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## Warner Creek AICs reap what they 'sow'

S. Garrett Shaw / Lake County Examiner May 8, 2019  0



Institute of Applied Ecology's Stacy Moore and Tyler Knapp have an important role to play for the saving of sage-grouse birds and replenishing of sagebrush.

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In an attempt to help save the greater sage-grouse bird nearing the endangered species list that has depleted from 16 million to 200-500,000 today, the Institute of Applied Ecology (IAE) out of Corvallis has been heading up the Sagebrush in Prisons Project, a part of the Sustainability in Prisons Project.

The environmental partnership with IAE, the Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is focused on redeveloping sagebrush, which the sage-grouse use for every phase of its life.

“They’re considered an iconic species of the landscape,” said IAE’s Program Dir. Stacy Moore.

The program is funded by the BLM and has been taking place at Warner Creek Correctional Facility for the last four years. Down the road the sagebrush is planted by the local BLM department on wildfire burns to reestablish the wildlife area. So how does the program with the Adults in Custody (AICs) work?

First, the AICs mix the soil peat with vermiculite and perlite to create a “soil mixture”. Then they fill containers with water and the mixture and carefully insert five minuscule sagebrush seeds in each cone. Finally, the AICs cover the containers with a plant fabric. In four days, the plants start to germinate and along the way a four-person sagebrush team water the plants seven days a week. About a month later they fertilize the sagebrush and then end up transporting the plants to the BLM who carry out the replanting.

“Sometimes a crew of AICs will go out with the BLM to plant them and that brings the program full circle,” said Moore.

The AICs “sow” as the term goes, nearly 32,000 sage and bitter brush plants. One of the solidifying reasons behind the sagebrush is the focus on changing the damaged habitat and bringing down the increase in wildfires due to cheatgrass and the introduction of other invasive species.

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“I’m very thankful for the BLM’s support for this program,” said Moore. “AICs do quality work and care about giving back to the community.”

Current AIC Curry is the sagebrush lead. Although he worked on the team last year, his background in a blueberry nursery for 21 years led to his interest in the position.

“The big difference is blueberries need a lot of water,” said Curry. “The sagebrush just need planted and they find their own.”

Members of the team all seem to feel that the project is important. AIC Julkowski and Richards believe that without the help of the BLM this wouldn’t be possible.

“I’m just happy to work outside,” said Julkowski. “I was in the kitchen before and this is much better.”

A place on the team serves as a job for these AICs, but they don’t go into it uninformed.

Ecological Education Coord. Tyler Knapp has taught and brought in speakers to the AICs to inform them of not just sagebrush and its importance, but other projects as well.

“We really want to educate them on local ecology to know what its for,” said Knapp.

The AICs know they have an important role and as long as they’re incarcerated, they want to have a purpose.

For more information on the IAE or the project, contact Moore at 541-753-3099 ext. 714.