

Crews work to restore Waterfall fire area

Andrew Pridgen
Appeal Staff Writer
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Photos by
Cathleen
Allison/Nevada
Appeal
Members of a
Silver Springs
Conservation
Camp crew plant
Jeffrey pine
seedlings



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Thursday in Ash Canyon. Crews will plant 7,500 seedlings this week in several areas destroyed by the Waterfall fire in July 2004. Below, NDF engine boss Ryan Safford runs an auger Thursday morning in Ash Canyon as crews plant 7,500 seedlings.

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With the choke of a drill's carburetor and a whiff of gas, the workers on a south facing slope in Ash Canyon went to work - digging, boring holes and planting.

"Yeah, you know it's a nice day when you do this for a living and there's no place you'd rather be," said Nevada Department of Forestry Fire Captain Joe Fording, who this week and next will help supervise more than two dozen crewmembers slated to plant some 7,500 Jeffrey pine seedlings on 40-plus scarred acres ravaged by the Waterfall fire in July 2004.

The fire injured five people, destroyed 21 structures and consumed almost 9,000 acres.

NDF crew members said the replanting effort, funded by Carson City, held double-meaning.



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Cathleen Allison/Nevada Appeal
NDF engine boss Ryan Safford runs an auger Thursday morning in Ash Canyon as crews plant 7,500 Jeffrey Pine seedlings in the Waterfall fire area.

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Planting new trees helps culminate the four-year effort to restore the area, Fording said. Yet, as a dry spring will eventually turn to fire season, it is also a reminder of the dangers that await his crews.

"Yeah, this is the right way to start the season," said NDF crew supervisor Daniel Rangel, who was ensuring the saplings were planted about 15 feet away from one another, in an area with freshly turned soil and away from the cheat grass. "The thing is, if it's a wet winter, it's a dangerous fire season. If it's a dry winter, it's a dangerous fire season.

"Like always, we're prepared and we're ready for whatever comes our way. But getting to do a little conservation work on the front-end, getting our legs under us and enjoying some good (spring) weather - well, I'm not gonna complain."

Female inmates from the Silver Springs Conservation Camp made up Rangel's morning crew. After a hole was drilled a foot into the ground, members of the inmate crew knelt, and with care, sunk the trees into their new permanent home.

Though the inmates were instructed to speak to the press only on a condition of anonymity - most were effusive about the work they did this week.

"You know, you can make this sound however you want - and some people may shake their heads, but when we're out here doing this we're really giving back. I feel, and I think I can speak for a lot of people (working) on the crew, that despite our pasts, we're out here contributing.

"There's no better way to look back at something positive you did than to be able to see a tree grow. That's something I'll take with me."

Crews had already planted about 1,400 trees and that number rose to more than 2,000 by the end of the day Thursday, Fording estimated. In all, 7,500 trees would take root over the week.

"We're putting about 1,000 in the ground a day," he said. "These trees come from the (NDF) nursery near Washoe Lake. They're grown at elevation and refrigerated before planted.

"Once we take them out (to plant) there's a finite amount of time they have to thrive - we're just out here trying to give mother nature a little helping hand."

Crew supervisor Rangel estimated only a percentage of trees would survive - albeit, he gave a good chance for many of the tiny pines to take hold on the south-facing slope he stood on Thursday morning.

By 10:30 a.m., most of one hillside had been cleared and planted. Soon it would be time to move on to another ridge.

As Fording took in the work of his crew, the thought of last summer crept to the forefront of his mind and furrowed his brow.

The words Angora, San Diego, Malibu, McCall, Idaho -fires he'd been on over the last 12 months - escaped his tightly drawn lips.

"We're out here doing what we can do to restore this area today," he said. "We've got a long season in front of us. This is the beginning.

"We hope for the best, but we prepare for the worst."

• Contact reporter Andrew Pridgen at apridgen@nevadaappeal.com or 881-1219.

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