

## **Pine Creek/Sulphurbeds Allotment: Wildcat Creek**

Wildcat Creek was visited near the crossing of the ORV trail by a number of the Collaboration members on August 27, 2007. Two transects were run by Mary O'Brien and Wayne Hoskisson in this same general area on May 9, 2008. Much of Wildcat Creek is in a narrow canyon bordered by steep slopes.

In the area visited (Reaches A24-2 to A24-4), cattle were overgrazing the small riparian openings accessible to them (Fig. 1); cheatgrass is present in some of the openings (Fig. 2); and accessible banks are trampled (Fig. 3).

As noted in the two transect reports, large old cottonwood are providing large woody debris to the creek in this area, stabilizing banks and providing complexity and sediment capture. However, little narrowleaf cottonwood recruitment is taking place, with the result that the old cottonwood will not be replaced by younger overstory trees. However, where cottonwood and willow are inaccessible to cattle reach, they are abundant (Fig. 4). Doug Sorensen indicates that a fire in Wildcat Creek (what year?) was associated with some period of rest, and some young cottonwood >6' (Fig. 5) may be attributed to that rest.

Five years ago, over-use of Wildcat Creek was noted throughout nearly all its reaches in the Forest's Level II Riparian Inventory Report for Wildcat Creek (Petty 2003) : "Forage trends on Wildcat Creek were designated as "down" on all reaches, except A24-1- and A24-11, which received a "stable" rating. A fire which occurred several years ago was noted on reaches A24-4, A24-5 and A24-12; the [*Populus* [cottonwood] species are responding well, as young suckers are growing everywhere. Grasses have been grazed to an average measured stubble height of 2 inches on several reaches. Stubble heights of 1-2 inches were measured on reaches A24-16 and A24-17."

Major concerns:

- Where cattle directly access the riparian area it is overgrazed; banks are trampled; and young cottonwood are over-browsed
- Cottonwood recruitment is insufficient to replace old cottonwood (see Wildcat #1 and #2 transect reports)

Questions

- How much productivity is present on the slopes?
- How realistic is it to expect that cattle will not trample slopes and overgraze creek openings? What options exist to



Fig. 1 Wildcat Creek; overgrazed opening along Wildcat Creek. Bank erosion and cheatgrass.



Fig. 2. Wildcat Creek: Cheatgrass on bank opening.



Fig. 3. Wildcat Creek trampled banks



Fig. 4: Dense narrowleaf cottonwood where banks too steep for cattle.



Fig. 5: Cottonwood recruitment during post-fire rest?

### Reference

Petty, Jeff. 2003. Little North Creek Area Level II Riparian Inventory. Shell, WY: Shell Valley Consulting: Shell.