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Contact: John McKay

Phone: (702) 486-5127, ext. 3510

WILDFIRE REHABILITATION ONGOING IN SOUTHERN NEVADA

Early in the summer of 2005, southern Nevada experienced extensive damage to Mojave Desert ecosystems as a result of lightning caused wildfires. Several mountain ranges in Lincoln and Clark counties were impacted, including the Clover, Meadow Valley, Delamar, and the Mormon ranges in Lincoln County and the Virgin range including the Gold Butte area in Clark County.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) has worked hand in hand with the Bureau of Land Management as part of the BAER Team (Burn Area Emergency Response) to rehabilitate these burned areas. The team consists of resource specialists and fire management personnel from all over the western United States.

The team convened in Mesquite, NV on July 15, 2005 to develop a strategy to combat red brome and cheat grass invasion in burned areas and to help wildlife survive the loss of forage and cover. Because of unique features such as high average temperatures, low annual precipitation, and soil types in the Mojave Desert, seeding of dominant native species such as blackbrush is not nearly as successful as operations in northern Great Basin habitats with sagebrush.

The strategy called for the planting of live bushes, both succulents and woody stemmed species, in small areas near wildlife watering areas. The locations were selected based upon their proximity to burnt areas and historic use by upland species such as chukar, Gambel's quail, cottontail rabbits and a host of passerine birds and other small mammals.

Native plants were planted along with Dri-water gel pacs, a plant food and water supplement that helps the plants survive the shock of being moved from the Division of Forestry greenhouse to the harsh desert environment. The gel pacs are supposed to last up to 90 days at which time refills can be inserted into the plastic tubes which will give another 60 to 90 days of nourishment. Crew members return to the sites to install cages around each plant consisting of four rebar posts wrapped in 3'X 1/2" poultry netting to limit utilization and trampling by wildlife.

Despite unanticipated setbacks such as budget delays and personnel shortages, NDOW habitat biologists have been able to implement "Project Headstart" this fall and will complete four of the eight sites, each one consisting of approximately 100 native plants, with a skeleton crew of three or four members. Another four sites will most likely be planted in the spring of 2007.

Project Headstart was developed and coordinated by NDOW supervising habitat biologist Brad Hardenbrook and habitat biologist Roddy Shepard. Crew members have included Dave Hunnel, NDOW southern region guzzler maintenance crew, Tracy Kipke, NDOW habitat/mining biologist, Polly Conrad, NDOW reptile biologist, Shepard and Nevada Division of Forestry resource management officer Lisa Ortega.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) protects, restores and manages fish and wildlife, and promotes fishing, hunting, and boating safety. NDOW's wildlife and habitat conservation efforts are primarily funded by sportsmen's license and conservation fees and a federal surcharge on hunting and fishing gear. Support wildlife and habitat conservation in Nevada by purchasing a hunting, fishing, or combination license. For more information, visit www.ndow.org