

# Cheatgrass: Why Is This Work Ecologically Important?

Jill Randall, Statewide Migration Coordinator  
Wyoming Game and Fish Department



# ANNUAL INVASIVE GRASSES

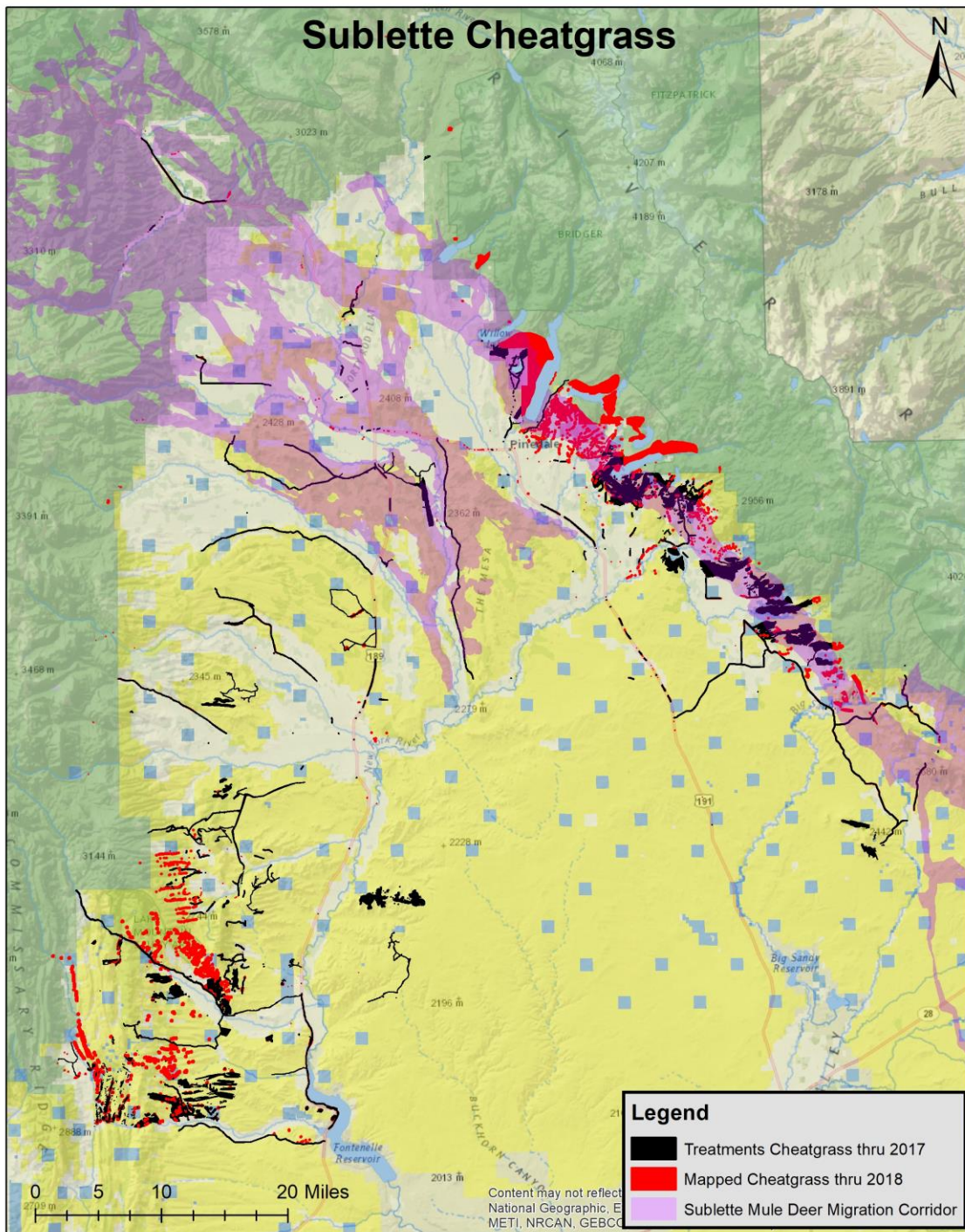
- Creates an increased fire risk
- More likely to re-establish burned areas than native grasses
- Threatens wildlife through conversion of productive habitat to invasive grasses



