

## The WSWR Rita Beard Endowment Foundation Announces Four Scholarship Recipients.

The Rita Beard Endowment Foundation Board of Trustees has selected four recipients of travel scholarships for 2019. They are Christie Hubbard, an M.S. student at the University of Idaho; **Rory O'Connor**, a Ph.D. candidate at Kansas State University; Rachel Seedorf, an M.S. student at Colorado State University; and **Travis Sowards**, a Ph.D. student at Brigham Young University.

The Rita Beard Endowment Foundation is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit that was created from a generous donation by Rita Beard's family and friends. Funds are awarded to support educational opportunities of students and early career invasive species managers by providing registration and travel to professional meetings including Society for Range Management, Western Society of Weed Science, Western Aquatic Plant Management Society and the North American Invasive Species Management Association.

Christie Hubbard and Rachel Seedorf will be attending the Western Society of Weed Science annual meeting in March, and Rory O'Connor and Travis Sowards will attend the Society for Range Management annual meeting in February. To read more about the Foundation, learn how to apply for the 2020 scholarships, or make a donation go to: <http://www.wsweedscience.org/rita-beard-endowment-foundation/>.



**Christie Hubbard:** I started my journey to becoming a weed scientist by investigating the ability of a native parasitic plant, dodder, to suppress the vigor of Johnsongrass. This broadened my knowledge of invasive plants, parasitic plants, and experimental design. The experiment led to a plant survey opportunity in Costa Rica where I learned the art of plant identification. The research demonstrated the importance of human intervention after catastrophe (natural or manmade). I am currently using aerial imagery and GIS tools to build plant community susceptibility models for a portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to focus ground survey efforts on susceptible areas. My professional ambition is to minimize invasive species impacts and restore habitats to functioning, native communities.

**Rory O'Connor:** I became interested in invasive species management during my range management class of my undergraduate program. The following summer I worked for the USDA-ARS in Burns, OR, as a rangeland aid on juniper expansion. In graduate school, I have worked on becoming an invasion rangeland ecologist. During my M.S. degree, I studied how annual grass invasions in the Great Basin and Mojave Desert occur after fire. I decided to return to investigating woody plant encroachment for my Ph.D., but to elucidate drivers and mechanisms of encroachment in the tallgrass prairie. I see myself working in the federal government and with land owners/managers to answer questions and solve problems by creating collaborative, science informed, land management prescriptions.





**Rachel Seedorf:** Having grown up on a farm and ranch, I have been surrounded by agriculture my whole life and understand the challenges that invasive plants can present to land managers in many different settings. I have grown more interested in the dynamics of natural area landscapes, as well as the biology of the weeds and the effects herbicides have on them. My own research involves working closely with Denver International Airport to help develop an invasive management plan. As a municipality that owns 50 square miles, there is a challenge to maintain the landscape in a timely and effective manner. The environment is continually changing, and I hope that through any career path I have taken, I will be able to continue learning and informing others about the importance of managing invasive plants in all kinds of natural areas.

**Travis Sowards:** John Muir observed that earth's organisms are so entangled that we cannot understand a single entity without studying the entirety of the system in which it is found. The seed of land stewardship had been planted, cultivated through my life experiences, and has blossomed into a deep desire to understand and care for degraded ecosystems. The experiences I gained in Hawaii with the US Forest Service opened my eyes to the detrimental impacts that invasive exotic species can have on native ecosystems. My Ph.D. research has focused on seed enhancement technologies to provide greater restoration success. I am developing both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in restoration ecology that I believe will enable me to provide novel perspectives of the interrelated complexities of ecological restoration, conservation of natural resources, and the impacts from future uncertainties of a changing climate.

