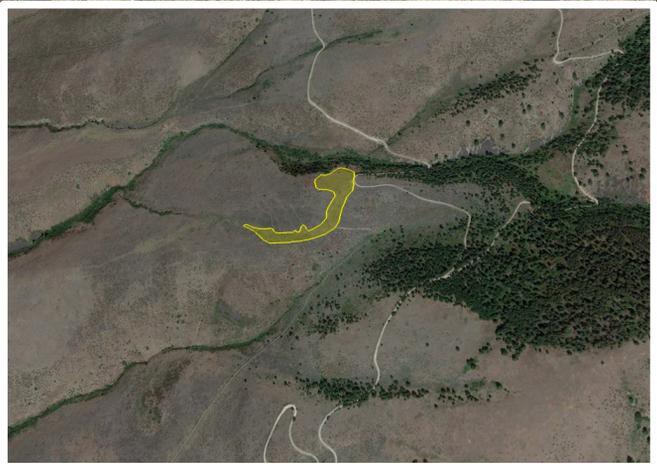


Thin sage, prune orchards, basin wild rye, short-eared owls

March 31st 2022



Jeff Clarke



In 2018, we removed most sage from a large hillside near the north fork of Sheep Camp draw. The native flora erupted in the opened niches. Last week we returned to the site to clean up all the new sage bushes that recolonized the open prairie.

While the ground was frozen, John masticated several acres of sage near the Trifecta. We returned to the site this spring to remove the plants that the masticator missed.

Unlike our previous treatment, mastication leaves all the cut sage in place. The finely chopped sage should provide additional nutrients to the opened understory.





I observed short-eared owls several times this winter. Each one perched on a fence post and showed no sign of fear.

Over the last decade, we planted 1,500 trees and shrubs into the draws on the north side of the South Center Pivot. Each plant was protected with a plastic enclosure that needed yearly maintenance.





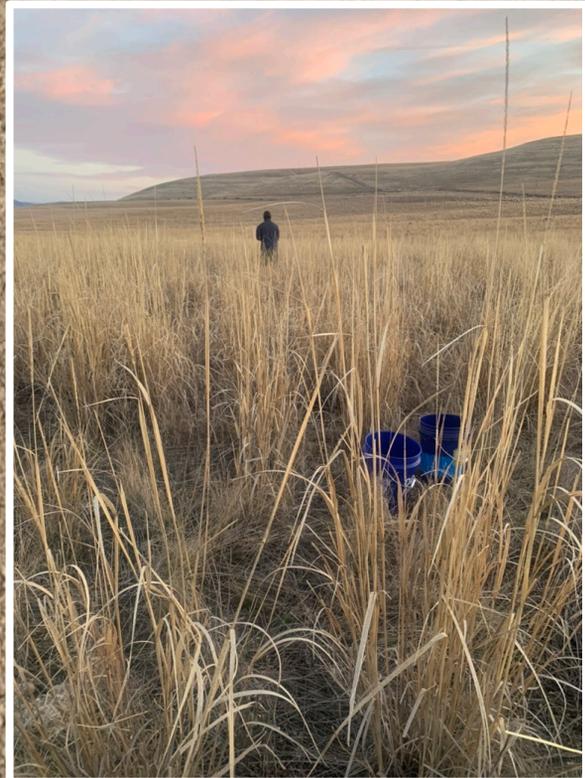
This spring we returned to those draws, removed every plastic enclosure, and built a large buck and rail fence around all the trees. The larger fence will allow the plants to expand without restriction from plastic or browse.



We also started our yearly ranch-wide exclosure maintenance and removal project. Many of the planted trees have outgrown their tree protectors and will now fend for themselves.

We removed some of the last metal exclosures from the North Floodplain. The exclosure in this photo protected an area in the middle on the floodplain for a decade. As expected, native cottonwood and ponderosa pines seedlings thrived inside the ungulate-proof exclosure.





Every year we identify an area that struggles to support vegetation and we plant it with basin wild rye. Basin almost always finds a way to flourish. This year, we decided to focus our transplanting efforts along the road that leads to the Education Garden.

Once the basin wild rye establishes, we will fill the interspaces with forbs that we propagate in the greenhouses.



There is a seep that flows year-round in the middle of Partridge Bowl. Last year we protected it with a buck and rail fence. This week we planted 125 willow cuttings along its wet edge.





We pruned and reshaped all the orchards before bud-burst.



Our resident porcupines dine on a few planted trees every winter. Unfortunately, this winter they took a liking to our bur oak trees that just started to produce acorns.



Early buttercups always provide a welcome splash of color on the drab landscape.