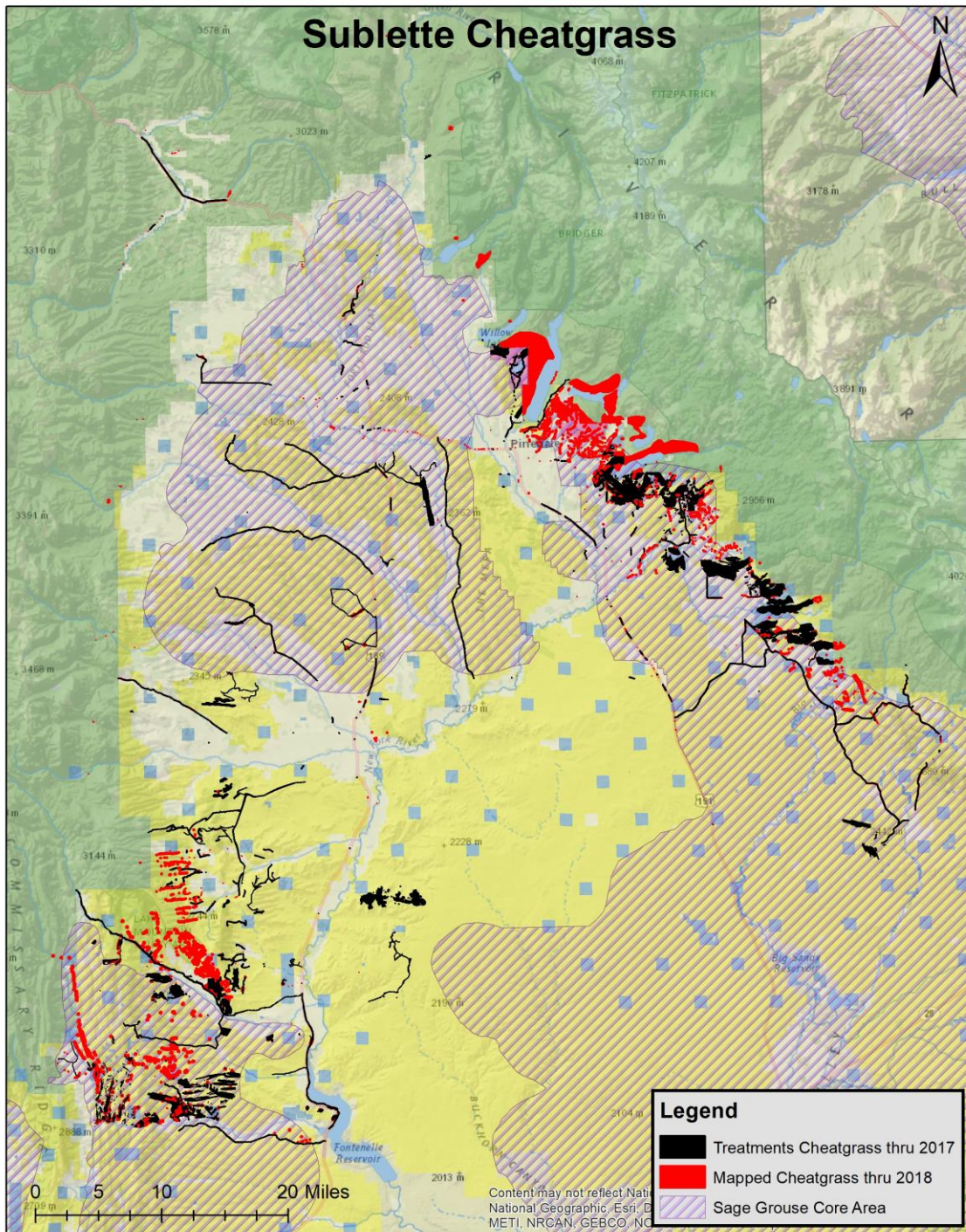
- Annual invasive grasses outcompete native vegetation, reducing forage for wildlife
- Nevada's mule deer population has decreased from ~150,000 to ~93,000 since 2000
- Beginning in the year 2000 there has been an increase in large-scale wildfires caused by cheatgrass
- Many of Wyoming's most critical deer migration corridors fall within sage grouse core habitat

