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Needed*

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# NEWSLETTER

## Blue Grama for Low Maintenance Lawns

Tony Koski, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture July 2005

Blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*) is a warm-season, perennial, native grass found throughout the Great Plains of the U.S. Along with buffalograss, this was the major native grass species of the shortgrass prairie. It is often the dominant species on sandy soils, with buffalograss dominating the heavier clay soils. Like buffalograss, blue grama possesses excellent drought and cold hardiness. Although common at lower elevations, blue grama can be found at



elevations approaching 7000 feet - where warm-season species would not be expected to persist. This species forms short rhizomes, but appears to be a bunch grass when seeded at low rates or when it is non- irrigated. Under favorable management, it can provide a serviceable turf of low to medium quality. Being a warm-season grass, it will be dormant for the majority of the year in northern areas of its range. Proper management is necessary

to achieve reasonable turf quality. Excessive management, in terms of irrigation and fertilization, will promote weed and cool-season grass invasion. It is commonly planted for naturalizing fair roughs of golf courses and where homeowners want a lawn that will not be mowed. Blue grama, with its accompanying seedheads, forms a very attractive unmowed turf.

There are no turf-type blue grama varieties commercially available. Available varieties were developed for range use and revegetation of disturbed areas, but can be used to produce a lawn of low to moderate quality.

'Lovington' (released in 1963) and 'Hachita' (released in 1980) can provide a low to medium quality lawn if mowed at a higher mowing height and provided with supplemental irrigation during extended drought. Lawns often become thin and somewhat "clumpy" in appearance after a few years, especially with no supplemental irrigation and minimal basic lawn management. Much of the blue grama sold is harvested from native stands and sold as 'Native' blue grama.

### ***Culture and Management***

#### **Seeding Rate**

3-5 pounds per 1000 square feet; blue grama seed is approximately 40% inert matter. Seed early in the year (April-July) to allow seedlings to mature sufficiently before winter. Blue grama seed germinates quickly (4-6 days) when soil is warm and irrigation is provided. Seedlings are vigorous and will dominate stands if buffalograss is included as part of a seed mix. Some sod is being produced by Colorado growers.

#### **Mowing**

1.5-3 inches for lawns; unmowed blue grama will grow 10-16 inches in height.

#### **Irrigation**

Does not require supplemental irrigation once established. Better quality will be achieved if irrigation is provided to prevent summer dormancy (2-4 total inches per growing month of combined irrigation + precipitation).

#### **Fertilization**

0-2 pounds Nitrogen per 1000 square feet annually, depending on desired quality. Apply during late spring and/or summer, not after August 1.

## ***Board Supervisor Needed***

The Douglas County Conservation District Board of Supervisors is composed of volunteers passionate about our mission to help people help the land.

The time requirement is tied to our monthly meetings (4th Monday of each month at 6pm), our fund raising efforts in April, and several workshops. The District is also working on a Stream Restoration Partnership at CALF's Lowell Ranch in Castle Rock. This Partnership is focused on creating a stream restoration demonstration project for others to learn about restoring and conserving creek corridors.

Please contact Heather for more information and to get involved.

## Pest Problems

Weed invasion is the most important pest problem with blue grama. Blue grama that is irrigated and/or fertilized excessively is prone to weed invasion. Preemergent herbicides labeled for use on buffalograss are safe for blue grama turf. Phenoxy-based herbicides should not be applied to actively growing blue grama turf unless phytotoxicity can be tolerated. Confront (triclopyr+clopyralid) can be safely used on blue grama lawns, where allowed (clopyralid is not labeled for use on residential lawns). Spot applications of glyphosate to weeds in dormant blue grama can effectively control cool-season weeds.

Your Douglas County Conservation District can order Blue Grama for customers to pick up at the Franktown Office.

# Conservation District, Board of Supervisors Spotlight

Eric Ness, Douglas County Conservation District Board of Supervisors, Member joined the Board in 2021. We interviewed Eric to learn a little bit about him.

