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**SOUTHEAST AREA SAYS. . .** *by Deborah Lester, Southeast Area Range/Livestock Agent*

Last week the Colorado State University Beef Team got a first- hand look at some dramatic improvements on western rangelands at a cow-calf and sheep operation.

Now before you think that ranges on the Western Slope have nothing in common with the Southeastern Plains, allow me to explain.

Soil erosion on washes, ditches, and even in some of our canyon country can slowly widen those washes and “dry” creeks. What we see are sharp jagged edges with sandy sides and trees or shrubs that eventually fall into the wash. The bed keeps eroding, getting wider and deeper with sides that begin to look like sandy rock walls. **What if there was a way to stop that. . . naturally?** Interested?

Many of our creeks and ditches of all kinds have trees or shrubs, like sagebrush on the top of their banks. Sagebrush and similar shrubs are even more detrimental than most trees because their roots not only take advantage of surface water, but they also have a deep tap root; that is why they live so well in our “desert” conditions.

These deep roots (of the tree or shrub) at the side of the wash simply act as a wedge in the soil which allows moisture to enter and continually crack the soil surface. Eventually the vertical crack in the soil is deep enough and the soil has dried out enough that the entire section of soil (and the tree or shrub) falls into the creek, wash or ditch.

**Now comes the fun part!** To create sides that are “sluffed” or rounded and not sharp and cracking, the vegetation on top must contain grasses. These grasses hold the shape of the wash

and help hold the soil in place, stop the wash from eroding. So the trees or shrubs must be removed and then grasses allowed to take hold. If they are allowed a period of rest (meaning no grazing) the banks and sides can actually rejuvenate themselves (heal) in a couple of years.

Remember, results on our ranges take time and all soils act differently. It took years for this wash to get in this eroding state, but these few key steps can put your rangeland back into a healthier condition.

If you would like help accessing your rangeland and seeing how your operation could benefit from simple techniques like these, call your local CSU Extension Office, we have experts and resources to help you solve your problems.

Thanks for David Stuges, 1977. "Soil Moisture Response to Spraying Big Sagebrush", USDA Forest Service and John Murray, "Ecological Restoration of Gullies and Stream Channels", NRCS, Montrose, CO

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