GBEP
Great Basin Environmental Program
Progress Report FY09-FY11

The Great Basin is one of the most threatened ecosystems in the US. Current evaluations of the condition of the Great Basin indicate that the situation is deteriorating. It seems clear that continuing on the same path will not lead to restoring the Great Basin and preserving it for future generations. Something different must be done, if we are to succeed in improving the environmental condition of the Great Basin. This is the reason for the various projects now collected and functioning under the rubric Great Basin Consortium. The Great Basin Environmental Program is a member of this Consortium.

State and federal agencies have recognized that the environmental management of the Great Basin must change, and their various efforts are directed to finding the right approaches to affect the changes. The GBEP has the vision of broad involvement and guiding the improvement efforts by metrics that are made available each year to the researchers and the public on the condition of the Great Basin in the six thematic areas of the GBEP. Among the impacts of these metrics will be their ability to engage the public in the Great Basin in developing efforts to reverse the deterioration in the environment. It is hard to engage the public unless there is credible scientific information about the condition of the Great Basin.

In addition to developing the metrics, the proposal is to undertake two critical projects—one focused on the major die off for cheat grass in the Great Basin and another orientated to

OBJECTIVE

- Develop a large scale environmental initiative including the five Great Basin states; Idaho, Utah, California, Oregon and Nevada.
- Focus on interventions that cannot be addressed on a farm by farm basis, and that involve invasive weed species. Sub areas of activity include:
  - Wildfires
  - Water Resources and Conservation
  - Land Use and Health
  - Urban, Rural Wildlands Mosaic
  - Sustainable Communities and Their Cultures
  - Biodiversity
- Involve all of the environmental players, land grant universities, state agencies, NGOs, federal agencies and the private sector—completed in Utah and Nevada and progressing in the other states.
- Change attitudes, policies and regulations to better fit the current Great Basin uses and demands

PROGRESS

- The Great Basin Environmental Program is a member of the newly developed Great Basin Consortium. The objective of the Consortium is to coordinate activities and reduce duplication among groups. Other members of the Consortium are:
  - Great Basin Land Conservation Cooperative
  - Great Basin Research and Management Partnership
  - Great Basin Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit
- Changed or upgraded web page and moved it to a neutral site (making the other universities more willing to use) and in the process of adding projects and plans of Nevada NGOs.
- Held meetings in Reno and Salt Lake City. The latter included discussions the Agricultural Research Service of USDA on joint work in the Great Basin.
- Developed three proposals for joint work beginning this year.
- Guidelines developed for collaborative writing teams for projects in the six theme areas.

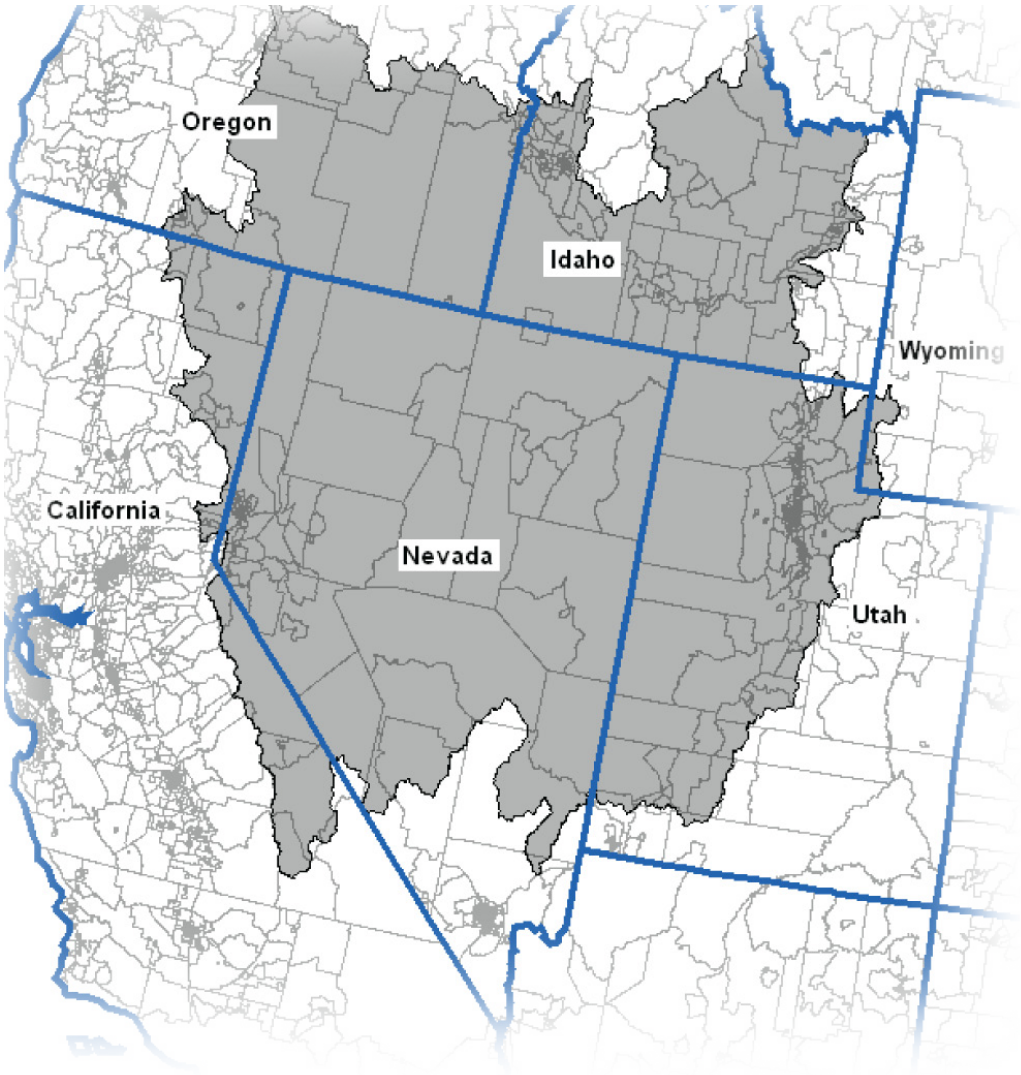
FUTURE WORK

- Work to get the various organizations together in the remaining three states
- Complete web site listing NGOs projects and plans for Nevada and extend to other states
- Develop scientific teams from all of the organizations in each state to conduct the initial three multi state projects requested.
- Hold meetings in each state to energize the effort to improve the environmental performance of the Great Basin—and measure the improved performance with metrics.

grazing cheat grass impacted areas in different ways than in the past. The die off presents a great opportunity to better understand the reasons for this condition—are they genetic, disease related, climate related or due to other factors. As well, there is evidence that the die off has implications for restoring native plants—they too are possibly affected by the conditions linked to the cheat grass die off. Much scientific work needs to be completed to find the real answer to these and other questions associated with the die off.

The other proposal is a real on-the-ground effort. Researchers at the Gund Ranch in Nevada have discovered that fall and winter cattle grazing of cheat grass impacted areas followed by spring grazing by sheep has a major impact on the ability of cheat grass to renew itself. Cattle and sheep grazing in this way have shown good results in improving the productivity of the land and limiting cheat grass expansion. The native species of grass and other forage have a tendency to re-emerge in the grazed areas with increased biodiversity. We need to investigate this possibility for controlling cheat grass in the Great Basin at a landscape scale. If these grazing patterns can work there will be a major benefit to the Great Basin that can address one of the major invasive species problems.

These three GBEP projects will be under-taken in collaboration with the state, federal, university and NGO researchers and practitioners to foster a significant move forward in improving the environmental condition.



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