## What brought you to Douglas County and when was that Eric?

*After Leaving College in 2000, I rented an apartment in the Parker area. After living there for a few years, my wife and I had really liked the Parker area and decided it was going to be the place where we wanted to raise our family.*



*We enjoyed the small town feel of the community and that there was still a lot of rural influence in the area. We also enjoyed a lot of the amenities that Douglas County offered for our family.*

## How did you get involved with agriculture?

*I was raised on a multi-generational family farm in Byers, Co that my grandpa purchased in the mid-1950s, and my parents still operate today. The main crops that our family produces are Winter Wheat, Alfalfa, and Cattle. In addition to being raised in the agriculture community, I was also active in 4-H, and FFA through High School.*

*Given my agriculture background, I continued my education after high school by obtaining my Bachelor's in Agriculture Business from Colorado State University in 2000.*

## Tell us a little bit about your family?

*My wife, Brigitte, and I live in the northeastern corner of Douglas County just outside of Parker, with our 2 children, Macarthur and Brecklyn. Both kids are active in competitive swimming, which keeps*

*us very busy. My daughter also started to develop her own herd of Angus cattle a couple of years ago, by starting with raising bottle calves out of our larger herd in Byers. We also continue to actively participate with the Farm in Byers with the cattle and harvest.*

### **What's your experience with conservation practice?**

*It was a part of my upbringing that we needed to be good stewards of both our land and the animals that were in our care. To do this, we needed to implement certain conservation practices.*

*On the farming front, we did a lot of strip farming to help maintain vegetation on each field to reduce the risk of wind erosion. We also implemented terracing of some of our more sloped fields to prevent water erosion that would take away our valuable topsoil in the fields. For the cattle, we had to be very mindful of the condition of our pastures, so they were not overgrazed and exposed to erosion.*



**Terraces constructed on the family farm to prevent runoff in the late 80s in partnership with the local conservation district in Byers, CO.**

### **Why do you volunteer your time to the Board of Supervisors?**

*I think that it is important to be an active participant in my community. In addition, by serving on the BOS, I am able help educate the community on both Agriculture and Conservation practices. If we provide the education and help inform the public on each of these items, then my hope is that we can continue to build the connection between the agriculture community and suburban communities. Conservation isn't just about the conservation of our soil and waters, it about the conservation of agriculture as a whole and how it feeds and supports our communities.*

# Why is the West Plum Creek Stream Management Plan important to the watershed?

West Plum Creek is one of the last relatively unaltered transition zone streams on Colorado's Front Range, and is perhaps the best remaining example of this type of habitat. It is home to several declining eastern plains fish species, as well as the Northern Leopard Frog and the Preble's meadow jumping mouse. West Plum Creek has long been identified as an important conservation priority; as early as 1996, the Colorado Natural Heritage Program identified West Plum Creek as having "an extraordinary number of rare or imperiled species, demonstrating that [West Plum Creek]



Image by Ellen Edmondson and Hugh H. Chrisp (Cornell University)

## Northern Red Belly Dace, Species of Concern

represents a significant proportion of Douglas County's biological diversity."

[West Plum Creek Stream Management Plan](#) website notes that our state's rivers, streams, and creeks are an important natural resource, providing clean water for people and agriculture, homes for wildlife, and important open spaces for us all to connect with nature.

