

BLM restoring land with aid from inmates

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(Photo: Christian Venhuizen / For The Spectrum & Daily News)

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A few dozen inmates from Salt Lake County are giving a unique meaning to the term “Sagebrush Rebellion” in Utah.

Bureau of Land Management crews spent the weekend north of Cedar City planting sagebrush starts that were grown by Utah inmates.

The prisoners grew more than 20,000 sagebrush plants at the Oxbow Jail run by the Salt Lake County Sheriff’s Office, according to Sgt. Cammie Skogg.

“Prisoners at the Salt Lake County Jail are part of a hands-on program that provides much-needed native sagebrush for greater sage-grouse habitat that has been burned by wildfires,” she said.

Skogg added the inmates have been caring for the plants since May in collaboration with the “Sagebrush in Prisons Project” and the non-profit group Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE).

“Through this partnership, prisoners at the Salt Lake County Jail have made an important contribution to habitat restoration efforts while also gaining horticulture, teamwork and problem-solving skills that can be applied even after the conclusion of the project,” according to Jessie Brothers, education coordinator at IAE. “The inmates are learning about soil and pH-balance concepts that can be used in any garden or nursery setting.”

Dan Fletcher, assistant field manager at the Cedar City BLM office, said the sagebrush are “crucial” to restoring the number of sage-grouse in Iron and Beaver counties.

“These plants will provide crucial habitat components, such as food and cover, for greater sage-grouse and other wildlife species,” he said.



Inmates at the Salt Lake County Jail load sagebrush to be planted in Minersville into a truck in this undated photo. (Photo: Cammie Skogg / For The Spectrum & Daily News)

The sagebrush was planted south of Minersville, in Beaver County, in an area heavily damaged by the 2012 Baboon Wildfire, according to Christian Venhuizen, public information officer at BLM Color Country District.

“These efforts are also part of Utah’s Watershed Restoration Initiative,” he said. “What a unique combination of many entities with the common goal of helping to restore the land. We have previously seeded the Baboon Wildfire area with sagebrush seeds but they just didn’t take. We feel very confident these starter plants will be able to help the area for many years to come.”

According to an IAE news release, the nearly 24,000 sagebrush were grown by minimum-security male and medium-security female inmates at the Salt Lake County Jail for use by the BLM.

The “Sagebrush in Prisons Project” is part of the “Sustainability in Prisons Project” started by Evergreen State College in Washington state, which has spread to collaborate with jails and prisons

in several western states and aims to “bring science and nature to prisons,” according to their website.

Venhuizen said the BLM hired a contractor out of Oregon to sow the plants into the ground approximately 30 miles north of Cedar City.

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