

High Altitude News

Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center

5538 RBC #4
Meeker, CO 81641
Phone: 970-878-5003
Fax: 970-878-5004
E-mail:
Steve.Parr@co.nacdnet.net



'Timp' Utah Sweetvetch



About Us

Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center (UCEPC) is a non-profit facility owned and operated by two conservation districts in northwest Colorado. The 269-acre center is located at an elevation of 6500 feet with 16 inches of annual precipitation and a 90-day frost free growing season. Our service area includes mountains, deserts, and plateaus of the Rocky Mountain West.

Our Goal

Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center works to ensure an improved quality of life for people and those affected by human activities. We provide quality plant materials and associated technology to those engaged in natural resource management. Each of us understands the importance of plants in our lives. From a golf course fairway to a forested mountain; a houseplant to an alpine meadow. Plants and their successful management, affect our quality of life. It is our mission to conserve or improve environmental conditions through the wise use of plants.

High Priority Areas

Presently, there are many plant species and projects at UCEPC which our Technical Advisory Committee has identified as providing substantial benefit for resource conservation. These projects fall into one of five identified High Priority Areas:

- Revegetation of high altitude and disturbed land
- Increased productivity of rangeland and pastures
- Improved water quality
- Wildlife habitat
- Use of native plants in xeriscape and horticulture



'San Luis' Slender Wheatgrass

Our Purpose

UCEPC is unique in that it is the highest elevation center within the Plant Materials system. A vital need was identified over 30 years ago within NRCS and among many NRCS customers for plant materials and associated technology for high elevation uses.



'Garnet' Mountain Brome

2009 Field Collection List

Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center, Meeker, Colorado, is requesting seed collections of four plant materials from Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. In 2009, continued collection assistance is requested of western wheatgrass *Pascopyrum smithii*, prairie Junegrass *Koeleria macrantha*, bluebunch wheatgrass *Pseudoroegneria spicata*, and galleta grass *Pleuraphis jamesii*. UCEPC is asking NRCS field offices, Soil Conservation District employees, USDA field offices and conservation partners to collect seed of these species and send them to UCEPC. For more information please contact UCEPC.

Assistance from Peru, South America

Every growing season, UCEPC hires seasonal workers to help with the field work at the center, as well as off site. In 2007, the work load for the staff increased and additional help was much needed.

In 2007 UCEPC went international to find seasonal help and hired two class H2A nonimmigrant Peruvian workers, Augusto Edgar Sosa Leon and Teodoro Santiago Damian Casas. The two men proved they had good work ethic and were dependable. In 2008, Augusto and Santiago returned and were joined by Anibal Damian Aquino and Marcelino Clemente Quispe. The four men worked from May to November 2008. While working at UCEPC, Augusto, Santiago, Anibal and Marcelino began to improve their knowledge of the English language from the UCEPC staff and in return they began teaching Spanish to the staff. Anibal was the only one of the four workers who knew some English prior to coming to UCEPC. Regardless of the language barrier between the staff and the men, Augusto, Santiago, Anibal and Marcelino completed all of their work assignments. Work assignments consisted of weeding fields, irrigating, pruning, farming, and fencing. Efforts are being made to bring back all four men for the 2009 growing season.



UCEPC staff with the Peruvians at lunch as they say "Adios"



Left to Right: Anibal, Marti (assistant manager), Augusto, Marcelino, Steve (manager) and Santiago.

Farm Foreman's Dream



The new Kincaid 2045 combine.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and two energy companies operating in Rio Blanco County; EnCana Oil and Gas (USA) Inc. and Williams have helped Rodney Dunham, the UCEPC farm foreman, lighten his load for the 2009 growing season. Generous contributions to help with the purchase of a new combine for UCEPC were made from each of the three entities; NRCS \$125,000, EnCana \$20,000 and Williams Energy \$10,000. These helpful contributions went towards the \$176,340 cost of the new Kincaid model 2045 combine. The new combine has numerous threshing features that will provide much greater efficiency in the harvest, threshing, yield and cleaning of native plant seed. Our present combine (of 31-years) takes approximately 16 hours of cleaning time before it can be reassembled and returned to the field for the next crop harvest. The Kincaid will reduce that time greatly. The past year, UCEPC harvested 37 crops. Of these, 13 were harvested with our old combine,

National Park Service Recognizes UCEPC

On October 30, 2008, Russ Haas, NRCS revegetation technical advisor to the National Park Service, presented UCEPC, with a Special Recognition Award. The award was in recognition for the dedication and contribution to the National Park Service/NRCS Interagency Plant Materials Program and assistance to Bryce Canyon, Great Sands Dunes, Grand Teton, Lassen Volcanic, Mesa Verde, Rocky Mountain, Sequoia/Kings Canyon, Yosemite National Park, and Dinosaur and Canyon de Chelly National Monuments. The NPS/NRCS thanked UCEPC for providing plant revegetation technical assistance, technology development, and seed and plant propagation over the years. The assistance from UCEPC helped allow the National Park Service to meet many native revegetation challenges.



