TCWP	\$ 14,665,392.00	\$ 4,800,000.00	\$ 1,400,000.00			\$1,400,000.00
09-24-021	Hot Springs Cheatgrass	Hot Springs	InS	HSCWP	\$ 431,415.00	\$ 219,415.00	\$ 219,415.00			\$219,415.00
09-24-022	Buffalo Core Cheatgrass	Johnson	InS	PF	\$ 854,288.00	\$ 277,179.20	\$ 277,179.00	DONE	\$ 277,179.00	\$0.00
09-24-023	Carbon Cheatgrass	Carbon	InS	CCWP	\$ 2,754,737.00	\$ 399,150.00	\$ 349,150.00			\$349,150.00
09-24-024	NEWIGWP Cheatgrass	Sheridan	InS	SCWP	\$ 24,730,607.00	\$ 6,000,000.00	\$ 4,500,000.00			\$4,500,000.00
03-25-046	Bear Creek Fire Rehab	Albany	InS	LRCDD	\$ 117,525.00	\$ 28,325.00	\$ 28,325.00			\$28,325.00
					\$ 68,372,788.70	\$ 19,209,001.20	\$ 12,738,469.92			\$9,728,915.26

These efforts have been accelerated in the past five years due to the availability and approval for use of a new treatment using *Indazaflam*, a chemical that is highly specific, longer lasting, and more effective than previous treatments. These projects do not include all other treatments performed by other agencies, and were only possible due to supplemental funding provided by the Wyoming Legislature.

At the present time, requests for preventive treatment have been submitted from 16 of 23 counties for a total of \$12,650,800.00. Three other counties are preparing comprehensive plans to address the potential for extreme fire due to invasive annual grasses and encroaching

conifers; those applications are anticipated in February 2026. Addressing the threat of invasive species on native ecosystems will continue only if adequate funding is available; current earnings on the WWNRT Trust Account are estimated to be \$8 million per year, and current annual requests for all projects averages approximately \$20 million.

## 2024 - 2025 FIRE IMPACTS

Invasive annual grasses have been a concern for more than two decades, and the relationship between annual grasses and fire is well documented. As soon as the 2024 fires were contained, efforts to map and evaluate the potential for invasion and re-infestation were underway. The initial request for funding was based on the number of acres identified as vulnerable, and each fire perimeter and at least one mile of adjacent lands were mapped in a manner than identified them as low, medium, or high priority for treatment. As soon as funding was approved by the Wyoming Legislature, the WWNRT sent a “Request for Proposals (RFP)” to impacted counties on 14 March 2025. The result was an unprecedented effort to submit applications for invasive treatment as well as other known restoration needs. Within 15 days, a dozen proposals were submitted. An ad hoc advisory group consisting of state agencies, local governments, landowners, and experts in the field of weed management reviewed the applications, and four local meetings were held to review the projects. Within 45 days of receipt nine were recommended for funding, and funds were allocated in May; the entire process was expedited and completed within 60 days. Those grants are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Fire Recovery Funding to Date**

2025 FIRE RECOVERY APPLICATIONS APPROVED							
APPLICATION	COUNTY	PURPOSE	ACRES	TOTAL COST	ORIGINAL ASK	CURRENT ASK	APPROVED
Warm Springs Fire	Hot Springs	IAG	4,000	\$ 259,203.00	\$ 192,150.00	\$ 192,150.00	\$ 192,150.00
Southeast Wyoming	Platte	IAG, Conifer	38,217	\$ 6,602,820.00	\$ 6,433,820.00	\$ 6,536,850.00	\$ 3,536,850.00
Southeast Wyoming II	Platte	IAG, Conifer	38,217	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 2,866,275.00	\$ 2,886,275.00
Elk Fire	Sheridan	Erosion	500	\$ 140,000.00	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 100,000.00
Sheridan County Fire	Sheridan	IAG	53,473	\$ 10,036,400.00	\$ 8,041,400.00	\$ 8,019,600.00	\$ 8,019,600.00
House Draw Fire	Johnson	IAG, Erosion, Seeding	120,000	\$ 13,166,000.00	\$ 12,200,000.00	\$ 12,200,000.00	\$ 12,320,000.00
Campbell Fire	Campbell	IAG, Seeding, Pasture	122,708	\$ 7,963,160.00	\$ 7,843,160.00	\$ 7,843,160.00	\$ 7,600,000.00
Natrona Fire	Natrona	IAG	5,500	\$ 713,268.00	\$ 433,387.00	\$ 710,894.00	\$ 433,387.00
IMAGINE	Multiple	Monitoring		\$ 461,010.00	\$ 461,010.00	\$ 461,010.00	\$ 461,010.00
Crook Fire	Crook	IAG	4,822	\$ 3,618,507.00		\$ 3,585,536.00	\$ 1,002,204.00
			387,437		\$ 35,704,927.00	\$ 42,515,475.00	\$ 36,551,476.00

