

Colorado State Conservation Board 2008 Matching Grants Project: Shavano Conservation District: Pinion-Juniper Forest Management

What natural resource problem(s) did the project address?

In Montrose and Ouray counties pinion-juniper forest forms a native ecosystem on the lower northern slopes of the Uncompahgre Plateau. **High tree densities and drought have led to ips beetle infestations killing many of the pinion trees in the area** - especially on the lower, drier sites. This has resulted in **elevated wildfire risks and wildlife habitat degradation**. Efforts are being made to restore the forest health through state Forest Service and Natural Resource Service funds and the Colorado Division of Wildlife's Uncompahgre Habitat Partnership Program. Private landowners and Safari Club International have also contributed to the thinning and clearing which forms the backbone of the restoration efforts by **reducing competition between trees to increase their vigor and resistance to drought and ips beetle attacks**. The Shavano Conservation District has used Matching Grant funds to focus on **thinning and then reseeding the most-affected lower elevation sites** where colonization of open sites by cheatgrass is also a problem.

What was achieved?

- 431 acres of pinion-juniper forest received one or more treatments for restoration:
 - Hydroaxing method of selective tree mastication for thinning : 39 acres
 - Reseeding : 309 acres
 - Cheatgrass control : 83 acres
- Total of 886 acres of wildlife habitat improved through mixture of treated and untreated areas.
- Trees thinned to for 30-150 feet spacing to mitigate crown fires and to leave trees in good health and of mixed age and species for disease resistance and wildlife value.
- Clearings incorporated for maximizing wildlife value through habitat diversity and forest edge effect that creates high value habitat.
- Grass and forbs seed mix aerially applied to reduce erosion and weed infestation on disturbed area and promote species beneficial as wildlife forage.
- Modifications made to seed mix to better out-compete cheatgrass as needed and aerial herbicide treatment of cheatgrass and other weed problems carried out as necessary.
- Over 100 landowners participated in project.



Following thinning of pinion-juniper forest ecosystem to promote better forest health, aerial treatment of cheatgrass and reseeding with beneficial grasses and forbs helps ensure desirable species re-colonization. On the right is a treated area after a few years, showing excellent wildlife habitat development.