

Bates Creek Watershed Restoration Project

The Bates Creek Watershed Restoration Project, located in southeastern Natrona County, addresses a common issue in the Rocky Mountain West — conifer encroachment into aspen stands.

This project involves multiple partners and funding sources working together to achieve common goals. Partners include private landowners, Wyoming State Lands, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Forest Service.

According to Acting Fire Management Officer Eric Fransted, "This project is a perfect example of what can be achieved through good interagency cooperation. It shows that we can meet multiple land use objectives and work together to improve the landscape."

Project objectives are to improve the health and condition of aspen and associated sagebrush grassland communities and their diversity and structure, improve quality and quantity of wildlife habitat, achieve 10,000 aspen stems per acre above escape height in five years, and 1,000 stems per acre at mature stage in aspen stands.

Treatments are accomplished by several methods. These include use of mechanized equipment, cutting, hand piling and burning, broadcast prescribed burning, and harvest of commercially viable wood products. These activities were initiated on private lands in 2004, but they could take up to fifteen to twenty years to fully complete.

Possible treatment sites total about 17,500 acres, of which about 3,000 acres are conifer encroached aspen and 14,500 are sagebrush grasslands. To date approximately 161 acres of aspen and 554 acres of sagebrush grasslands have been treated.

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Aspen re-growth following the prescribed burn.