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Section 1

Introduction

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Alterations of native plant communities within the Colorado Plateau, particularly shrub dominated associations, have become a major concern due to the loss of wildlife habitats, the subsequent conversion of communities to annual and perennial weeds, significant decline in watershed stability, and the increased concerns of wildfires. Concerns related to the stability and disruption of plant associations within the sagebrush (*Artemisia*) and pinyon-juniper woodlands of the Uncompahgre Plateau prompted the creation of the Uncompahgre Plateau (UP) Project and a program to foster the development of native plants that are site specific to this region. Considerable areas within the two communities currently require remedial treatments to restore the complexity of native species that once existed. Impacts from previous management practices have resulted in the elimination of certain species. Alteration of the communities have allowed for a significant increase in pinyon-juniper, which in turn, has changed the ecological balance of understory species. Attempts to restore many plant associations now requires reduction of existing competition, creation of suitable seedbeds, and the insertion of seed by seeding or planting. Seed from site adapted native plants is currently not available from nearly all required species. Restoration of diverse communities is obviously dependent upon the creation of a stable seed industry to furnish the required amount of seed. Various species that will be required to support restoration have not been propagated or grown under cultivation. Rearing practices required to produce sufficient amounts of high quality seed need to be developed for these species. Various studies related to species ecology, plant biology, plant culture, seed production and processing will also be required to accomplish this task.

The Uncompahgre Plateau (UP) Native Plant Program was initiated in 2002 to address these issues. A comprehensive assessment of the studies and related work that are required to develop seed of the desired native species for this region was completed at the inception of the program (Monsen 2002 - Recommendations and Directions for a Research Program to Develop and Advance Native Plant Materials for the Uncompahgre Plateau, Colorado. Appendix 1). The document outlined the various areas of investigative studies that would be necessary to develop and produce seed for restoration.

The UP Native Plant Program was initially developed to address the following objectives:

- Identify and develop site adapted species to restore plant communities of the Colorado Plateau and comparable regions.
- Develop procedures and rearing practices to produce seed from select species from cultivated fields and wildland managed stands.
- Develop measures to advance the commercial production and availability of species under study.

- Develop procedures and technology to restore native plant communities and important watershed and wildlife habitats.
- Provide information and direction to assist the propagation of desired native species and means to restore disturbances.

The conception of the UP Native Plant Program evolved nearly simultaneously with a December 31, 2001 Report to Congress of an Interagency Native Plant Development Program for the Departments of Interior and Agriculture (Appendix 6). This report identified and listed the following actions that land management agencies need to initiate:

- Undertake a comprehensive assessment of native plant needs.
- Make a long-term commitment to native plant production, research, development, and technology transfer.
- Expand efforts to increase availability of numerous species of native plant materials.
- Invest in partnerships with state and local agencies and the private sector.
- Ensure that adequate science-based protocols for monitoring restoration are established.

The congressional report clearly identified areas necessary to support regional native plant materials programs such as the UP Native Plant Program (Appendix 6). In addition, it coincides with directions from federal agencies to properly restore native communities (Examples 2001 Interior Appropriations Bill, Executive Order 13112 Invasive Species – 1/99, and Standards for Rangeland Health).