

## Fuel Break Maintains Wildlife Habitat

Maintaining wildlife habitat in an area with an active wildfire regime can be quite a challenge. Several partners are working together to reseed more than 1,340 acres of checkerboard public and private lands on the west side of the Sheep Creek Range, about 18-20 miles north of Battle Mountain. Partners in the restoration effort include: Glamis Dee Gold Mining Company, Barrick Goldstrike Mines, Inc., Nevada Chukar Foundation, 25 Ranch LLC, Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the BLM. The cost of the project is approximately \$148,000.

Recent large fires in the Sheep Creek Range area include the 1984 Lander Fire, and the area burned again in 2001. Wildlife habitat and big-game winter range were severely impacted by the 1999, 2000, and 2001 fire seasons, which burned extensively across northern Nevada.

“What makes this project different from many of our normal activities is its intensity,” said BLM Elko wildlife biologist Ken Wilkinson. “In April 2005, 709 acres (public) and 634 acres (private land in partnership with NDOW) were disked to prepare the seedbed and in October 2005, the area was drill-seeded with a mixture of native and exotic perennial shrubs, grasses and forbs.



“We’ll also be establishing a 600 to 800-foot by 3-mile-long fuel break to protect the area,” Wilkinson continued. “The newly drill-seeded main area and surrounding fuel break are adjacent to an unburned, pristine area of sagebrush habitat that’s critical wildlife winter range.”

According to Wilkinson, the shrubs, grasses and forbs planted on the fuel break area provide cover and forage for wildlife and can slow down or stop a wildfire. During the next phase of the project, the fuel break will be “over-seeded” with forage kochia and yarrow and the main area will be “over-seeded” with sagebrush, forage kochia, yarrow, and winterfat.

Over-seeding equipment donated to NDOW by the Mule Deer Foundation and Newmont Gold will be used for the job. The same equipment has been used over several thousand acres for big game habitat rehabilitation efforts on public and private land since the early 1990s.

“Although the project area is just over 1300 acres, it’s important for several reasons,” Wilkinson said. “Since 1964, more than 90 percent of big game winter habitat in the southern portion of Big Game Management Area 6 has burned. We’re trying to protect one of those few unburned areas. This project also fulfills the offsite mitigation work for mule deer and antelope for the Glamis Dee Gold Pit and is the last of several mitigation projects for the Barrick Goldstrike Mines’ Betze Pit. It completes their obligation for big game habitat mitigation.”