

Hello families,

Here is an activity to help 4th – 6th grade students explore the unintended consequences of plant travel.

Even though seeds and plants naturally travel around landscapes, there are times when all that travel isn't a good thing. **Invasive plants** come from somewhere else and are really good at taking over the landscape they arrive in. These plants can push other plants and animals out of their homes, destroy buildings, or even put human lives at risk.

Cheatgrass is a plant that hitched a ride a long time ago with people and cattle traveling from Europe. You can find it all over the western United States today, and if you go on a hike, you might find it trying to catch a ride on your socks.

Cheatgrass causes a huge problem in Idaho. It sprouts very early in the spring and grows in large carpets all across the landscape. It makes its seeds earlier than the other plants, then turns dry by early summer. The dead carpets of cheatgrass catch fire easily, and since it has arrived, fires here have become larger and more frequent. Sagebrush and other shrubs that live in our landscape don't survive fire well, and they take a long time to regrow. After a fire, cheatgrass comes back faster than other kinds of grasses, and it may replace things that used to grow in an area.

Aside from the danger cheatgrass fires pose to people, can you think of another way this plant could be a problem to other living things in the landscape? It might replace other plants grasses that animals depend on for food.

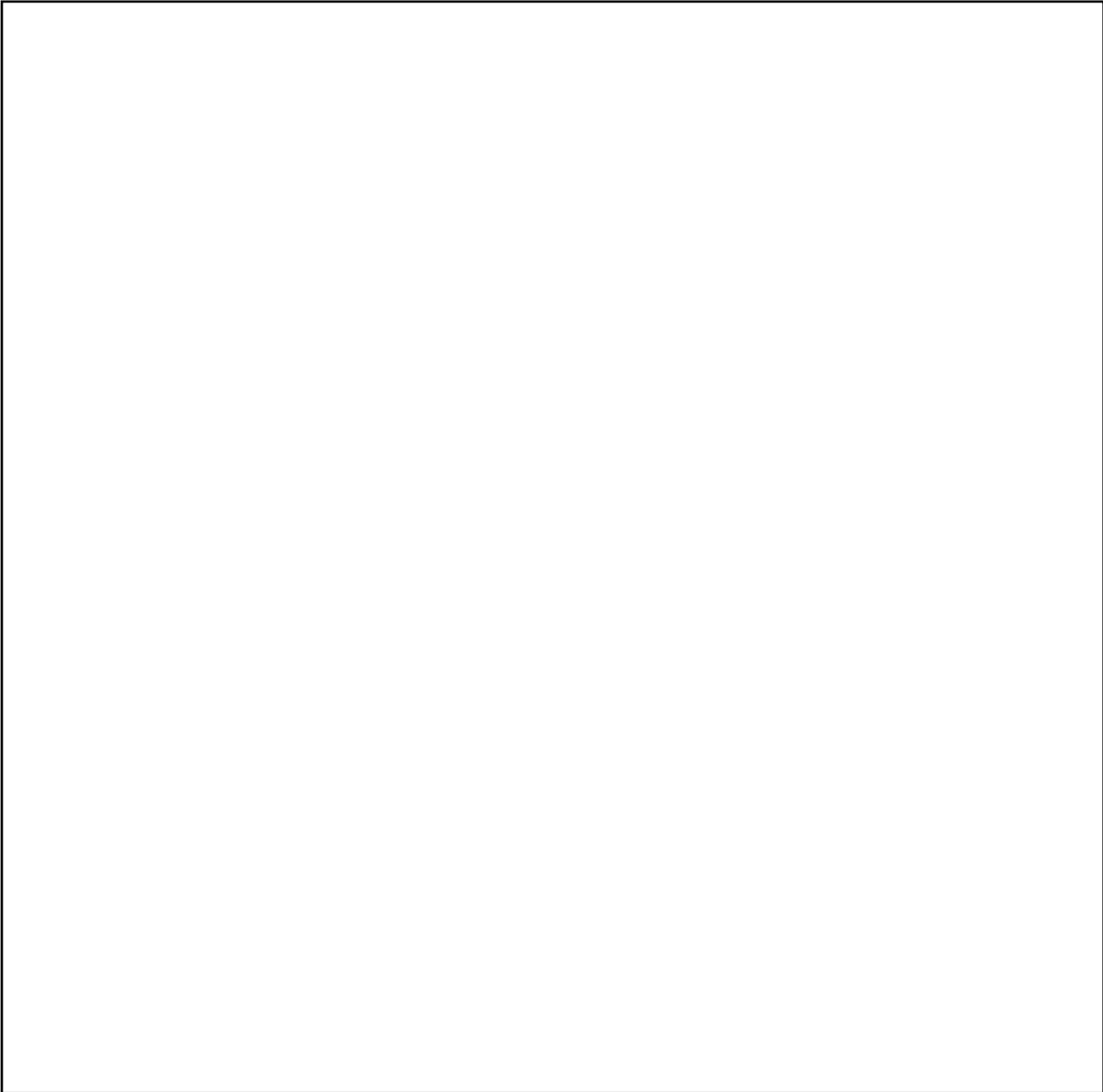
FOOD WEB

This activity shows connecting food chains in the Boise foothills. Look at the living things listed below and draw lines between all of the things that interact with each other. When you finish you will have drawn a food web. You could use these plants and animals in a story you write.