Since that time, continued surveillance and treatment identified two additional areas in need of immediate response. At the present time, nine areas for treatment have been funded, for a total cost of approximately \$46.6 million, leaving a balance of approximately \$3 million from the 2025 appropriation. The current allocation of funds from that appropriation is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Fire Recovery Funding to Date**

2025 FIRE RECOVERY ALLOCATIONS - NOVEMBER 2025									
APPLICATION	COUNTY	PURPOSE	ACRES	TOTAL COST	ORIGINAL ASK	CURRENT ASK	APPROVED	PAID	BALANCE
Warm Springs Fire	Hot Springs	IAG	4,000	\$ 259,203.00	\$ 192,150.00	\$ 192,150.00	\$ 192,150.00		\$ 192,150.00
Southeast Wyoming	Platte	IAG, Conifer	48,172	\$ 6,602,820.00	\$ 6,433,820.00	\$ 6,536,850.00	\$ 3,536,850.00	\$ 2,556,205.42	\$ 980,644.58
Southeast Wyoming II	Platte	IAG, Conifer		\$ 3,000,000.00	\$ 2,866,275.00	\$ 2,866,275.00	\$ 2,866,275.00		\$ 2,866,275.00
Elk Fire	Sheridan	Erosion	500	\$ 140,000.00	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 85,000.00
Sheridan County Fire	Sheridan	IAG	53,473	\$ 10,036,400.00	\$ 8,041,400.00	\$ 8,019,600.00	\$ 8,019,600.00	\$ 5,612,662.95	\$ 2,406,937.05
House Draw Fire	Johnson	IAG, Erosion, Seeding	120,000	\$ 13,166,000.00	\$ 12,200,000.00	\$ 12,200,000.00	\$ 12,320,000.00	\$ 6,686,286.75	\$ 5,633,713.25
House Draw Fire II	Johnson	IAG, Erosion, Seeding		\$ 9,000,000.00	\$ 9,000,000.00	\$ 9,000,000.00	\$ 9,000,000.00		\$ 9,000,000.00
House Draw Mesic	Johnson	Erosion		\$ 400,000.00	\$ 400,000.00	\$ 400,000.00	\$ 400,000.00	\$ 228,040.00	\$ 171,960.00
Campbell Fire	Campbell	IAG, Seeding, Pasture	122,708	\$ 7,963,160.00	\$ 7,843,160.00	\$ 7,843,160.00	\$ 7,600,000.00	\$ 1,286,875.80	\$ 6,313,124.20
Natrona Fire	Natrona	IAG	5,500	\$ 713,268.00	\$ 433,387.00	\$ 710,894.00	\$ 433,387.00	\$ 151,856.00	\$ 281,531.00
IMAGINE	Multiple	Monitoring	NA	\$ 461,010.00	\$ 461,010.00	\$ 461,010.00	\$ 461,010.00		\$ 461,010.00
Crook Fire	Crook	IAG	4,822	\$ 3,618,507.00	\$ 3,585,536.00	\$ 3,585,536.00	\$ 1,002,204.00	\$ 479,809.70	\$ 522,394.30
Sleeper Fire	Park	IAG	20,700	\$ 711,000.00	\$ 698,000.00	\$ 698,000.00	\$ 698,000.00		\$ 698,000.00
			379,875	\$ 56,071,368.00	\$ 52,254,738.00	\$ 52,613,475.00	\$ 46,629,476.00	\$ 17,016,736.62	\$ 28,722,589.38

