

## **Sol Y Lomas Cheatgrass Control Project**

### **Overview of the Problem Facing our Neighborhood**

A serious weed is loose in Santa Fe. Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) also known locally as Foxtail grass, is an invasive annual grass that is widespread in Santa Fe and across much of New Mexico. It 's a problem of the 1st magnitude. In many areas of the Western US native grass and shrub ecosystems have been replaced by Cheatgrass. As a result, Cheatgrass caused fires have destroyed the native plants causing the widespread loss of habitat and greatly diminished wildlife populations.

### **Problem for Pets**

For pet owners, it's seed heads are extremely dangerous to our dogs and cats and wildlife. The sharply stiff seeds ripen to a burgundy color and are barbed. They readily puncture the skin and move deeply into paws, the flesh and into organs. Or as any northern NM veterinarian will attest, get into pet's ears where the seeds will puncture their eardrums causing great pain and deafness.

### **Fire Danger**

Once dead and dried by mid- to late June (it's an annual grass that completes in one growing season), this grass is highly flammable and burns quickly with intense heat. Hence it presents an extreme fire hazard when growing around homes and outbuildings and under dry brush and junipers.

### **How Cheatgrass Spreads**

When the seeds are ripe, they disperse by wind and water into our yards and arroyos. Here the seed remains viable for many years and sprouts readily in the fall when rainfall is sufficient. The grass overwinters and begins active growth in February.

### **What Can You Do to Control Cheatgrass on your Property?**

We can make a big impact in this weed taking over our neighborhood if we prevent Cheatgrass from forming ripe seeds. You do this by;

### **Where Do You Find Cheatgrass Growing?**

In early spring, it's the first plant to start greening up. Look for green grass shoots. Don't be fooled by its soft, inviting look. It will soon turn into a mass of prickly seeds that pierce socks, non-leather shoes, clothing and pets.

Cheatgrass is most prevalent in partially shaded areas under Chamisa (Rabbitbrush) and other native shrubs, in the dappled shade of Siberian elms, Russian Olives and other

shade trees, on the north and east sides of coyote fences and in the ditches along dirt roads. In Sol y Lomas, the grass is particularly bad along the arroyo banks and especially the Arroyo Chamiso.

### **When and How to Prevent Seed Set and Keep Cheatgrass from Spreading**

**1. February-April; You can pull it.** But this is very labor-intensive, especially where the weed is well established. There will be thousands of grass plants growing throughout favorable growing spaces.

**2. March; You can use natural non-toxic herbicides to control young plants.** From February through early April, Cheatgrass grows as a low, lush-looking bright green grass carpet. Thoroughly spray young grass plants with Burn-Out Formula II (a mixture of citric acid and clove oil. Available locally), or by mixing your own homebrew of household vinegar/Epsom salts and liquid dish soap\*. Apply on a warm, sunny day when day temperatures are above 50° F. These herbicides burn actively growing foliage and won't damage native grasses and other plants as long as they are still dormant and don't have green foliage.



Young Cheatgrass plants in March

**3. Mid- to late May; there is a 10-day window in which do a well-timed mowing with a lawnmower or weed wacker to prevent the grass from ripening seeds. Mow it too soon and the grass re-grows the flowering seedhead. But these secondary seedheads are too low to re-mow. So wait until the seed heads turn purple to cut them down. This will be happening toward the end of May.**



**Cheatgrass seed heads ready-to-cut in May**

**4.June-July: Cutting or pulling plants with ripe seeds to diminish fire danger.** This is only an option if you missed cutting the grass with immature seedheads in May. This is a less desirable remedy and a lot more work. And you must thoroughly rake up and throw the litter into the trash. Otherwise, the seeds will fall off and remain to germinate later.



**Cheatgrass seed heads ready to cut in May**

### **Check-in Online About When to Mow/Wack Mature Cheatgrass**

Watch on [Nextdoor](#) for notification about when to cut the ripening seedheads.

Historically, the optimum time to mow is a 10-day window in mid- to late May. But weather conditions affect the timing. So stay connected as a trained horticulturist will be keeping a close eye on the situation and give everyone a “heads up” when it is time to cut.

### **Contact a Landscaper to Schedule Cheat Grass Control**

Now would be a good time to talk to your existing landscape maintenance company or reach out to a landscaper to set up a time to either spray or mow. Waiting until May to call a landscaper do the work will be too late. This way you’ll be ready to go when the time is right.

### **Make this a Neighborhood Effort**

Once we easily identify this weed, you’ll see it our own yards, neighbors’ yards, and the arroyos. Share this information and encourage your neighbors to join in the effort to control Cheatgrass in Sol Y Lomas. As we make headway each year, it will improve our property values, quality of life and reduce the risk of grassfires. Each and every

homeowner that takes makes the effort will have a positive impact. Together we can make a difference.

**\*Homebrew herbicide recipe:** 1 gal. cooking/cleaning vinegar + 2 cups Epsom salts + ¼ cup liquid dish soap (Dawn, Ivory or Dr. Bronners). Apply I a spray bottle directly to the green grass.

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