

## A New Breed of Johnny Appleseed

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Roaming the rolling foothills of eastern Oregon are the makings of a modern breed of Johnny Appleseed. These distant relatives of that legendary character are an unlikely alliance of folks from different backgrounds united by their dedication to the improvement of sagebrush-steppe ranges. These new rangeland enthusiasts have volunteered help in range research efforts to improve areas still scarred from misuse at the turn of the century.

Their interests differ, but collectively, these volunteers share a philosophy of range improvement for various uses. Pooling talents and resources has achieved desirable results for all interests—the almost mythical “win-win” situation in land management. They have learned that “winning” does not happen on every acre for every interest group, but it can happen when a mosaic of land treatment efforts are added together. Knowledge has

been gained about habitat qualities, differences among sites in their capacities to produce varied kinds and amounts of vegetation, and how plant diversity offers greater potential for ecological and economic stability of managed rangelands.

Cooperating ranchers, resource managers, recreationists, and researchers hope this spark of cooperation can be kindled into a fire of renewed effort on range improvement for multiple-use. Even amid persistent conflict between hunters and landowners about elk and deer management, a spirit of cooperation remains in Oregon's Baker and Union counties for the simultaneous development of better habitat for domestic and wild animals. This cooperation may also lead to a more important long-term benefit: healthier soils that could maintain higher productivity.

A little background will help the reader put these devel-

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*Ranchers, sporting groups, and others volunteered time, labor, and land in establishing research trials to help determine plant species for future efforts in multiple-use range improvement.*

opments into perspective. During the bitter winter of 1984-85, the Oregon Hunter's Association (OHA), in cooperation with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), solicited donations for emergency feeding of deer and elk. OHA purchased and distributed feed primarily in conjunction with ODFW. Big game animals cross private lands to reach feeding stations; this raised landowner's concerns about animal damage to fields and crops. Rural landowners and others were also feeding wildlife, even though feed was in short supply and costs were high. Coincidentally, land-use planning was being conducted by the Bureau of Land Management, the USDA Forest Service, and the counties. Planning included provisions for elk and deer winter habitat that sparked more conflicts between recreationists and some landowners. Tight economic conditions for farmers and ranchers and a continuing decline in deer numbers sharpened the conflicts.

In the midst of this conflict, research efforts in range improvements were increasing. Scientists from the USDA Forest Service, Forestry and Range Sciences Laboratory in La Grande, Oregon, had been evaluating improved plant species and techniques for vegetation establishment. In early winter 1984, the researchers suggested to OHA members that, although feeding wildlife demonstrated dedicated concern for deer and elk welfare in an emergency, the overriding need was for better habitat. OHA members were challenged to direct some effort toward habitat improvement research as a way to address the long-term problem of inadequate winter range.

The OHA Chapters in Union and Baker County volunteered help to raise and plant containerized seedlings. Ranchers and farmers were asked to provide test locations and they responded with donated land, fencing, equipment, and seed. Field and coordination assistance came from the Baker and Union County offices of the Soil Conservation Service and Bureau of Land Management, the Keating and Eagle Valley Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Volunteers for planting included members of these organizations, OHA chapters, local gardening groups, and unaffiliated individuals. Citizen and agency involvement grew as awareness of the efforts grew. A local

freight company provided a truck to distribute plants to test sites, and herbicide for site preparation was supplied by an agricultural chemical firm. In 1986 and 1987, funds to assist research were contributed by Baker County and the Eagle Valley Soil and Water Conservation District. Initial outplantings of fourwing saltbush were expanded to include other shrubs, grasses, and forbs.

The ultimate success of test plantings will be evaluated after extended exposure of seedlings to physical and biological elements at each site. But in late 1987, participants remained encouraged about their efforts despite negative influences from grasshoppers, gophers, rabbits, and drought. The positive interaction among participants has been increasingly successful.

Volunteers helped produce about 24,000 seedlings for transplanting at 22 test locations that ranged from small plots of a few hundred feet square to 3 acres in size. Drilling of various grasses, shrubs, and forbs in test plots has also been done on a volunteer basis. Participation included over 65 individuals, who collectively donated more than 1,300 hours.

Volunteer efforts are difficult to sustain, and activities are hard to schedule around unpredictable spring weather. Participation of hunter volunteers was largest in 1985 when wildlife populations were most stressed and the issues received greater media attention. Ensuing winters were milder, and malnourished wildlife were less evident. The habitat issue did not go away, but the public feeling of an emergency faded. Nevertheless, the persistent dedication of many volunteers has been surprising. Some folks were always there, and new faces have appeared. Knowledge is being gained, and all concerned look forward to application of that knowledge on a broader scale.

Participants took advantage of opportunities for sharing experiences and perspectives, for gaining awareness of the problems and concerns of individuals and groups, for understanding the interactions of summer and winter ranges, and for building cooperation. The experience was gratifying for all involved. It was good for the soul and we hope for the land. The spirits of the "older hands" have been raised by the contagious energies and enthusiasm of these rangeland Johnny Appleseeds.

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