



Extensive Sagebrush Planting Responsive to Wildlife and Vegetation Needs in Idaho

When Idaho Bureau of Land Management refined its organization to enhance customer service and access, a fourth management district was established in October of 2004.

The fire and aviation program, formerly called South Central Idaho Fire and Aviation, was reorganized as the Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation Program. With the change, their wildfire suppression responsibility expanded from 3 to 4.3 million acres of public land with addition of the Jarbridge Field Office area.

In an effort to respond specifically to needs of the Jarbridge Field Office, Fire Use Specialist Brandon Brown developed a series of projects to plant sagebrush in areas across field office and district lands to benefit wildlife and vegetation, as well as rehabilitate past fire areas. Each identified treatment area is less than 1,000 acres in size and will be hand-planted, which allowed the project to fall within categorical exclusion parameters of the President's Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003.



Each about 12-inches tall, sagebrush plants will strengthen fire rehabilitation efforts, improve wildlife tracts and re-establish native vegetation in hazardous fuels areas.

In early March of 2005, a fire and fuels crew completed an 800-acre sagebrush planting east of Bruneau Canyon. It is aimed at restoring a burned area to its historic fire regime by planting big sagebrush and perennial vegetation, which are critical to returning the fire cycle to more normal, healthy intervals. Reintroduction of big sagebrush also benefits wildlife and plant species such as sage grouse and Slickspot peppergrass. This is the first of several plantings that will be done across Twin Falls District.

Through an agreement with the Boise National Forest Lucky Peak Nursery, 34,000 seedlings, each about 12-inches tall, were purchased and hand planted in just under two weeks. With this first project complete, Twin Falls District began working on an agreement to donate 250 remaining seedlings to the College of Southern Idaho Horticulture Program where they will be planted at a campus facility for seed cultivation to be used for future BLM fuels work.

Brown subsequently obtained another 100,000 seedlings to be planted each year for the next five years, totaling 500,000 plants. The first 100,000 will be utilized in three upcoming projects, one each in Shoshone, Burley and Jarbridge Field Offices. In the Jarbridge area specifically, the next planting will be done in conservation areas for Slickspot peppergrass, a candidate for listing under the Threatened and Endangered Species Act, as well as in isolated wildlife tracts and fire rehabilitation areas where sagebrush is not naturally re-establishing.

An upcoming Shoshone Field Office planting will be conducted in wildlife tracts and a former fuels treatment area where sagebrush is not re-colonizing at the desired rate.

In the Burley Field Office, isolated wildlife tracts will be included for planting, along with critical mule deer habitat. All will occur this fall, conditions permitting, with remaining projects to be completed in early spring of 2006 if necessary.

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