

## Organizations work toward management, elimination of new invasive grasses

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SHERIDAN — Two new invasive grasses have been found in Sheridan County.

Luke Sander from Sheridan County Weed and Pest said the two species of grasses, *vetenata* and *medusahead*, were spotted last summer. He said that while there was an early case where *vetenata* was found by a botanist in 1997, no action was ever taken to control it.

When the University of Wyoming was conducting studies last summer, they found more of it.

“It turns out, *vetenata*’s fairly widespread,” Sander said, “More so than we thought in Sheridan County.”

Sander said *medusahead* was found later in the summer. As the first time the species has ever been found in Wyoming or in this ecoregion, Sander said that this summer it’ll be a big priority for Weed and Pest to identify where the grass is and start treatments.

The two invasive grasses, he said, have similar effects as cheatgrass, increasing wildfire frequency and intensity. But *vetenata* and *medusahead* are even more detrimental.

He said they impact rangelands, exclude desirable native species and reduce livestock and wildlife forage by up to 70 percent. He also said the higher silica content in the two grasses makes them less palatable to grazing.

“They kind of just take over,” Sander said. “Of the areas in the US that have them, they’re reported to be worse than cheatgrass, just the invasiveness of it and the reduced grazing.”

Sander said they’re not certain how the species spread to Sheridan. He said *medusahead* has been found on two pieces of state land in the county that’s accessible to the public, so it’s possible out-of-state travelers brought it in unknowingly. This summer’s survey work will help put together a clearer picture of the situation.

The first step is raising awareness of the grasses. District Manager of Sheridan County Conservation District Carrie Rogaczewski said they are helping spread the word.

Information about the species, along with photos, can be found on SCCD’s website and will be on Weed and Pest’s soon.



COURTESY PHOTO | SHERIDAN COUNTY WEED AND PEST

One of the new invasive grasses, *vetenata* is considered worse than cheatgrass and have been observed as replacing cheatgrass.

Weed and Pest, UW and SCCD are also working with many other entities, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Wyoming Game and Fish and Bureau of Land Management, as part of the North East Wyoming Invasive Grass Working Group to address these issues.

Sander said starting around April they’ll start to hold public meetings, and he encourages anyone who sees the grasses to report them to their county’s Weed and Pest or through the website EDDMapS – Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System.

The two grasses, Sander said, are a bit difficult to identify, but *vetenata* is similar in appearance to cheatgrass,



COURTESY PHOTO | SHERIDAN COUNTY WEED AND PEST

*Medusahead* has been found in regions of Sheridan County. Along with *vetenata*, it reduces livestock forage and increases wildfire frequency and intensity.

only with longer awns. He said *medusahead* is more identifiable and looks similar to foxtail barley with an inflorescent light green color when it grows in the summer.

Once public meetings start, he said, it’ll be easier for people to identify the grasses. If people find themselves in areas with the grasses, they should clean boots, pets and animals to help keep them from spreading. But most importantly, notify Weed and Pest.

“The biggest thing, I guess, would be to report it,” Sander said, “so we can start managing of it and eliminate it before it gets worse.”



Find and purchase photos from The Sheridan Press at [sheridanpress.smugmug.com](http://sheridanpress.smugmug.com).

## Celebrating 120 years with the Bighorn National Forest

The era of concern about American’s natural resources began after the Civil War, as Americans turned their attention to building railroads, homesteading, farming, mining, cutting timber and raising livestock. Using a seemingly unending supply of natural resources was the spirit of the times.

The Powell Expedition in 1869 and the Hayden Expedition in 1871 were important in calling to attention the marvelous and unusual features of the

American West. The images created by artist Thomas Moran and photographer William Henry Jackson informed Americans about

what they stood to lose. In the 1890s, it was apparent to many that the remaining natural resources — the nation’s forests, water, soils, grasslands and spectacular physical features — represented great but finite and vulnerable national assets that needed protection.

Various acts of Congress reflected these concerns. In 1891, President Benjamin Harrison signed the Forest Reserve Act, setting aside the Yellowstone Timberland Reserve, which included part of what is now the Shoshone National Forest, the nation’s first. On Feb. 22, 1897, President Grover Cleveland established 13 new forest reserves, known as the “Washington’s Birthday” reserves, including the Big Horn Forest Reserve. Originally managed by the Department of the Interior, in 1905 the Transfer Act transferred management of forest reserves to the Department of Agriculture and named the agency the Forest Service. Gifford Pinchot led the new agency as its first



COURTESY PHOTO |

Crews ready to fight the Black Mountain Fire in the Bighorn National Forest in 1916. Feb. 22, 2017, is the 120th anniversary of the creation of the Bighorn National Forest.

chief, charged with caring for the newly renamed national forests.

Let’s pause a moment here to address the name. No less than mountains, a river, a basin, a town, a canyon, a county and a national forest are named for the eponymous sheep. Accounts written by early explorers use big horn, big-horn, and bighorn interchangeably, sometimes in the same document.

In the beginning it was the “Big Horn” Forest Reserve, but in about 1900 the reserve began to be referred to as “Bighorn,” and over the years, the spelling has gradually been accepted as the one-word “Bighorn” we use today.

As for the mountains, in 1962, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names officially designated the mountains as the “Bighorn” Mountains. The Bighorn Mountains’ rich cultural history began more than 10,000 years ago, when Native Americans used the land for rich, varied and vibrant lifeways, which they adapted over time in response to changing climates and ecosystems.

In 1802, the first recorded visit by a white European was by Charles LeRays, who camped near the town of Big Horn. Over the next century, LeRays was followed by fur trappers and hunters looking for beaver and bison, military expeditions looking for timber to build forts and game to

feed soldiers, loggers cutting tie hacks, and settlers with families and livestock.

The historical uses of the Bighorn resonate today in ranching, logging and professional outfitters and guides. Lodges and resorts provide fishing, hunting, trail rides and other recreation services.

Feb. 22, 2017, is the 120th anniversary of the creation of the Bighorn National Forest. For 120 years, it has exemplified the multiple uses Congress intended for the American people: forest products like timber and firewood, clean water for aquatic species and municipal watersheds and rangeland forage for domestic livestock. The forest provides habitat for deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep and all manner of smaller mammals, fish and birds. Every year, the national forest offers a refuge from everyday life for hundreds of thousands of people who enjoy the Cloud Peak Wilderness, more than 500 miles of hiking trails, 33 campgrounds, 180 miles of motorized trails, 391 miles of groomed snowmobile trails, downhill and Nordic skiing and the three scenic byways that traverse the Bighorn Mountains.

In 1891, Congress began conserving national forests for all of us. Over 125 years later, they continue to inspire, restore and provide.

SUSAN DOUGLAS is the public affairs specialist for the Bighorn National Forest.

SHERIDAN-JOHNSON COUNTY  
CHAPTER #542

20th ANNUAL BANQUET



Dinner at Sheridan County  
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Saturday, February 25th, 2017  
5:30 PM

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