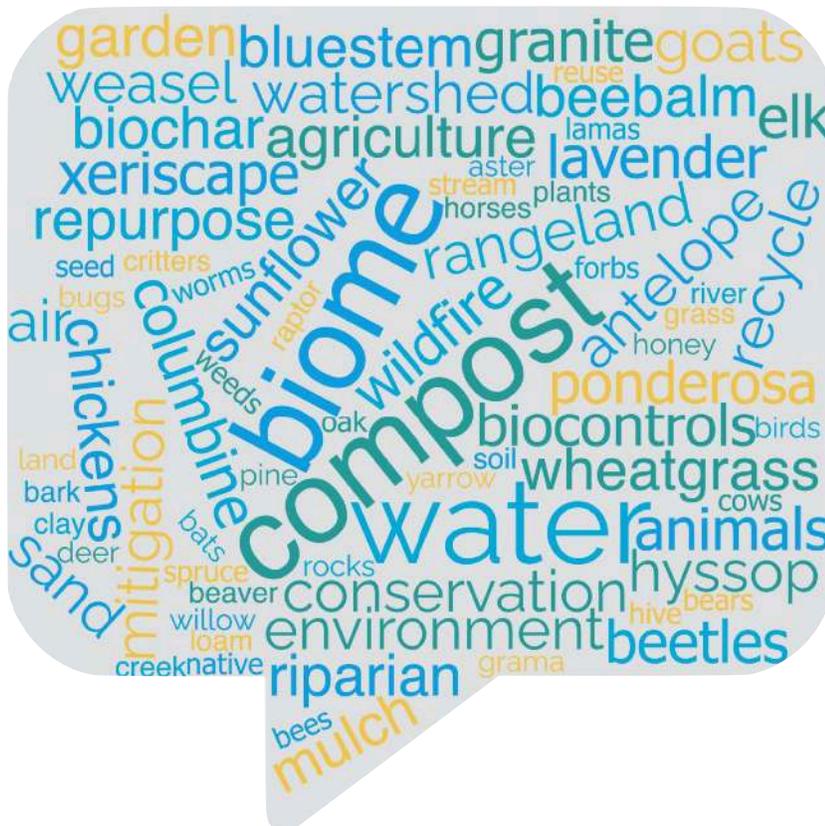
Stream management plans (SMP) are data-driven assessments of river health that help communities prioritize how to protect or enhance environmental assets in their watershed. A

well-developed SMP uses data on biology, flow, streambank vegetation and erosion, and other data to assess the physical conditions that are needed to support a sustainable ecosystem. SMPs are not regulatory, and participation is not required; therefore, community support is critical. SMPs are meant to be collaborative efforts; thus, goals in these plans are informed by community concerns and priorities.

The West Plum Creek SMP is an open, collaborative process: participation in the SMP is voluntary, and all recommendations will be made using landowner and local stakeholder input. The effort is about finding common ground by identifying strategies that provide multiple benefits for both people and the creek.

To engage local landowners, the team will be reaching out to property owners along the creek this summer to better understand what they value about the creek, how they use the creek, and whether they are interested in voluntary conservation practices to improve the creek's habitat. They will use this information to ensure that any ideas that come out of the plan are aligned with property owners' interests.

## Check out our Events Page at DouglasConserves.org!



# What's up at the East Plum Creek Restoration?

The Douglas County Conservation District partnered with the Colorado Agricultural Leadership Foundation (CALF) at Lowell Ranch to restore the section of East Plum Creek through the ranch property, an important wildlife corridor. Additional partners are the Douglas County Public Works Department, Douglas County Open Space and Natural Resources, Douglas County School District - Office of Sustainability, Colorado Fish and Wildlife, The Douglas Land Conservancy, Colorado State Forest Service Nursery, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), Colorado Youth Corps - Mile High Youth Corps, and the Board of County Commissioners. It takes a community to successfully restore this wildlife corridor.

Recent work on the creek includes bank layback strategies to improve water quality and improve habitat. Essentially this means that the steep banks are pulled away from the waters edge and a stable slope is created, seeded, and planted with native riparian plants.

Steep banks attribute to poor water quality and inhibit native plants from taking root.

Planting native plants invite wildlife back into the environment.

Volunteers are crucial to the stewardship of this important wildlife corridor. A local Embrace the Trees group planted ~ 250 Alder, Redtwig Dogwood, and willow species in the northern reach recently.



Example of a steep bank along East Plum Creek.



Embrace The Trees Group



Embrace The Trees Planters



At the East Plum Creek Restoration Partnership, we were able to layback the steep banks as shown here, thanks to County Engineers. Permits are in place for this work. This work will increase the conservation value and is in compliance with the Conservation Easement held by the Douglas Land Conservancy.



After the bank slopes are fine tuned, we use a seed drill plant native seed. Then we use coconut mats to hold the soil as shown here. Erosion control mats like this help keep the soil in place, helps to retain moisture in the soil, and lets sunlight through to allow those seeds to germinate and have the best start.

**For more info  
Check out the  
EPCRP Website**



Planting shrubs, sedges, forbs, and trees are icing on the cake! Mile High Youth Corps crews plant the riparian zone in this photo.

Note planting beyond the riparian zone requires additional hand watering which can be burdensome. We now only plant in the riparian and wetland zones for the best success rates.

Thanks for your interest in this conservation

story.