# Big Game Impacts





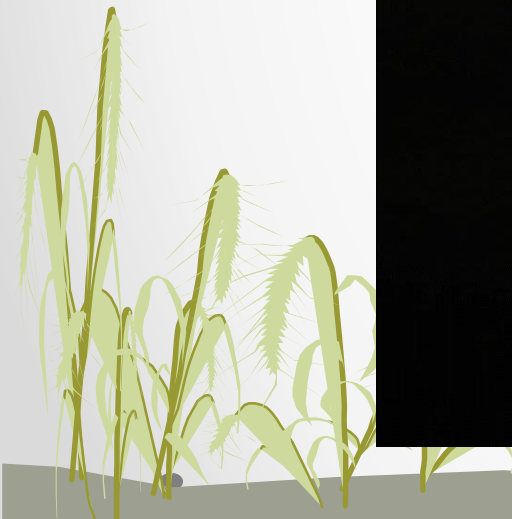
# Sublette Cheatgrass



M. Gocke

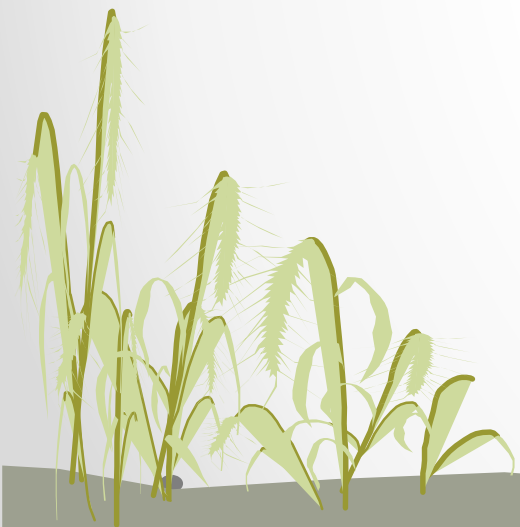
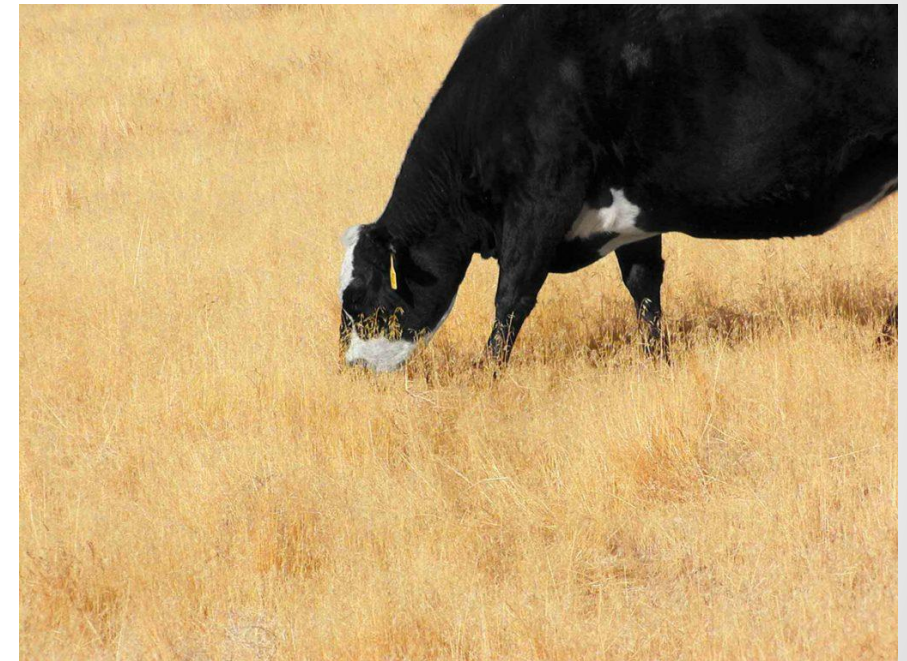


# Treatment to Control the Spread of Cheatgrass



# Livestock Implications

- Cheatgrass can be grazed early in the growing season but is not palatable the remainder of the year
- Cattle, other livestock and wildlife can spread seeds