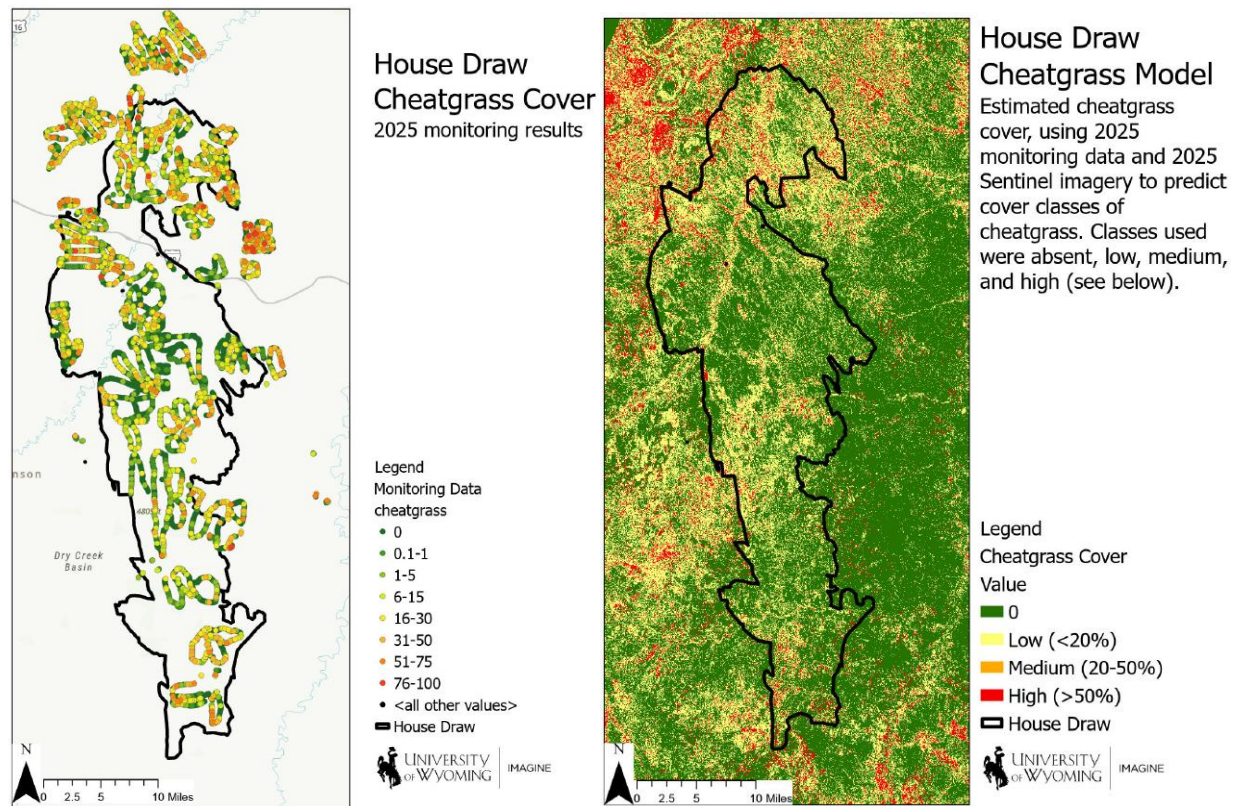
In 2025, Wyoming suffered eight major fires covering more than 250,000 acres; the two largest fires were fueled by invasive annual grasses and encroaching conifers. All of these fires are highly susceptible to infestation by cheatgrass, and the estimated cost to treat these major fires, based on current costs, is \$29 million.

