



Wasatch-Cache National Forest

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

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Local Wildlife Biologist Receives National Conservation Award

Salt Lake City, Utah, March 7, 2008 - Steve Blatt, USFS, Zone Wildlife Biologist for both the Ogden and Logan Ranger Districts has been awarded the Mule Deer/Blacktail Deer National Conservation Award for his hard work on the Wellsville Wildlife Habitat Restoration/Enhancement Project. This project restored and enhanced deer summer and winter range for the Cache Deer Herd by seeding 107 acres of plowed barren fields and planting 22,960 bareroot seedlings of sagebrush, bitterbrush, serviceberry shrub species.

In 2005, the USFS acquired 603 acres of the Murray property (private lands) for 2.35 million dollars. The Murray property is truly a gem which greatly adds to the value of the local area. The acquired land is associated with the Wellsville Mountain range and adjacent wilderness area; without acquisition, these lands easily would have been developed as is much of the benchlands within Cache Valley. While the acquired lands were purchased using Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds with the assistance from Trust for Public Lands; funds were not provided for the restoration of the land, much of which consisted of barren farm fields.

During the acquisition process, it was recognized that quick action would need to occur to restore and enhance the lands. A partnership project proposal was developed and submitted through the Mule Deer Foundation for financial assistance for the restoration of the lands. Without the assistance of partners, funding would not likely be obtained to restore the fields into productive wildlife habitat. Together a joint partnership was formed between the US Forest Service, the Mule Deer Foundation, and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

The lower elevation benchlands and foothills within Cache Valley are especially important as deer habitat since much of these areas have been and are being encroached upon by urban development. The project objectives were to:

- Restore and enhance lands through the conversion of plowed barren fields into valuable wildlife habitat by seeding and seedling planting of wildlife cover and forage species.
- Improve big game (mule deer and moose) winter, summer, and fawning range.
- Build and maintain partnerships through involvement and assistance in the management of deer and their habitat.
- Improve habitat conditions for the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, a forest service sensitive species and for other sagebrush obligate species.
- Develop a source of native shrub seed for restoration and enhancement projects along the Wasatch-front which will benefit numerous wildlife species.
- Promote National Program Initiatives (e.g. Million Bucks, Making Tracks, Every Species Counts).
- Reduce watershed degradation and sedimentation within streams, riparian areas, and other wetlands.

In addition to the Cache Deer Herd, several other species will benefit from converting the farmland into wildlife habitat: upland game bird species such as pheasants, wild turkeys, and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, numerous songbirds such as the Brewer's sparrow and Vesper's sparrow; and additional big game species such as the moose.

Steve Blatt was presented the award on Friday, February 8, 2008 at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo banquet. The award was presented by Bill Burbidge, Mule Deer Foundation Board of Directors representative and Brian Ferebee, Acting Wasatch-Cache National Forest Supervisor on behalf of Gail Kimball, Chief of the Forest Service.

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