



## Volunteers Help Restore Native Idaho Wildlife Habitat

*By Mary Dudley*

On January 12, with bags of sagebrush seed on their backs, 16 volunteers hiked up the steep ridges east of Boise where the Lucky Fire burned last year.

They spread seed over the burn. Volunteers had collected the seed in late fall from nearby sites. Spreading sagebrush seed on top of snow during winter months is an effective method of re-establishing sagebrush on burns. As snow melts, seeds the size of carrot seeds work into crevices where some seed germinates in late spring.

Volunteers provide the workforce to restore native habitat throughout Idaho, collecting seed and planting since 1990 when Idaho Fish and Game initiated its volunteer program. Since then, thousands of volunteers in the southwest have planted nearly three quarter of a million bitterbrush and sagebrush seedlings to restore the native shrubs on burned winter ranges for deer, elk and pronghorn.

Hundreds of wildlife species depend on sagebrush and bitterbrush – shrubs that provide not only food but also nesting habitat and cover from predators and the elements. Because of their deep roots, shrubs hold soil, reducing erosion as well.

Volunteer habitat restoration projects statewide take place nearly 12 months of the year. And volunteers are poised to begin planting on March 2 – the first day of the 24<sup>th</sup> annual volunteer bitterbrush/sagebrush planting project.

Native habitat restoration is the focus of the Southwest Regional volunteer program and volunteers make this important work possible and successful.

Veteran volunteers serve as crew leaders, supervising and working with less experienced volunteers planting bitterbrush and sagebrush seedlings to assure quality control. Our volunteer crew leaders make it possible to work with upwards of a hundred volunteers planting.

After volunteers plant bitterbrush and sagebrush seedlings,

they turn to creeks and rivers and plant native trees and shrubs to restore riparian habitat. Most riparian restoration work in the Southwest Region takes place along the Little Salmon River. Work began here in 1996 and along its tributaries near New Meadows and Boulder and Willow Creeks east of Lake Fork and Donnelly.

The volunteer native riparian habitat restoration has evolved into semiannual project work: mid-April through mid-June, resuming late September through early November. Plus, volunteers tend plantings during hot, dry summer months, watering and weeding plantings. They plant mostly five-gallon native trees and shrubs in the spring and construct willow weavings in the fall.

During summer months volunteers collect seed from native plants including forbs, grasses and shrubs for restoration work by the Boise National Forest and Idaho Fish and Game. Seed collection sites include Bear Valley, Snowbank Mountain and the Trinity Mountains.

Sagebrush seed collection begins in early November and lasts about a month. The volunteer program began collecting sagebrush seed in earnest after the 257,000-acre Foothills Fire in 1992. Volunteers collect several thousand pounds of sagebrush seed every year.

In addition to sagebrush seed, volunteers have been collecting bitterbrush seed for restoration purposes for more than 20 years. Some seed is used by the US Forest Service Lucky Peak Nursery, 15 miles east of Boise, to propagate seedlings that volunteers plant. The seed is taken to the nursery and spread on drying racks. Nursery employees clean the seed. Seeds sown in May of one year are ready to plant as seedlings the following spring.

Volunteers make it possible to plant seedlings grown from local seed sources which are ideal for successful restoration.

*Mary Dudley is the Southwest Region volunteer coordinator.*



### Inside this issue

Page 2:

Volunteer Opportunities Around the State

Page 3:

Master Naturalists Promote Stewardship



Last year, more than 4,100 volunteers contributed about \$1.5 million in-kind value.

### Here is a list volunteer activities from around the state for 2012:

- Sage grouse lek surveys.
- School fishing clinics.
- Riparian habitat restoration.
- Songbird banding.
- Big game check station.
- Free Fishing Day clinics.
- Youth mentored hunts.
- Winter bald eagle surveys.
- Electro-fishing, tagging, fish counts.
- Hatchery spawning, counting and fish transport.
- Creel surveys.
- Trout in the Classroom instruction.
- Mule deer fawn capture and radio-collaring.
- Riparian area fencing projects.
- Raptor rehabilitation.
- Sagebrush seed collection.
- Habitat restoration projects.
- Education event staffing.
- Gardening/landscaping at nature centers and outdoor classrooms.
- Bluebird box building.
- Building and maintaining wood duck boxes and goose platforms.
- Peregrine falcon fledgling watch.
- Patrol cabin maintenance.

### Idaho Fish and Game News

Fish and Game Commission:

Chairman: Randy Budge

Director: Virgil Moore

Published by Idaho Fish and Game

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Volume 25, Number 3

To find out about opportunities across the state or to sign up go to: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/about/volunteer/> or contact regional Fish and Game volunteer coordinators in:

- **Panhandle Region** - Pete Gardner 208-769-1414.
- **Clearwater Region** - Bill Seybold 208-799-5010.
- **Southwest Region** - Mary Dudley and Michael Young 208-327-7095.
- **Magic Valley Region** – Clayton Nielson 208-324-4359.
- **Southeast Region** - Tessa Atwood 208-232-4703.
- **Upper Snake Region** – James Brower 208-525-7290.

## MK Nature Center Offers Volunteer Opportunities

The MK Nature Center has many year-round volunteer opportunities to donate time and talents. Volunteer positions include:

1. Planting, weeding, weed pulling, pruning and other landscaping duties.
2. Building hosts provide customer service at our front desk and gift shop, greet visitors and operate the gift shop.
3. Administrative assistant.
4. Eagle Scout Projects.
5. We gladly accept groups up to 20 individuals for outdoor work projects.
6. Youth volunteers for students to complete community service for school projects. But those under age 14 must have adult participation.
7. Teacher - interpreter conducting wildlife programs tours.
8. Internships.
9. Event support staff.

