



NEWS

Saving Nevada's Sage-Grouse, with Inmate Volunteers

A unique prison program to restore sage-grouse habitat started up today for its 4th season. John Potter reports on how it's bringing back the bird once known as, "the Queen of the Great Basin."

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There was a time, in Nevada's earliest years, when the little bird with the tall, tall feathers covered the land. Sage-grouse outnumbered people, if you can imagine that. As Shannon Swim, coordinator of the



See the video at <https://www.ktvn.com/story/40362560/saving-nevadas-sage-grouse-with-inmate-volunteers>

Sagebrush in Prisons Project told us, "Their historic numbers were like 16 million. The sage-grouse is a sagebrush-dependent species, which means that it survives off of sagebrush. So no sagebrush, no sage-grouse."

And it got perilously close to that happening. Pinion and juniper and cheat grass spread across the state. Wildfires made it worse, burning millions of acres of sagebrush. Shannon told us, "We are actually losing a lot of our sagebrush ecosystem in the lower 48 states."

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The beautiful bird was even considered for an endangered species. What does a prison have to do with saving them? Well it takes a lot of manpower to bring back their habitat. Today inmates at Warm Springs Correctional Center in Carson City got their hands in the dirt, "mixing all the soil and they are seeding those containers with sagebrush seed."

They are very tiny sagebrush seeds. The next step is watering them. 100,000 sagebrush babies there are then left to grow. In November, they'll be turned over to BLM rangers for planting in areas ravaged by wildfire. For the inmates, Shannon says, "They get outside. They get their hands in the dirt. They get to be a part of something that's bigger than this place."

In the middle of the soil-mixing, seeding and watering, inmate Patrick McKinnon told us the work, "Kind of started out as a mish mash, but everybody's found their niche and what they're best at."

With 2 other prisons in Carson City and Lovelock, they will seed 320,000 plants in Nevada this year. There is no shortage of volunteers. McKinnon told us, "When it came up that this was to help the environment and propagate the sage-grouse, I thought what better way to do it than be part of this program."

Now the bird that has been longtime part of our landscape, once a Nevada institution, has a new chance with a program that restores what they depend on. Inmate McKinnon put things in perspective: "We've all committed sins, and part of the reparation and the healing for that is to actually get out there and do something...do something positive."