## 2025 STRATEGIC ACTIONS

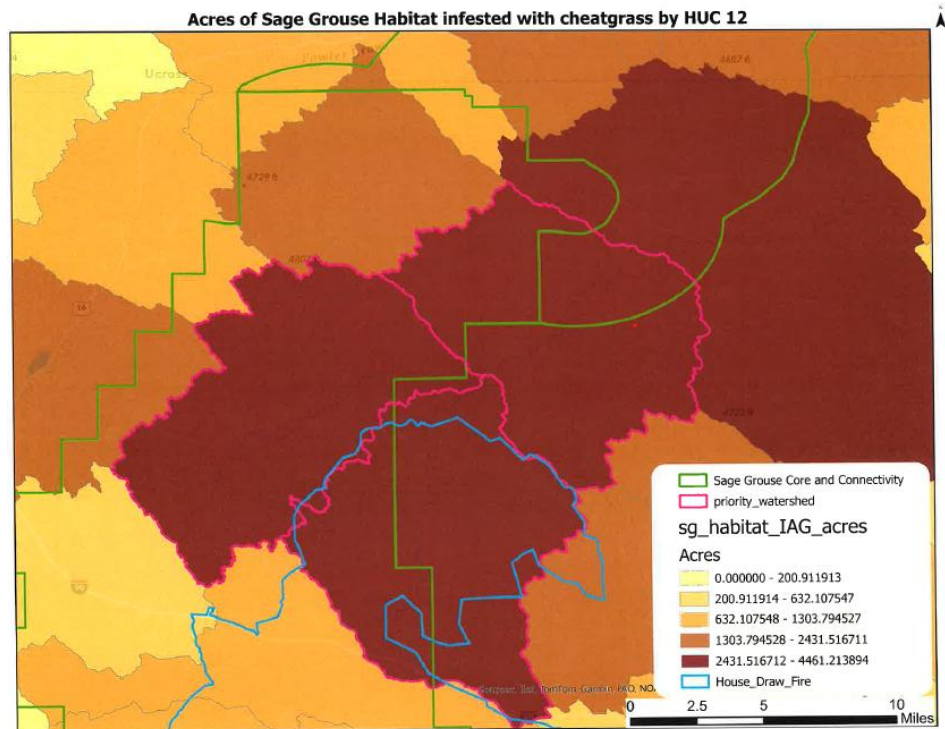
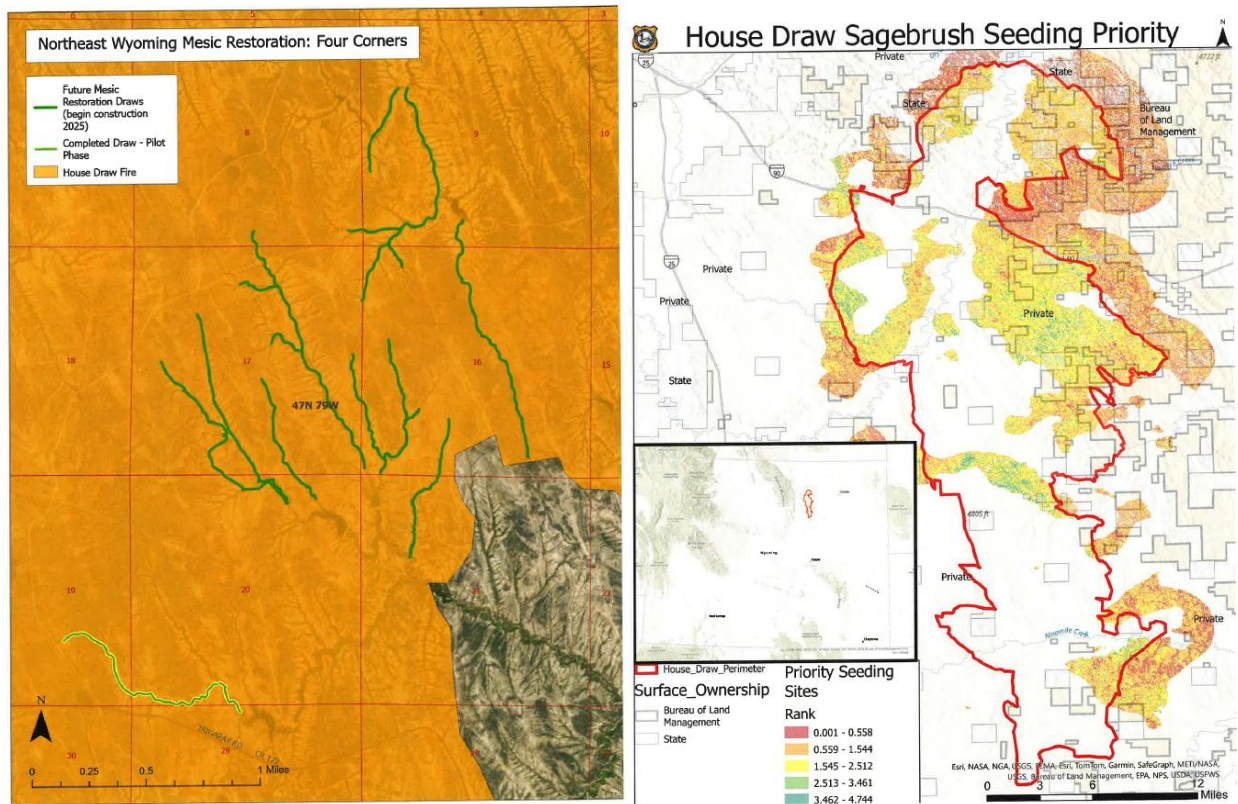
Ecological response to fire is complex. In order to be effective, surveillance is an immediate priority to identify 1) severity of burn effects, 2) areas of highest vulnerability to annual invasive plants, 3) areas that will require accelerated restoration, 4) timing of treatments for invasives or for restoration, 5) appropriate types of treatment, and 6) long-term implications for all of the above.

