

BLM, MCC collect sage brush seed for habitat improvement projects



Montana Conservation Corps volunteers assisted the BLM South Dakota and Miles City Field Offices with sage brush seed collection efforts during the first week of November.

The joint field office endeavor collected the seed to be used as part of local habitat restoration projects. Gathering seed from area plants boost seedling survival, said BLM Biologist Rebecca Newton, who works in Belle Fourche.

“The purpose of collecting seeds locally for future planting is to ensure that the stock is adapted to local conditions,” said Newton. “This might not be true of stock collected in a different geographic region, even if the species is the same.”

Billings-based MCC volunteers Harry Kaplan, Daniel Kennedy, Ryan Spencer, Meg Woodruff, Ale Dominguez and Tessa Grasel started and ended their 2014 work season in South Dakota.

“A couple of the MCC crew members expressed that having their last hitch here felt like closing the loop on their summer,” said Newton.

“Collectively we ended up with over 100

brown-paper lunch bags full of sagebrush inflorescence parts, including seed,” said Newton. “The method for collecting is simply stripping the flower stalks by hand and placing all the material in a bag. The tiny seeds are later separated out by machine at a special facility.”

The material has since been delivered to BLM Botanist Wendy Velman at the Montana/Dakotas State Office in Billings, where it resides in storage prior to the machine-cleaning process that separates the seed from the stalks. According to Newton, the collected will go to [Special K Ranch](#) for propagation and the produced seedlings will return to the Eastern Montana/Dakotas District field offices to be planted at project sites.

The MCC was awarded the Public Land Foundation’s Landscape Stewardship Award at a ceremony held at the BLM Montana/Dakotas State Office in Billings Oct. 10. The Landscape Stewardship Award honors the work done by private citizens who work to advance and sustain community-based stewardship on lands that include those administered by the BLM. The BLM nominated the MCC based on its ongoing work on BLM-administered

lands in Montana and South Dakota.

Volunteers play a large role in assisting the BLM in taking care of public lands. The BLM has a long relationship with youth groups like the Montana Conservation Corps, which promotes a healthy work ethic and public service by coordinating volunteer work crews with public land agencies. The MCC continues to be a productive partner and helps stretch taxpayer dollars while accomplishing important work projects that otherwise might not get done due to limited BLM staff and funding.

For more details on the Montana Conservation Corps and its mission, see: <http://mtcorps.org/>.

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Photo: Montana Conservation Corps crew members Harry Kaplan, Daniel Kennedy, Ryan Spencer, Meg Woodruff, Ale Dominguez and Tessa Grasel pause while collecting sagebrush seeds in Carter County, Montana. Photo by Justin Hanley