

## Volunteers Rescue Aspen Trees

By Norv Dallin

Personnel from the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and local volunteers recently constructed pipe rail fences around some aspen stands in the Stag Mountain area destroyed by the 2006 Charleston fire.

The fire burned more than 148,000 acres in central Elko County and destroyed most of the mature aspen trees in the area. When aspen trees burn, new shoots are quick to sprout, but the tender new growth attracts grazing livestock, which prevents replacement of mature trees.

Volunteers met on Saturday morning in late July and made the two-hour trip to the Stag Mountain area 40 miles north of Deeth. Assembly of the three-rail steel fence commenced upon arrival of the 19 people and was completed by evening. Over 1,000 screws were driven to ensure the fence will stand the pressure of wind, snow load and livestock. The three-rail fence made of pipe, excludes livestock from the critical regenerating areas, but still allows them access to water and forage near the

enclosures. The fence is constructed so that it can be easily removed once management reaches a point where domestic livestock grazing is brought into balance with the environment. Over 1,200 feet of fence was constructed and another, larger enclosure was finished. Materials for a third project were hauled to the construction site.

"I'm pleasantly surprised at how much work we got done" said NDOW biologist Pete Bradley. Before turning in for the night, Bradley gave the volunteers an informative presentation on the importance of aspen stands and spoke of the day when the aspen sprouts grow into mature trees and the fence can be removed.

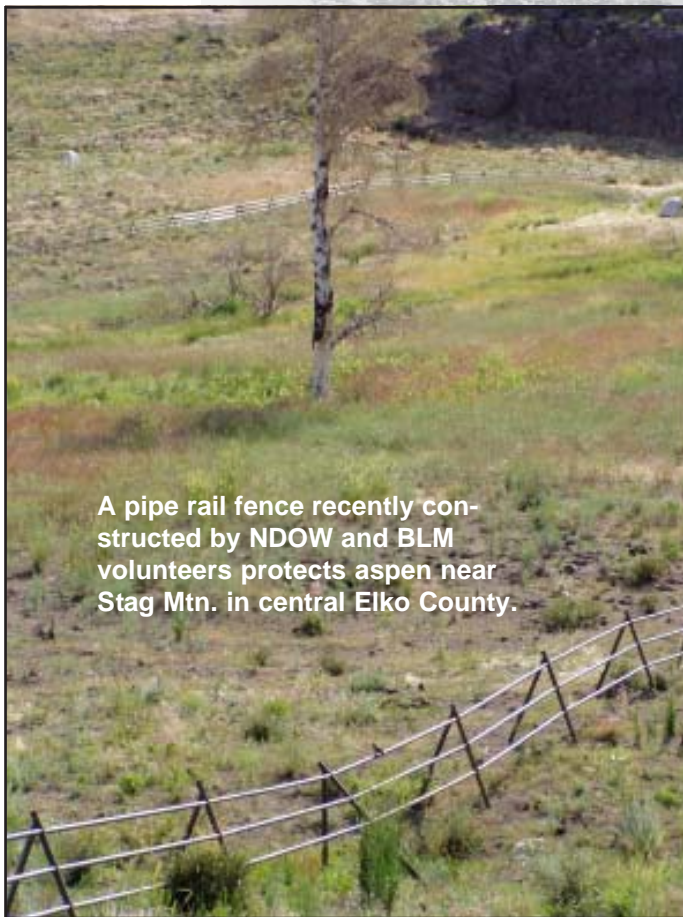
He explained that survival of quaking aspen stands in Nevada and throughout the west is a serious concern for foresters and wildlife managers because of the diverse wildlife using these unique habitats.

Bradley noted that, "Easily over 150 species of Nevada's wildlife use quaking aspen and associated understory habitats during portions of their life cycles. Some, like the Swainson's thrush, ruffed grouse and rubber boa are found almost exclusively in these environments." he said. "In this 'tree-challenged' landscape of the Bruneau River headwaters, these aspen stands surrounding Stag Mountain provide the only cavity and canopy nesting habitat in over 100 square miles. If we lose these stands, our wildlife heritage will suffer. It's essentially their last refuge."

Marcial Evertsen, from Crescent Valley, who regularly volunteers on NDOW habitat projects, says, "These projects are fun. You get dead tired, but the food is good and it gives you a good reason to camp out."

In addition to providing habitat for Rocky Mountain elk and mule deer, quaking aspen stands in Nevada are home to many species of birds, small mammals and reptiles.

Thanks to a generous donation from Elko Bighorns Unlimited, three delicious hearty meals were provided to all workers. Those interested in volunteering in the effort to conserve and improve wildlife habitat in the local area, should contact the Nevada Department of Wildlife at 775-688-1500.



A pipe rail fence recently constructed by NDOW and BLM volunteers protects aspen near Stag Mtn. in central Elko County.