# Sagebrush

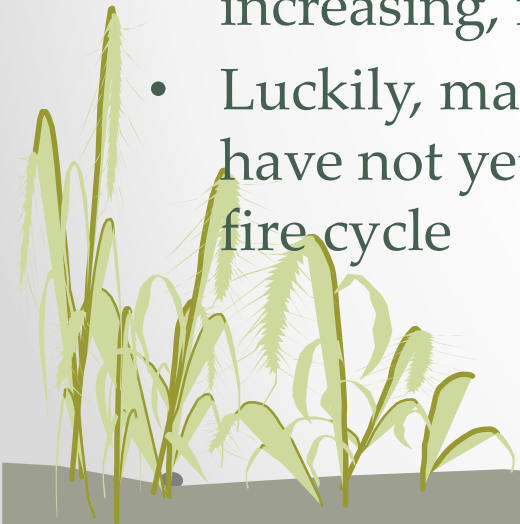
- Annual invasive grasses rapidly taking over sagebrush habitats
- Sole food source for sage-grouse in the winter
- Once covered nearly 250 million acres in western North America
- Now occurs on approximately half the original acres
- 11 of the 50 biggest fires in the last 20 years have been in the Great Basin





# FIRE

- Invasive grass matures and dries out long before native species
- Acts as a fine fuel for fires
- Fire frequency has increased from every ~50+ years to every 5 years or less
- More than 2 million acres of BLM rangelands across the US burn on average each year – number is increasing, in part, because of cheatgrass
- Luckily, many of Wyoming's ecosystems have not yet entered into the cheatgrass fire cycle



*“What we do know is that over the last 10 and 20 years, we are seeing longer fire seasons, and we are seeing more extreme fire behavior due to cheatgrass and hotter temperatures”*

~ Jessica Gardetto, spokesperson  
for the National Interagency Fire  
Center



# The Martin Fire, Nevada 2018

- Burned 435,569 acres, twice the size of New York City
- Majority of the fire burned in sensitive habitat for sage grouse
- Burned more than 39 active leks
- The fire affected about 2,520 birds and many died directly in the fire
- Some birds caught fire and flew ahead, spreading the flames

