

WILDLIFE

Introduced grasses can cause problems for wildlife

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Old World bluestem (light colored grass on left) encroaching into a native grass pasture.



Across the United States, introduced and invasive plant species have displaced and replaced many native plant species. These plants are spreading across the landscape primarily due to human activities such as plantings, accidental introductions and fire suppression.

These invaders can take over an area before some land managers realize a problem exists.

Land managers often see wildlife habitat being invaded by nonnative, introduced grasses such as bermudagrass, tall fescue and old world bluestems. These introduced grasses are sometimes called improved grasses. When it comes to wildlife and native plant communities, there

is nothing “improved” about these grasses. Introduced grasses are typically managed as monocultures, which means only one plant species dominates an area. Even when not managed as monocultures, introduced grasses typically replace many native plant species and reduce diversity. Many species of wildlife depend on a diversity of plant species, which is best achieved through managing native

plant communities.

When invasive plant species appear in rangelands, management practices must be carefully evaluated to prevent their continued spread. Sometimes, an intensive management practice such as an herbicide application may be needed to reduce abundance of some invasive species. With proper management, plant diversity can be maintained or increased in native rangelands. Other than the proper application of grazing, rest and prescribed burning, rangelands require few inputs (unlike introduced monocultures) to support livestock and wildlife.

In addition to degrading wildlife habitat and the integrity of native plant communities, invasive plants can also decrease property value. Depending on the motivation of an individual buyer, many rangeland properties are more valuable than properties dominated by introduced plants due to value placed on wildlife habitat. The number of landowners whose primary income comes from off-the-farm sources is increasing and many of these individuals are looking for properties that provide recreational opportunities.

If wildlife and native plant communities are important to you, whether for aesthetic, personal recreation or business purposes, carefully evaluate if introduced grasses should be present or encouraged on your property. For more information about invasive plants in Oklahoma, go to the Oklahoma Invasive Plant Council website, www.okinvasives.org/. ■