

Russian olive trees were a serious problem on the Dallas Mount property, and a project to remove them is in its final stages. Russian olive trees are on the state's noxious weed list due to their invasive nature. The list of designated noxious weeds is at www.wyoweed.org/statelist.html.



EXTREME PROPERTY MAKEOVER

Barnyards & Backyards team starts improving properties — members apply their lessons on your land

By Jessica Leetch

A variant of the Golden Rule might be to “Practice what you preach!”

So, this summer the Small Acreage Issue Team, which brings you *Barnyards & Backyards* magazine, started a new project to do just that. The team will apply its expertise while working closely with two small-acreage landowners in Wheatland and Casper to enhance or rehabilitate small acreages to achieve the objectives – and dreams – of the owners.

As the project develops over the coming seasons, readers can follow the progress, understand the techniques, and apply the team members’ insights on their properties. Watch the successes and failures of the property makeover process through articles in this magazine, the Property Improvement Project link on the www.barnyardsandbackyards.com Web page, and the project’s Facebook and YouTube pages (linked to the Barnyards & Backyards Web page).

How will it work? The project has already begun – the team of resource experts and the landowners toured the properties this past summer to gauge their current condition.

Two groups have been formed – one for each property. Members are working with the landowners to reach the landowners’ goals. Members of the teams come from a variety of agencies, including, local, state, and federal land resource organizations, and their backgrounds vary from range management, weed and pest management, to wildlife and other fields.

The teams are working to devise different management alternatives to reach landowner goals. The experts will offer guidance for the nominated properties, but the landowners will determine the course they want to take. Once a path is determined, the team will follow the implementation strategies and progress. Successes and challenges will be shared with the world on the Web sites mentioned above. To give you an idea of what the projects are, here is information about the two acreages and the owners readers will be following.



Another issue to address on the Dallas Mount property is field bindweed around barns, watering areas, and corrals. Field bindweed is a problem weed due to a root system that can penetrate the soil up to 20 feet, which gives rise to numerous long lateral roots. It can outcompete native or beneficial plants. Commonly called wild morning glory, field bindweed is one of 25 designated noxious weeds in Wyoming.

This spring, Dallas, a team member, nominated this property for the project. Shortly thereafter, the property was unexpectedly put up for sale. In July, Dallas and Dixie Mount bought the 78-acre pasture to add to their two-acre homesite. Dallas, a University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) educator, says he is thrilled to own the pasture that surrounds their home and looks

forward to improving the condition and forage production potential of the land.

The property has several issues for the team to tackle. Two years ago, a veritable forest of Russian olive trees was removed from a portion of the property. The stumps of the trees, an invasive species declared a noxious weed in Wyoming, scar a slough area, and treating resprouts is an ongoing process. Another area is dominated by weeds and less-desirable grasses. For the last decade, the land was grazed from April to October with approximately 40 cow-calf pairs. This season-long grazing was harmful to desirable plants in the early growth period, especially those areas closest to the water source. This resulted in some areas developing bare ground that now hosts annual weeds. Other areas farthest from livestock water are undergrazed. But there is good water, a number of good grasses, and strong fencing on the property. Luckily, the Mount's property is positioned in the middle of the Wheatland Irrigation District and is in the drainage between two lakes – so the Mounts have water and will be able to see quick results.

Dallas says their goal, first and foremost, is to get the bare spots filled in and weeds reduced. In addition, the Mounts would like to have a bit of recreation, such as family horseback riding. In the end, the Mounts want a nice property that will generate some grazing lease income to help make the annual payment on the loan for the land.

The second property is northeast of Casper and owned by Tim and Krista Brown. The 20-acre parcel sits on an ancient sand dune in a high-wind area. The Browns moved to Wyoming recently and have two horses and no fences on their piece of the prairie. Native grasses are sparse, and invasive cheatgrass has moved in. One objective would be to get rid of the downy brome (commonly called cheatgrass) and promote the native grasses already there. Another objective would be for the Browns to make the property sustainable for their recreational use.

The Small Acreage Issue Team is also seeking other properties to rehabilitate. See the sidebar below for more information.

The Small Acreage Issue Team is seeking nominations for more properties to participate in this project. In particular, team members are interested in working with landowners with forested properties or properties with significant riparian areas or wetlands in need of improvement. Please contact Dallas Mount at (307) 322-3667 with nominations or for more information.

Jessica Leetch was the Small Acreage Outreach Project intern this summer in the Wheatland and Cheyenne areas. Leetch, a junior from Glendo, is majoring in agricultural business in the University of Wyoming's College of Agriculture.