**Habitat Happenings**

**Vegetation Management in Wetlands**

Wetland management is usually a long-term process. However, it should be noted that some management objectives, such as modifying vegetative structure, can be accomplished in the short-term. It is important to outline a set of strategies for both the long-term and short-term to help you accomplish your objectives for your wetland.

Wetlands are dynamic systems, so it is seldom feasible to “fix” a problem utilizing one management strategy and then walk away. Due to varying weather patterns from year to year, the presence of invasive species, and management actions performed, or not performed in preceding years you will need to adapt each year. The proper actions applied throughout the year and in succeeding years can promote the desired vegetative communities and biological state you wish to see in your wetland.

Since 2004, the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture partners have worked collaboratively to implement various management practices and evaluate their success. Following is a list of common management tools that have helped the partners achieve their objectives on wetlands they manage.

**Burning:** Burning can be used to reduce cool-season grasses such as reed canary grass while late summer fires can be used to reduce bulrush and cattail stands in wetlands. Winter burns are used to open up wetlands for the spring migration. Prescribed fire alone does not cause significant long-term vegetation alteration, but it is a critically important catalyst for successful implementation of other treatments such as grazing and herbicide applications.

**Herbicide:** It is often necessary to apply herbicides when managing some of the more aggressive species such as river bulrush, cattails, and reed canary grass. Good success has also been seen using herbicides to kill small trees such as cottonwood growing in wetlands. Herbicide can be applied using a floater, spray plane, or by spot treatment utilizing a pickup truck, tractor, boat, or ATV. Just like burning, herbicide applications are most effective when implemented in conjunction with other management techniques.

**Haying, Shredding, Mowing:** Haying, shredding, and mowing can temporarily open up wetlands and can result in increased waterfowl and shorebird use. It can also result in new vegetative growth for more desirable grazing conditions. Hay removed from a wetland can be used as livestock feed in the winter.

**Disking and Rototilling:** Disking and rototilling are one of the most aggressive mechanical treatments that can be used in wetlands. These actions are non-selective and significantly impact all vegetation in the treated area. Disking usually requires a minimum of 3 passes with a heavy disk. Rototilling can be more effective and usually only requires one pass. However, most rototillers are narrow and require the operator to go very slowly limiting the amount of wetland that can be effectively treated by this method.

**Grazing:** Perhaps the most used management technique used in the Rainwater Basin region is cattle grazing. Many public wetlands are leased to grazing tenants during the spring and early summer. Cattle can be used to alter wetland species composition, diversify vegetative structure, increase the amount of bare ground, mudflats, and open water, reduce invasive species, and increase the productivity and nutritive quality of the forage. Grazing is a tool that allows for flexibility with regard to timing, frequency and intensity.

*The Rainwater Basin Joint Venture is a public/private partnership that works with federal and state agencies, local Natural Resources Districts, non-governmental organizations, and private landowners to develop “win-win” opportunities to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands in the Rainwater Basin. For more information, visit* [*www.rwbjv.org*](http://www.rwbjv.org) *and follow us on Facebook and Instagram.*