



# Grazier

► by Kindra Gordon

## Stopping the spread of cedars

*The eastern red cedar can be considered a friend or foe — depending on who you ask. For some landowners, this shrubby evergreen tree has been a popular, hardy species for windbreak plantings and wildlife habitat. It is estimated that 1.2 million eastern red cedar seedlings were planted annually from the 1980s through 1990s in Nebraska.*

### From friend to foe

But, the lack of fire — which historically controlled the encroachment of cedars into grasslands — has created an eastern red cedar invasion across much of the Great Plains today. Thus, to more and more landowners, the eastern red cedar is a foe that competes with grasses for light, water and nutrients, ultimately reducing forage production and land values.

“Fire suppression over the years has allowed eastern red cedar to invade prairies,” says Amy Ganguli, an Oklahoma State University (OSU) doctoral degree candidate researching the subject. She adds that birds have transported seed to a wide range of areas. Cedars can establish anywhere, from shallow, rocky sites to productive grasslands.

While eastern red cedars are relatively easy to control, too many landowners have done nothing, and the infestations have choked out entire land tracts.

“The key to preventing eastern red cedar invasion is early detection and prompt

action,” Ganguli says. “It’s an easy species to control because it’s not a resprouter.”

University of Nebraska (NU) weed scientist Stevan Knezevic agrees. “It is important to control cedars while they are small seedlings,” he says. Red cedars can grow an average of 1 foot (ft.) per year, which means they can quickly get out of control without management.

Knezevic frequently gets calls from landowners in Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin wondering how to get rid of cedars encroaching on their land. His advice is to use an integrated approach. “There are several control strategies: cutting, mowing, fire, goats and herbicides. Each has benefits and concerns, but using a combination of methods will get the best results,” he says.

### Control options

Knezevic says determining the control strategy to use on red cedars should be based on size of the tree.

- For effective herbicide control, trees

should be no more than a couple feet tall. Knezevic says broadcast herbicides such as Surmount<sup>®</sup>, Grazon P+D<sup>®</sup> and Tordon 22K<sup>®</sup> work well when applied according to the label. These herbicides also work for individual treatment of trees up to 6 ft. tall.

- Less severe infestations of trees up to 2 ft. can be pulled or dug up. These short trees can also be mowed with mower blades set close to the soil surface or below the lowest branches. Knezevic suggests doing this shortly after the regular haying process.
- Periodic prescribed fire is the least expensive option to help eliminate small red cedars and other noxious weed seeds. Knezevic says to burn once or twice in a three- to five-year period to control seedlings.
- Pasturing goats with cattle can also help eliminate small trees. Goats will eat cedars and noxious weeds, but won’t compete with cattle for grasses, Knezevic points out.
- For trees 6-10 ft. or taller, cutting appears most economical, he states. Treating individual trees with chemicals or using fire can also be done, but this will leave the dead tree standing for several years.
- Another option is to reduce tree populations and prevent further cedar spreading while maintaining a wildlife habitat by cutting out only female, or berry-producing, trees.

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