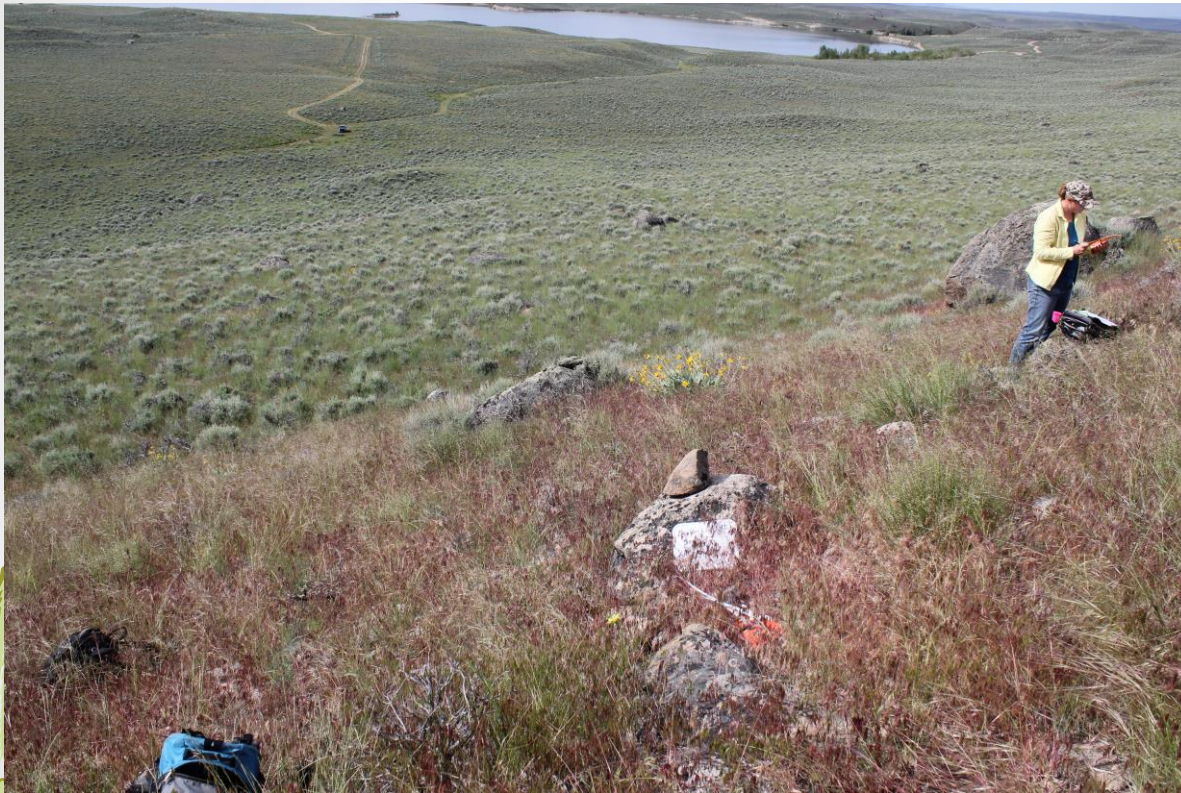


# Boulder Lake Fire, 2019

- Wildfire in August 2019
- History: Prescribed Fire and Spike in 1997 and 1998; then a wildfire in 2001
- Sagebrush Rangeland converted to Grassland

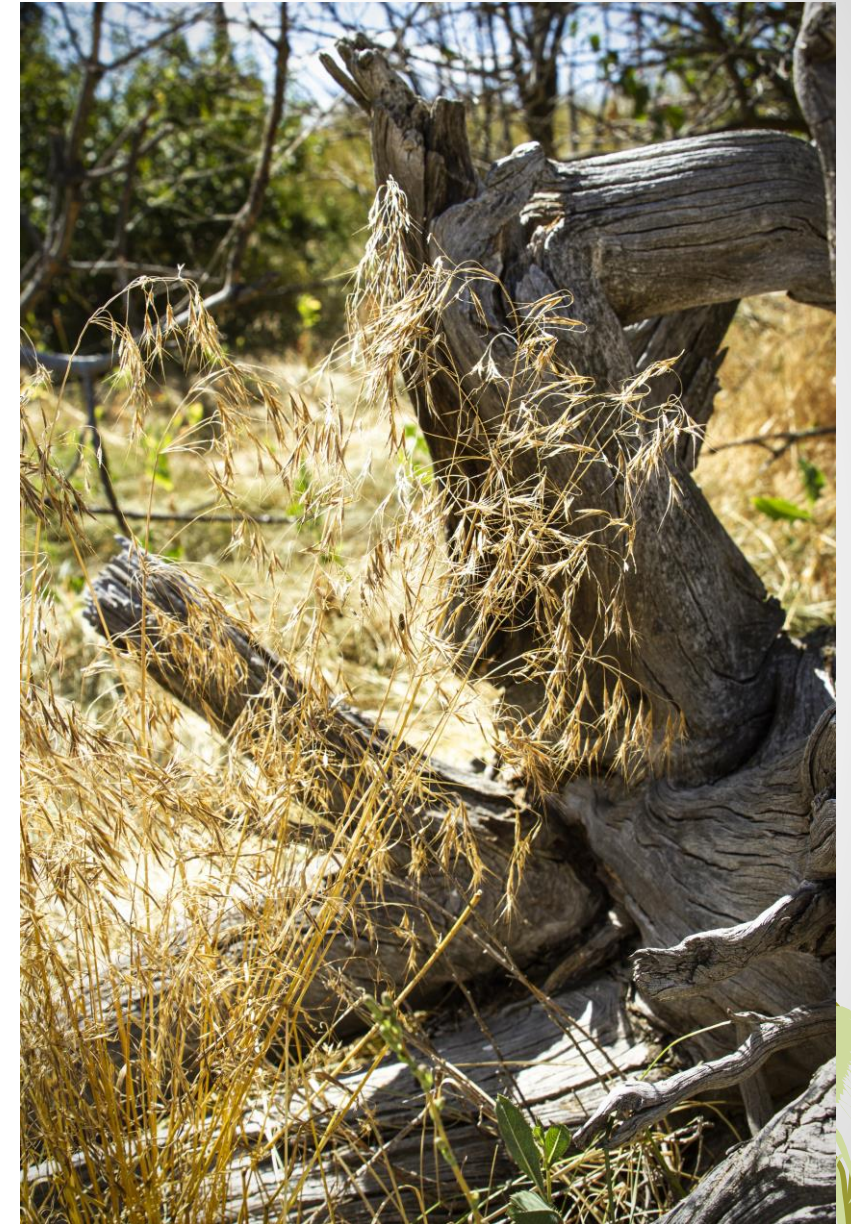


# Boulder Lake Fire, 2019



# Summary

- Wildlife and livestock require good native forage plants
- Many wildlife require sagebrush ecosystems
- Cheatgrass decreases habitat quality and increases risk of wildfires



Thank You!

