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Improving stewardship one landowner at a time

The Colorado Master Steward Program is specifically designed to help small acreage landowners and managers understand and implement stewardship on the land.

Situation

Colorado's nearly 40 million acres of privately owned land is often split into small parcels of less than 100 acres. These ecologically sensitive lands increasingly face pressure from development, insects, diseases, invasive plants, soil erosion, and a variety of other issues. Yet, there are limited resources available to landowners who want to mitigate these pressures. There is a significant need to develop and advance public education and technical assistance opportunities for small acreage landowners to improve conservation efforts and promote healthy and sustainable private lands.

The environmental, social, and economic costs associated with a lack of proper implementation of land stewardship practices are high and readily observed across Colorado. Proper stewardship promotes conservation, improves yields, amplifies savings in input costs, increases biodiversity, and develops tourism and recreational opportunities.

Extension's Response

The *Colorado Master Steward Program* curriculum was developed in 2013 for small acreage landowners, and launched in one western slope community. The purpose of the program is to increase the knowledge of the importance of proper stewardship and support the implementation of stewardship practices on the land. Landowners learn about the benefits of land stewardship, receive practical, hands-on instruction, and are given knowledge to actively and effectively implement stewardship practices.

The program is locally customized to meet the diverse needs of the participants. Local guest speakers present on a variety of topics including, soil, water, plants, and animals. Colorado State University Extension is utilizing its diverse partnerships in rural Colorado communities to provide landowners with the technical information they need to make informed decisions that will protect the resources on private lands. Developing partnerships with local agencies and organizations is a key to promote the program and ensure the availability of stewardship opportunities in the future.



The Bottom Line

Teaching small acreage landowners to become more responsible land stewards can:

- help save money by reducing input costs;
- increase pasture health; and,
- prevent noxious weed infestations.

By the Numbers

Garfield County, 2013

- Total participants: 12
- Total acreage owned by participants: 51.5 acres (additionally participants manage over 1800 acres of land)
- 100% learned a good deal of information to help them be better land managers

Results

Twelve participants completed the eight-week long Colorado Master Steward Program in Garfield County in 2013. At the completion of the course, attendees completed surveys to gauge what they have learned and what classes were most beneficial to them. 100% of participants “enjoyed the *Colorado Master Steward Program* and learned a good deal of information to help them on their land.” Participants agreed that the course helped them learn new things and provided ideas to increase their efficiency.

As a direct result of the class, participants have already begun implementing better noxious weed management, improved grazing rotation schemes, properly composting wastes, and become more efficient at managing their irrigated pastures. Each landowner is receiving a site visit from the Small Acreage Specialist and working on putting together a property management plan. Many more results will be documented as participants continue to implement the ideas and skills learned in the classes.

Due to the success of the first small acreage Colorado Master Steward Program, we are pleased to offer the program in other areas across Colorado in the future. Planning has already begun for a 2014 program in Montezuma County, Colorado.

Participant Feedback

“It was a great couple of months, we received a lot of information.”

“I enjoyed the variety of local guest speakers from the industry.”

“Love it, learning a lot.”

“Learning about all of the resources available is the best part of the class.”

Learn More

This program is offered in cooperation with local NRCS field offices located throughout Colorado.

Download a resources, check out webinars, and learn effective tips on managing your small acreage at:

www.ext.colostate.edu/sam



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