(Music)

Krista Biorn: Hi, I’m Krista Biorn and I work for the Idaho department of Fish and Game and I manage the Boise River Wildlife Management Area and my main job is to take care of habitat for wildlife.

Joan Cartan-hansen, Host: THE BOISE RIVER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA IS ABOUT 47 THOUSAND ACRES.

IT’S BEEN SET ASIDE TO PROTECT WILDLIFE HABITAT AND FOR PUBLIC ENJOYMENT.

TODAY, BIORN IS SHOWING US HAMMER FLATS, AN AREA JUST OUTSIDE OF BOISE.

Biorn: So, we’re looking at an area that was burned in a fire two years ago. One side of the road was burned and the other side wasn’t.

It burned very hot and very fast and that fire went over about 300 acres of the management area.

Cartan-Hansen: THE FIRE TOOK OUT THE SHRUBS THE MULE DEER NEED FOR SURVIVAL AND THE WEEDS TOOK OVER.

Biorn: So, my job is to make sure we get rid of the weed component and bring back that native shrub component, so the wildlife will have forage and cover for survival.

Cartan-hansen: TO DO THAT, BIORN AND SENIOR WILDLIFE TECHNICIAN PETER OTT START BY PLANTING THE BURNED AREA WITH BARE ROOT BITTERBRUSH SEEDLINGS.

Peter Ott: This is about a year old. It was grown out for us by a local nursery//so hopefully it will persist herein this soil.

Cartan-Hansen: THEY USE A PLANTING BAR TO DIG A HOLE AND LOOSEN THE SOIL AND THEN PLANT BY HAND.

Ott: Once we’ve got it in there, we just rock the plant, both sides and give it a good stomp all around.

Cartan-Hansen: ANOTHER METHOD OF REPLANTING IS CALLED BROADCAST SEEDING.

IN LATE FALL, THEY TAKE LIGHT WEIGHT SAGE BRUSH SEED AND SCATTER IT ON THE HILLSIDE.

Biorn: The seed will sit on the ground and when the snow comes, the snow will land on top of the seed and will slowly work that seed into the soil. It will sit there all winter gathering moisture and as the warmer weather comes, that seed will start to germinate and grow into, hopefully, full sized plants that mule deer can use for coverage and for forage.

Cartan-Hansen: THEY ALSO CAN USE A STICK TO CREATE A HOLE AND PLACE A COUPLE OF SEEDS IN THE GROUND.

Biorn: Seeds like bitter brush, like this little plant, are like ice cream for the deer.

Cartan-Hansen: SO, BIORN AND OTT USE SMALL PLASTIC CAGES TO PROTECT THE PLANTS SO THEY HAVE A CHANCE TO TAKE ROOT AND GROW.

Biorn: And hopefully by this time next year, we’ll have a nice little bitterbrush plant growing and ready for those mule deer to eat.

Cartan-Hansen: ABOUT SEVEN THOUSAND MULE DEER AND NEARLY 1200 ELK WINTER ON THE BOISE RIVER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA.

AND FIRE ISN’T THE BIGGEST THREAT TO THEIR HABITAT.

WHAT IS?

FRAGMENTATION, AREAS DIVIDED BY ROADS, HOMES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

Biorn: Animals that used to travel thousands of miles, without any interruption by those things, still have to travel thousands of miles but now have infrastructure in the way.

Cartan-Hansen: SO, ONE OF THE WAYS WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS TRY TO HELP ANIMALS GET AROUND ROAD BLOCKS IS TO BUILD A WILDLIFE UNDERPASS, LIKE THIS ONE ON HIGHWAY 21.

THIS ALLOWS THE ANIMALS TO PASS SAFELY UNDER THE ROAD.

WHEN ELK AND DEER COME ACROSS THE RESERVOIR, THEY FIRST FIND AN 8 FOOT EXCLUSION FENCE.

Ott: As they hit the fence they’ll follow the fence, they want to go through it but they can’t so they’ll follow the fence. They’ll come up along here and they’ll hit the underpass. When they hit the underpass They can get through safely to the other side where they can continue their summer migration.

Underneath the wildlife underpass here we use cameras. We have them set up at each corner.

So, it will give us an idea of whose moving through, what number of groups are moving through and what time of year they’re moving through.

Cartan-hansen: IT’S ESSENTIAL THAT HERDS HAVE ACCESS TO THEIR WHOLE MIGRATION ROUTE TO MAKE SURE THEY DON’T GET ISOLATED FROM OTHER HERDS.

Biorn: And that’s what happens a lot of the time when highways and infrastructures, it closes those populations off. And overtime, that population isn’t as diverse and disease can be spread easier and that population eventually can get so small that they can’t reproduce.

Cartan-hansen: SO, PART OF KEEPING A HERD STRONG IS KEEPING ITS HABITAT HEALTHY AND WHOLE.

IT ISN’T AN EASY JOB, BUT IT’S SOMETHING BIORN HAS WANTED TO DO EVER SINCE SHE WAS A KID.

Biorn: Being a biologist has really fit that desire that I’ve had, allows me to be outside. It allows me to interact with people but also with the wildlife that I love.

Cartan-Hansen: SO, IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT BECOMING A WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST OR MORE ABOUT HABITATS, CHECK OUT THE SCIENCE TREK WEBSITE.

YOU’LL FIND IT AT IDAHOPTV.ORG/SCIENCETREK.

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