**SURVEILLANCE AND MAPPING:** Some of the impacted area had been mapped for invasive annual grasses in prior years, but much of that effort was focused on *Venttenata* and *Medusahead*. Beginning in early June, with Fire Response Funding from WWNRT, the University of Wyoming and cooperators began mapping those species, as well as cheatgrass, in the impacted area. The result, a combination of aerial photography, drone imagery, on-the-ground verification and modeling, is a roadmap of landscapes that can be prioritized for recovery. At the same time, monitoring focused on areas where native plants were recovering, and other ecological systems that should be considered for restoration (e.g. wet meadows, cottonwood forests, riparian vegetation). Examples of cheatgrass mapping and native recovery are shown below:



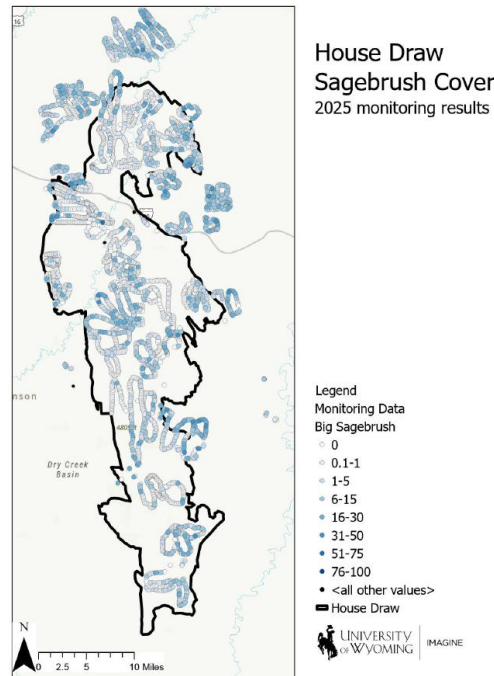


**INITIAL RESTORATION:** Greater Sage-grouse and mule deer are species of particular concern in northeastern Wyoming, and the House Draw Fire in particular impacted habitats for both species. Immediate post-fire surveillance in Johnson County identified areas where sagebrush loss was a potential limiting factor to Sage-grouse, mule deer and pronghorn, and existing local partnerships identified areas with high potential for restoration by seeding. Working in conjunction with many, a strategy to seed sagebrush was developed and implemented on a large landscape east of Buffalo. This effort was supported by local landowners, Clear Creek Conservation District, Wyoming Game and Fish, University of Wyoming, Wyoming DEQ – AML, and a host of private conservation organizations, completely without state funding. Those efforts led to a pilot effort to evaluate the effectiveness of seeding sagebrush in areas where recovery of the habitat is essential to recovery of other species. Examples of those efforts are shown below:



Concurrently, post-fire assessment found numerous areas where the loss of vegetation was a threat to mesic draws that hold important habitats for a variety of species. Those habitats were mapped and restoration efforts accelerated. The result of those efforts is evident now, merely

months since the installation of structures that retain water and sediment, and provide forage and cover for wildlife, as well as forage and water for livestock. Mapping of drainages and examples of the results of these efforts are found here:



On the Elk Fire in Sheridan County, similar efforts to reduce the impacts of erosion, soil movement and contamination of municipal water supplies were funded, and those projects are underway now. These projects will reduce the impact of sediment loading, and drastically reduce the cost of operation for municipal water systems.

Most recently, partners in all counties are beginning to assess the loss of cottonwood gallery forests and other woody vegetation on many of the streams in the areas impacted by fire. In some cases, entire riparian forests were lost to fire. These habitats, and wooded draws, are vital to a massive number of wildlife species, but local ranchers have been perhaps the most ardent advocates for restoration – these are areas of refuge for livestock in summer and winter, and often areas that retain moisture to feed springs and seeps that feed water systems for the ranch. In addition, these areas have historically been natural barriers to fire; the loss of these habitats, combined with the invasion of non-native annual grasses, creates a fire potential that is extremely volatile. It is highly likely that woody draws and gallery forests will become a high priority for restoration in the coming years.



## NEXT STEPS

At this time, 78% of the State of Wyoming is at risk of invasion by cheatgrass and other invasive annual grasses which translates to an annual loss of \$76 MILLION in direct and indirect agricultural value. This does not include the loss of wildlife habitat, potential soil loss, and a severely heightened fire risk and the costs associated with both prevention and suppression. The inter-relationship between annual grasses and fire can be ameliorated by a strategic effort to reduce invasive annual grasses and associated management to create resilient landscapes with a diversity of native species.

Current requests for prevention total \$12.6 million, primarily for areas that did not receive funding due to the lack of a budget. Estimated costs to address the Red Canyon Fire, the largest in 2025, are as high as \$29 million. And, the 2026 field season will likely add restoration costs that are yet to be determined.

The WWNRT has worked with all counties to begin the process of developing comprehensive plans to address invasive annuals and encroaching conifers county-wide. Sixteen counties have either completed or begun that assessment, which will offer a much clearer picture of the need to prevent loss of habitat, agricultural production and prevent catastrophic wildfires in the coming years.

