

# Habitat Restoration Project Creates Forage for Big Game and Jobs for Residents

**A**s part of a larger project called Integrated Habitat Restoration, overgrown meadows near Grass Mountain in the Cottage Grove Ranger District were cut back in order to improve foraging opportunities for deer and elk. Project leader Eric Risdal, Supervisory Forestry Technician for the Umpqua National Forest in Oregon, said the changes were suggested because big game populations in that area had been declining due to the overgrowth of brush and dense young tree stands. Deer and elk prefer forest edge habitats that provide both cover and new growth to forage on. Clearing the excess brush helps plants regenerate and will attract big game species back to the area, as well as others like migratory songbirds.



*Northwest Reforestation Company crew members Vicente Montano (left) and Ramero Stalavera.*

In addition to benefitting the animals, the project provides needed employment opportunities for local workers. The community also gains revenue brought in by hunters and wildlife watchers. Other benefits include the reduced risk of wildfire and the control of noxious weeds.



*A Northwest Reforestation Company crew member clears brush with a chainsaw.*

The project was sponsored by the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act under Title II, which stimulates local economies by providing funds for improvement projects on public lands. “Title II has been a great opportunity to implement programs like this,” said Rob Cox, the Forest Service Wildlife Biologist who supported the project’s proposal. “It’s been very beneficial to wildlife.”

Cutting work took place in mid-June and was contracted to the North Reforestation Company, a father-son business out of Monmouth. The crew members are residents of Salem, and most have wives and children there. “This project gives me the opportunity to work,” said crewman Vicente Montano, “and to make a better life for my family.”



*Marcus West passes a felled young conifer to his Kennedy YCC comrade, James Rook.*

Follow-up work to pile the cut brush was done in late July by the Kennedy School Conservation Corps out of Cottage Grove. The piled brush will be left to dry for a year, then later burned to clear it and fertilize the soil. This stage of the work was also funded by Title II through a grant with the Kennedy School CC program.

Several students working on the crew said they were saving their wages for college. Sixteen-year-old Destiny Honer hopes to become a veterinarian; she recently won a \$375 scholarship for her work with the crew. Haley Brady, 17, said she is saving the money she earned to rent her own apartment and attend Lane Community College; she wants to study psychology and work with troubled youth.

The newly opened spaces will allow plants such as vine maple and golden chinquapin to thrive for the benefit of wildlife. Though the clearings will need a few years of regeneration before they will be enticing to deer and elk, they are already attracting other species that also need open patches of forest meadows. Orange fritillary butterflies and mountain bluebirds can already be seen flitting around the openings, soaking up the sunshine.

Project Stats: Integrated Habitat Restoration

2012 funding:	\$14,131
Total funding:	\$40,000
Employs:	Northwest Reforestation Company Kennedy CC under separate account
Project:	Forest Health Improvement
Partner:	Oregon Youth Conservation Corps
Year awarded:	2009

Another stage of this project accomplished similar goals in the Steamboat Creek Watershed of the North Umpqua Ranger District.



*A Kennedy School YCC crew member hefts brush.*

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