

CHEATGRASS

The Invasive Wildfire Fuel

Environmental Message February 2026

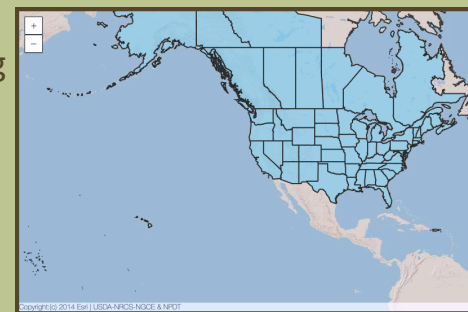
Did you know? Native plant sites have wildfire return intervals around 60-100 years, while a cheatgrass-invaded site has wildfire return intervals as little as 3-5 years. Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), an invasive annual grass, has become one of the most influential drivers of wildfire behavior across the western United States. It germinates early, grows quickly, and dies off by early summer, forming dense, continuous layers of extremely fine, dry fuel that ignites easily, burns rapidly, and carries fire faster than diversified plant communities.



Why It's a Problem: Cheatgrass forms thick, uniform patches that dry out quickly and burn very easily, increasing the risk of fire near power lines and utility corridors. Because of this, areas dominated by cheatgrass need different management strategies than typical rights-of-way (ROW) vegetation. Instead of focusing only on plant height, it's crucial to reduce fuel buildup and create breaks that slow fire spread. Replacing cheatgrass with native plant communities is the key to lowering fire risk over time.

Early Detection Matters: Managing cheatgrass also requires a nature-based risk assessment that looks at how changes in plant diversity affect wildfire behavior across the landscape. Increased monitoring and mapping help crews identify hotspots where cheatgrass is spreading and fire risk is rising. This information allows utilities and land managers to prioritize mitigation investments where they will have the greatest impact. By understanding these risk patterns in advance, organizations can also strengthen emergency response planning before fire conditions escalate.

Distribution Map



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