



extension  
**IMPACTS**

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## Weed management on Wind River Indian Reservation starts with educating youths

### **Situation:**

Many children on the Wind River Indian Reservation were found not to have a working knowledge of plants, in particular weeds commonly found throughout the Wind River landscape. Just as in many other places in Wyoming, many weed species have begun to take over agricultural lands on the reservation. The large number of weeds has quickly reduced land productivity, decreased biodiversity, and created a harmful grazing situation for pasture animals and wildlife. With little other options, animals on the reservation are often forced to graze on low nutritional, and even poisonous, weeds instead of nutritious grasses and forbs.

Increasing children's knowledge of weeds and their potential negative effects was seen as a good starting point for weed management awareness. It was hoped children would learn how to identify and distinguish between native plants and weeds as well as learn specific management techniques such as reducing the spread of weeds onto agricultural lands by cleaning shoes, clothes, and vehicles exposed to weeds.

The University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service Wind River Indian Reservation extension educator teamed with the Eastern Shoshone Boys and Girls Club to present a plant/weed identification field day during the summer. Children were bused to a nearby field and divided into groups to participate in various fun, educational activities. Activities included a weed-versus-native plant freeze tag match, which is the traditional game of freeze tag. Once a youth assumes the role of a weed, the other participants are native plants. Once a youth was tagged by the weed, they were frozen, illustrating how weeds can take over native plants. Other games included an animal survival game related to weed consumption and a native plant scavenger hunt.

## **Impacts:**

Seventy-seven American Indian children ages 7 to 15 attended the event. Staff members from the Eastern Shoshone Boys and Girls Club indicated this plant/weed field day was a great success with the children. They expressed the children were readily engaged in the activities. Many of the children had previous knowledge about native plants; however, their weed identification skills and weed spread prevention knowledge were both greatly enhanced from this field day. Youth participants shared their enthusiasm for the event, saying the outing was fun and interesting. Instructors used observation and testimonials from youths to gather impact of the field day. Many of the children exhibited enhanced knowledge of weed species they did not know before the field day by stating their recognition of weed names and characteristics previously seen on their own properties.

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