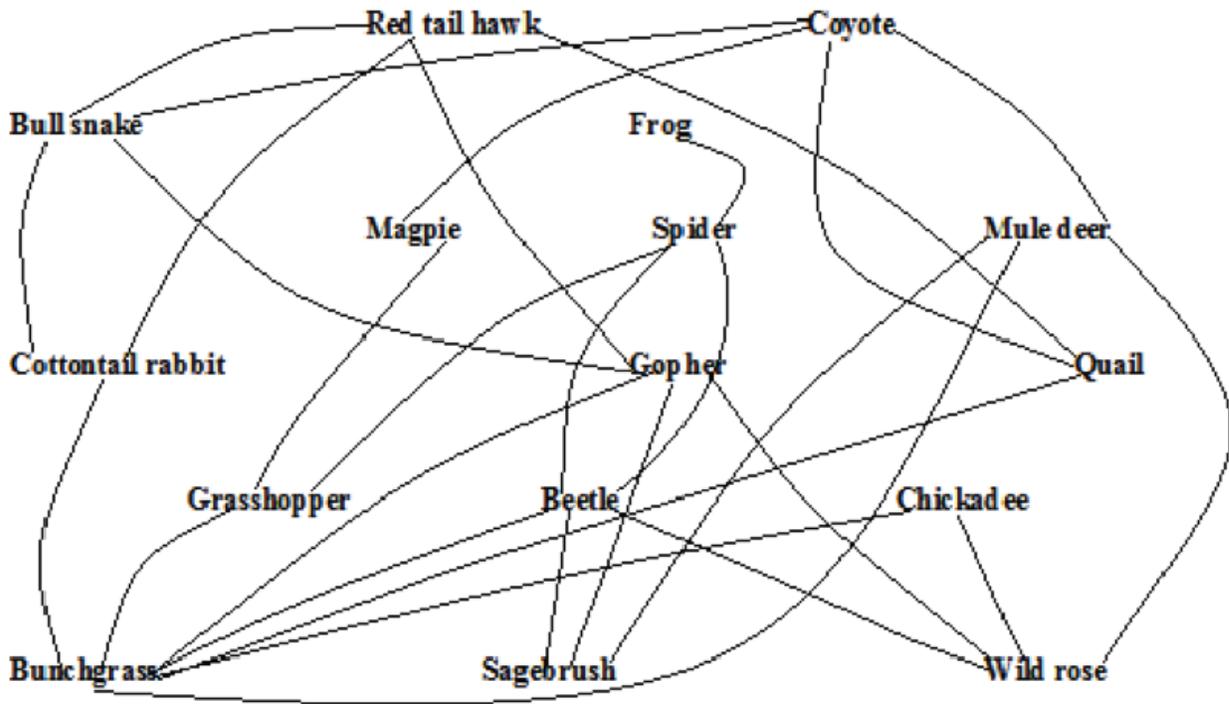
	Red tail hawk		Coyote
Bull snake		Frog	
	Magpie	Spider	Mule deer
Cottontail rabbit		Gopher	Quail
	Grasshopper	Beetle	Chickadee
Bunchgrass	Sagebrush		Wild rose

Now that you have drawn your food web, think:

1. Which living things in this food web make their own food?
2. Imagine that sagebrush is taken out of the food web. Count how many other organisms would be affected. Do this by counting the lines you have drawn from the sagebrush. (It is to be expected that answers will vary.)
3. Now imagine one animal is removed from the food web. Count how many other organisms would be affected. What are some reasons the answers to questions 2 and 3 are different?
4. Draw a food web or a food chain in which you are a part:



Possible answers:



1. Bunchgrass, sagebrush, and wild rose
2. Answers will vary
3. Answers will vary
4. Possible food chain could be: Grass-----Cow-----Me.

Looking for some more activities? Check out our Youth Tour Teacher Packets, available on the Idaho Botanical Garden's website, here:

<https://idahobotanicalgarden.org/learn/youth-education/>

Click on the arrow next to each youth group tour to view and download the associated packet.