UCEPC staff and board members with Park Service Award presented by Russ Haas.



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Working Together to Refurbish Our Waterways

Riparian ecosystems are extremely sensitive areas that are used by both humans and wildlife. Riparian areas are well known for major problems concerning soil erosion and infestations of invasive plant species. These problems are because of natural and man induced practices. As a result, habitat can be severely degraded.

On March 25 and 26 of 2009, the Los Lunas and Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Material Centers, along with the Grand Junction USDA/NRCS Service Center, hosted two one-day Riparian Restoration Workshops. The event was held at the Western Colorado Botanical Gardens in Grand Junction, Colorado. This workshop was offered to land management entities, private land owners, and land consulting groups.

Each training provided attendees with knowledge on rangeland seedings and long-stem pole transplants of trees, shrubs, and willows. During the mornings the attendees listened to presentations and in the afternoon they were allowed hands-on planting technique experience with longstem pole transplants and dormant willow whip cuttings. Presentations on these topics were presented by Steve Parr, manager, Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center, Meeker, Colorado, and Greg Fenchel, manager, Los Lunas Plant Materials Center, New Mexico.

The hands-on field work was conducted at Watson Island located behind the Western Colorado Botanical Gardens. Los Lunas provided the willow cuttings, shrubs, and tree poles as well as a specialized auger to deep plant the riparian materials. Dan Thompson, wildlife biologist for the USDA/NRCS Grand Junction Service Center, worked with the Division of Wildlife to donate their 7230 John Deere tractor to be used for the field work. In addition to the planting, the attendees were instructed on how to keep the newly planted materials safe from wildlife predation and harm.

The workshop was a huge success and attendees agreed it helped further their knowledge of riparian restoration and planting techniques.



Attendee's on Watson Island experiencing hands-on riparian planting techniques.

BLM & UCEPC Combine Efforts

The increasing concern to control invasive species and revegetate riparian areas along Colorado Rivers and streams has lead to substantial riparian restoration activities during the recent year. The White River Bureau of Land Management along with Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center have combined efforts. The BLM chose a prime riparian area with public access along the White River, in Meeker, Colorado, for an experimental planting. At the location several silver buffaloberries *Shepherdia argentea* were planted. Staff from BLM and UCEPC assisted in planting the native woody shrub. Silver buffaloberry has many conservation attributes. The shrub is capable of fixing nitrogen in root nodules that contain bacteria, thus helping in establishment and maintenance of shrub communities. It provides food, cover and nesting for many birds. Silver buffaloberry is a browse source for many big game animals as well as rodents. This specie is suitable for windbreaks and is colorful enough to be desirable in urban plantings.

The common goal for both entities is to test this promising native plant and its performance under a variety of soil and climatic conditions as well as its tolerance to wildlife use. The shrub has proven to be fairly tolerant and hardy in other field plantings around the service area. UCEPC hopes to acquire enough information so silver buffaloberry could potentially be released to the public for their use.



Left to right: Terri Blanke-UCEPC, Melissa Kendall-BLM, Heather Plumb-UCEPC
Standing: Mary Taylor-BLM

Beauty and Brains

Heather Plumb is not just another pretty face at Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center. She has been hired as the new Plant Scientist-Range Plant specialist. Heather began her career at UCEPC as part-time summer help in 2006, 2007 and 2008. Miss Plumb grew up in Oakhurst, California, near Yosemite National Park. Her family moved to Colorado in 1990 and purchased a ranch in Maybell, Colorado, where they reside today. Heather attended Colorado State University where she studied in the Warner College of Natural Resources, Rangeland Ecology with concentration in Range and Forestry Management. After graduation in December with a Bachelor of Science Degree, Heather moved to Meeker, Colorado, with her loyal companion, a Border Collie named "Molly". Heather joined the work force with UCEPC in February. Congratulations Heather and a high altitude welcome!

