

Whitetop and Wildfire

Group meets to discuss wildfire, hoary cress

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TUSCARORA — A gathering took place Monday in Tuscarora. The home of Ron Arthaud and Gail Rappa provided a pleasant setting but this was not a social event. The meeting had two serious topics, wildfire and whitetop, also called hoary cress.

The group was a collaborative effort representing eight groups; the Tuscarora Chapter of the Nevada Fire Safe Council, Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group, Owyhee Conservation District, Nevada Department of Forestry, Bureau of Land Management, Elko County, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

The group's goal is to protect Tuscarora from future wildfire. Their scope is one culprit, whitetop. The scale of weed infestation is staggering. No one knows how many acres of land surrounding Tuscarora have the weed and one of the group's main goals is to attempt to get an estimate. Figures like 3,000 to 5,000 acres were thrown out but they are



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Members of various agencies discuss wildfire and hary cress during a meeting in Tuscarora.

probably much too small.

Outside the home's windows, the group could see a continuous band of pale tan showing this year's weed crop on a nearby hillside. Private property in town has been fairly well cleared but open lots are thick with weeds. From here, whitetop has spread up drainages and along roads, covering open ground and approaching nearby mountain tops.

One problem with whitetop is it matures and dries out early in summer. Its presence adds a great fire fuel to the landscape and would help a wildfire sweep through the town. The

BLM maintains a green-strip surrounding the town but town residents still worry about fire.

No one talked about eradication of whitetop, that dream is long gone. They talked about containment and agreed that if the whitetop infestation could be kept from spreading any farther than what it covers today, it would be a huge achievement.

The BLM discussed fighting the infestation on surrounding federal lands while the county works on county land and vacant lots. Dedicated town residents will continue to eradicate the weed from private town property as

nearby ranches fight the weed on their private ground.

The effort will need to work from the edges inward, from the tops of drainages downward. It will not do any good to spray and remove weeds downhill if spring runoff carries more seed from higher seed sources.

Spraying weeds is only half of the needed work. Any land freed of whitetop will need immediate re-planting with native and exotic plants capable of competing with it and other weeds. Only a healthy understory of grasses and forbs will help protect Tuscarora from future wildfires.

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