

FEATURED

# Rehab for public lands

## Inmates help grow sagebrush ecology project

Larry Meyer The Argus Observer Nov 9, 2018



The person in this photo shows a Wyoming big sagebrush, one of about 17,000 that were planted earlier this week near Bully Creek Reservoir, as part of a habitat restoration project with multiple agencies.

Photos courtesy Amber Campbell, Snake River Correctional Institution

ALE — Inmates from Snake River Correctional Institution were busy for two days earlier this week planting about 17,000 Wyoming big sagebrush plants near Bully Creek Reservoir, west of Vale.

Nancy DeWitt, with the Institute for Applied Ecology, said in an email, there were 20 inmates per day working to get the plants in.

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According to Susan Fritts, with the Bureau of Land Management, survival rate for the 2014 and 2015 plantings by SRCI inmates in the Danner Loop area, west of Jordan Valley, has been about 70 percent.

“The plants are large enough now to see them when scanning the landscape,” DeWitt quoted Fritts as saying.

In addition to inmates planting out in the field, they are growing another crop of sagebrush seedlings at the prison for habitat restoration, Amber Campbell, SRCI spokeswoman, said.

This is the fifth year that SRCI inmates have participated in the sagebrush project, which is a cooperative program with the Institute for Applied Ecology, the Oregon Department of Correction’s Sustainability in Prisons Project, Bureau of Land Management and Collins Trust, Campbell said in an email.

“Since 2014, minimum-security inmates at Snake River Correctional Center have grown over 133,000 sagebrush seedlings and other plants for habitat improvement projects,” Campbell wrote.

“This year they are carefully tending more than 55,000 sagebrush seedlings, all of which are destined to rehabilitate public lands that have been damaged by wildfire. Their efforts will benefit the imperiled greater sage-grouse and other species that depend on sagebrush habitat, including pronghorn, mule deer, and Brewer’s sparrows. Funding this year is provided by the Bureau of Land Management and Collins Foundation,” Campbell said.

During the recent SageCon Summit to discuss efforts to protect sage grouse and habitat there was information about what local resources agencies are doing to enhance the habitat.

Gary Faw, with the Malheur Soil and Water Conservation District, confirmed comments that about 50,000 acres of juniper removal has been done in Malheur County between the district and Natural Resource Conservation Service over about the last 10 years. Juniper outcompetes sagebrush and other native species for water, reducing the number of sagebrush plants which are essential for grouse survival.

Faw said the agencies also created off-stream watering sites putting water closer to grouse breeding areas (called leks) and did work to improve meadows to provide more feed for grouse.

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