



## *Webinar Brief for Resource Managers*

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# Engaging communities in sagebrush restoration: Idaho Fish and Game Southwest Region Volunteer Program

*Presented on 24 January 2017 by Michael Young, Volunteer and Habitat Restoration Coordinator, Idaho Department of Fish and Game Southwest Region*

### **Project Summary:**

We built a program over 25 years that engages the public in wildlife habitat management by establishing a volunteer-based habitat program. The program fills a niche in land management that is reactive to current landscape needs and is able to gather plant materials and make them available for restoration projects, both for the program's projects and other agencies' projects. See what community habitat projects have been going on in Southwest Idaho!

### **Abstract:**

Idaho Fish and Game's Southwest Region Volunteer Program has been utilizing volunteers in important habitat restoration projects for over 25 years. We use an adaptive approach to landscape management that includes responding to wildfires and working across land managed by federal, state and private entities. The program has become quite successful because it makes the volunteer the most important piece of the project; without volunteers the projects could not happen.

Volunteers assist with native and local seed collections to make sure plant materials are well-adapted to restoration sites. In big wildfire years, volunteers have collected over 3,000 pounds of sagebrush seed material to be used for large-scale restoration, from sage grouse habitat to big game winter range. The material is made available for Idaho Fish and Game and other agencies' projects.

### **Management Implications**

- Public outreach and involvement leads to more acres restored and more partnerships formed
- Sage grouse habitat increases when hundreds of people get involved
- Wildlife habitat management can happen in new and creative ways.

Our program partners with the USFS Lucky Peak Nursery. The nursery cleans seed materials and makes it available for broadcast seeding and seedling production. On any given year, our program has 20,000 to 50,000 bare root seedlings grown out at the nursery to be planted the following spring. We have also begun working with Institute for Applied Ecology and the Sagebrush in Prisons Project. This year, inmates grew 30,000 plants for Idaho Fish and Game.

Volunteers help with all aspects of the project, from initial seed collections and spreading seed material on drying racks at Lucky Peak Nursery, to hand broadcasting seed in the winter and planting seedlings in the spring and fall. Having the same volunteers help with all aspects of the project builds ownership and commitment to the program. Our volunteers come from all walks of life: civic groups interested in serving the community, individuals interested in improving public lands, families interested spending time together for the common good or sportsman that want to make a difference for wildlife. Volunteers truly make a difference!