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Inmates earn certificates for efforts

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Zachary Chastaine | The Argus Observer

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Inmates earn certificates for efforts

By: Zachary Chastaine, The Argus Observer



Five inmates from SRCI receive horticultural certificates for their work with a sage grouse habitat restoration project. From left to right: Stacy Moore, Jason Kennedy, Donnie Owens, Jesse Foreman, John Hart.

ONTARIO—Five inmates at Snake River Correctional Institute were awarded certificates of achievement for their efforts with a program to grow sagebrush that will be used to rehabilitate greater sage grouse habitat.

The certificates recognize the inmates' horticultural, data entry and teamwork skills and can be used as a resume piece when they are released from prison. Some of them will have completed their sentences soon and can now use the skills from the project to look for jobs.

Jason Kennedy, Jesse Foreman, Donnie Owens, John Hart and Daniel Roseberry all received the certificates at the SRCI minimum-security facility Tuesday morning with a presentation from Stacy Moore and some words from Lt. Mike Clements with SRCI. Moore is from the Institute of Applied Ecology, a Corvallis-based nonprofit, and has been working to help the men learn to grow

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sagebrush and teaching them about horticulture. The program is being run by the inmates who have been growing the sagebrush.

Roseberry was not present at the ceremony, as he has been transferred to a different facility since working on the sagebrush project earlier this summer.

The inmates who were there spoke about their experience when they received the certificates. Foreman described the challenge in growing sagebrush as opposed to vegetables, which the inmates also grow at the facility.

“A lot of the garden vegetables you can toss the seeds in the dirt and it may grow,” Foreman said. “I can understand now why the sagebrush has a hard time propagating on its own.”

The plant was harder to grow than the inmates had thought it would be. They said they had learned a lot about taking care of the plants.

The men worked daily to tend to them, watering, fertilizing and re-planting failed sagebrush seeds to maximize the yield. They also took extensive notes and documented protocols that Moore said will be used at other facilities in the future.

Hart said the men had been putting a lot of sustained work into the project.

“We watered some of that stuff twice a day for a while,” Hart said.

The men described learning a great deal about techniques for growing the plants as well as how the surrounding ecosystem was dependent on the plants.

SRCI’s minimum-security facility has a greenhouse and garden that host several projects, including the sagebrush operation. Earlier this summer, the men had to move all 20,000 sagebrush seedling containers from the greenhouse outside to prevent them from overheating.

The men have successfully grown thousands of little sagebrush plants and continue to nurture them. In March, they will take the young plants to areas that were once sage grouse habitat that has been destroyed by fires and plant the sagebrush.

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Sage grouse use sagebrush in every part of its life cycle. Without sagebrush's reintroduction, the birds' habitat will greatly reduced.

Moore said the Bureau of Land Management office in Washington, D.C., has decided to continue funding and expand on the project in coming years.

The program at SRCI would be expanded depending on how much space the prison has for the program and funding. It also will be started at other prison facilities in the United States, using the data and experience from the work of the five men at SRCI as a model for the new programs.

"They would like to see this program expanded. So we will work with Snake River Correctional Institute next year," Moore said. "We would like to grow even more next year."