For information about volunteer positions, please contact Dave Cannamela at 287-2902, 890-1319 or [david.cannamela@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:david.cannamela@idfg.idaho.gov).



## Volunteer Instructors Provide Hunter Education

In 1979, the Idaho Legislature passed a hunter education requirement that mandated Fish and Game to recruit competent volunteer instructors who were to be issued certificates and would instruct hunter education.

Instructors were to be trained in the safe handling of legal hunting equipment, the conservation of wildlife and natural resources, good conduct and respect for the rights and property of others, outdoor survival, and other appropriate subjects.

Last year, nearly 1,000 volunteer hunter education instructors certified more than 9,100 new hunters through the hunter and bowhunter education programs.

Those volunteers are the heart of Idaho's Hunter Education Program. They stand as examples of what each

hunter should be in ethics, behavior and responsibility to themselves, landowners, other hunters and the resource. They share skills, experiences and their love of hunting with those new to the adventures ahead.

Instructors must be at least 18, subject to a background check and be knowledgeable about hunting weapons, wildlife and hunting, as well as organizing and instructing youth.

Instructor candidates receive eight hours of orientation and training in the techniques of teaching and administrative procedures associated with the program. reference materials.

For more information about becoming an Idaho Hunter Education Volunteer Instructor, please call a regional Fish and Game office.





Volunteers in eastern Idaho help remove obsolete fencing to benefit wildlife migrations.

*IDFG photo*

## Idaho Master Naturalists Promote Stewardship of Idaho’s Natural Environment

The Idaho Master Naturalist Program is a volunteer program led by Idaho Fish and Game through the help of many partnering agencies and organizations.

The program aims to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to work toward stewardship of Idaho’s natural environment.

Master Naturalists receive 40 hours of education in lectures, classes, workshops and field trips and then volunteer 40 hours of their time toward conservation for program certification. The program was developed to encourage Idahoans to learn more about the natural world and become involved in conservation in their community.

Subjects covered in the classes include ecological concepts, wetland ecology, plants, forest ecology, mammology, weather, entomology, aquatic ecology, fishes, rangeland management, land use and ownership, herpetology, birds and more.

Six chapters are active throughout the state. Each chapter has a unique set of local partners that provide education experiences and provide volunteer opportunities. Current chapters exist in Sandpoint, McCall, Boise, Ketchum, Idaho Falls and Island Park.

Master Naturalist volunteers are active in conservation through helping to teach at nature centers, hosting organizational

plants and animals, collect water samples, monitor bald eagle nests, band birds, and inventory plants.

In 2012, Idaho Master Naturalists donated nearly 15,000 hours of volunteer time toward the stewardship of Idaho’s natural environment.

For information contact Sara Focht at Idaho Fish and Game [sara.focht@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:sara.focht@idfg.idaho.gov) or 208-287-2906.

booths, teaching classes, leading field trip or assisting at wildlife festivals. They also are active in many citizen science projects, such as helping biologists and researchers collect data and monitor



Volunteers plant bitterbrush.

*IDFG photo*

### Idaho Fish and Game Policy

Idaho wildlife management policy is set by seven volunteer commissioners. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission’s policy decisions are based on research and recommendations by the professional staff of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and with input from the governor’s office, the state Legislature, hunters, anglers and the public.



## Wildlife Habitat Restoration: Volunteers Make it Happen

When Mary Dudley was hired to get Fish and Game's volunteer program off the ground in 1990, some co-workers asked why she was out planting bitterbrush with the volunteers.

"If you want a bureaucrat who simply recruits and tells people what to do, then hire someone else," she told them.

One of the keys to success, she said, is working with the volunteers.

statewide contributed more than 64,000 hours worth about \$1.5 million to assist with various habitat and other labor-intensive improvement projects.

Projects include



Mary Dudley plants willows on Boulder Creek.

*IDFG photos*



Volunteers plant willows to restore riparian habitat along Boulder Creek.

"Besides, that is the best part of my job because volunteers are cheerful, positive and fun to work with," she said.

Dedicated volunteers who are willing to work hard and plant carefully make riparian restoration projects a reality.

People volunteer to plant because they want to help wildlife and to heal the land. Motivation lies not in paychecks, prizes or required assignments. Rather, motivation stems from a genuine desire and willingness to do positive work.

Idaho Fish and Game hired Dudley on the strength of her previous experience. She had started a successful volunteer shrub restoration program for Boise District BLM after the 1986 Squaw Butte Fire, which burned 218,000 acres of critical winter range for deer and elk.

A major focus of Fish and Game's volunteer program is on habitat restoration on public and private lands.

In 2012, more than 4,000 volunteers

big game winter range restoration, wetland plantings, Habitat Improvement Program plantings, and riparian restoration. Most of the plants were rooted native trees and shrubs; the rest were cuttings and poles.

These habitat restoration projects would not be possible without the help of volunteers. The cost of paying contract planters to do these jobs is prohibitive.

"Even if funds were available to pay for contract planting crews, I am convinced that caring and properly trained volunteers do a better job," Dudley said.

Volunteer projects have tangible benefits. Willows planted along an eroded stream bank grow and regenerate and catch sediment, and they ultimately benefit fisheries and wildlife.

Riparian planting projects that involve a private landowner, who, in effect, is

also a volunteer, have a major added benefit in providing a demonstration area for good riparian management to the landowner, his or her neighbors and the public. The volunteers who worked on the project become ambassadors to their friends, associates and government land management agencies.

But to be successful, projects must be organized and planned well in advance. The details must be thought out and arranged, such as tools, materials, transportation, weather and road conditions, crew leaders, cooperation with landowners and other agencies, and training needed.

In addition to planning, the volunteer program offers training from professionals or qualified volunteers who train and supervise fellow volunteers.