

An amble down Lower Sheep Camp

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Lush aspen and cottonwood soak up the groundwater that flows beneath my feet. I head down Lower Sheep Camp Draw to monitor our plantings and evaluate restoration progress.



Red berries amidst a nearly fruitless draw catch my eye. This remnant hawthorn survived a generation of cattle grazing. I pop a berry in my mouth, spit out the mealy fruit, and vow to stop sampling hawthorn berries.



I climb out of the draw to check the orchards we planted in 2012 and 2013. An apple tree leans under the weight of its fruit. I pick two handfuls of these small but tasty apples. The tree regains its vertical stature.



Mount royal plums hide in the tree's shade. I tear away a hard fruit and anticipate bitterness but find a sweet and juicy bite. We discourage foraging from our wildlife orchards, but for me, stolen fruit tastes the sweetest.



I walk to the next orchard and find a battlefield. Ants burrow into apples while a wasp scouts for prey and sugar. After insects break the apple skin, oxygen initiates chemical reactions that turns the fruit brown. I flee to friendlier orchards.



A game trail descends from the orchards to the draw. Bitterbrush drops seeds on the trail (inset). I press my heel against the path to sow the seeds.





I fight my way through senesced tumbleweed and kochia (above) that rolled in from elsewhere. Rocky Mountain Bee Plant (below) greets me on the other side with robust blossoms. The field crew distributed seeds from this forb last year.



As the draw spills into floodplain, plants struggle to establish in the coarse debris that fanned out from last year's overland flow. This built-up alluvial fan attests to the prevalence of erosional events over the millennia.



Lower Sheep Camp boasts abundant remnant and regenerating shrubs compared to other degraded draws. I walk the draw edge toward the road and admire an old Ponderosa Pine and wonder when our plantings will reach a similar height. When can we call our efforts a success?



Two Spotted Towhees hop from a Mock Orange to a Chokecherry (above). They hide in a tangle of branches. Restoration success should not only be measured by tree height, but also how wildlife use the space over time. These Spotted Towhees found their habitat, and I suspect more wildlife will do the same as this draw burgeons with plants.