

The New Mexico Independent

Today's Top Stories: Sagebrush invades landscape near Farmington

By [Joel Gay](#) 09/02/2008

Sagebrush rebellion near Farmington — with herbicide

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management will poison up to 31,000 acres of sagebrush with herbicide near Farmington later this month in what officials are calling an attempt to restore the landscape to ecological health, [The Farmington Daily News](#) reports.

Beginning Sept. 15 and continuing into October, the agency will use an airplane to drop pellets of [tebuthiuron](#) in an area south of Bloomfield on BLM and traditional Navajo land. An agency official told the Daily News that thinning the sagebrush density should result in an increase of native grasses and other vegetation. "Our goal is to improve species diversity which will benefit wildlife. Rangeland and the watershed also will benefit," said Jeff Tafoya, a rangeland management specialist for the Farmington Field Office.

Tebuthiuron is needed, Tafoya said, because wildfires no longer provide the natural control for sagebrush. The herbicide has been used to control sagebrush since the 1980s to thin, not eradicate the plant, he told the Daily News. The effort is part of a larger, statewide program to restore ecological health under its "Restore New Mexico" initiative. To date, 750,000 acres have been restored since 2005. The agency's goal is to reclaim 1 million acres of land by 2010.

Elsewhere in the San Juan Basin, the BLM is closing and rehabilitating roads to improve wildlife habitat and decrease erosion. Near Taos, the BLM is shaving patches of dense sagebrush on public lands each winter, creating rich grass-sage mosaics for wildlife.

The BLM has consulted with Navajo Nation chapters in the treatment areas and with Navajo ranchers who graze livestock and reside in the areas.