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News Release



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Spring Break 2011 — Nevada Students Skip the Beach Alternative Spring Break on Desert National Wildlife Refuge

LAS VEGAS – A group of Nevada college students opted to spend their recent spring break doing something to benefit wildlife, rather than hitting the beach at some Gulf Coast resort. The students spent the week performing maintenance work on the Desert National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in southern Nevada.



UNR student Tom Knapp (left) works to extract a fence post with assistance from Barry Morgan, a member of Friends of Nevada Wilderness. Knapp is one of nine college students who spent their spring break to help the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service remove an old fence on the Desert National Wildlife Refuge north of Las Vegas. *Photo courtesy of Kurt Kuznicki, Friends of Nevada Wilderness*

Nine students — eight from the University of Nevada, Reno and one from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas — teamed with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) employees, the Friends of Nevada Wilderness, and local volunteers to remove an old fence from a ridge on the Desert NWR. Eight interns from the Student Conservation Association also worked on the project. The students camped at the nearby Pahranaagat NWR.

The fence was erected years ago on “Enclosure Ridge” (its unofficial name) for a study of Desert bighorn sheep. The ridge is located in the far northeast corner of the 1.5-million-acre wildlife refuge, near its shared boundary with the Pahranaagat NWR. The fence no longer served a useful purpose; it prevented the movement of wildlife and blocked their access to water in that part of the refuge.

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“This was no easy task,” said Harry Konwin, volunteer coordinator for the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex. “The team had to cut and bundle the wire, remove the iron fence posts, and carry all of it across steep and rocky terrain. The materials were loaded onto a truck and hauled away for recycling.”

(Right) Jessica Ogens from UNLV wrestles with a section of wire fencing material she removed from an iron post. Ogens and eight other Nevada college students spent their spring break dismantling and removing some 3,000 feet of fence from a remote ridge on the Desert National Wildlife Refuge near Las Vegas. *Photo courtesy of Kurt Kuznicki, Friends of Nevada Wilderness*

The 8-foot-tall fence was nearly 3,000 feet in length and was topped with rows of barbed wire. The fence line was along a slope 700 feet in elevation from the base of the ridge and 2.3 miles from the parking site. In all, the group removed three tons of fencing materials.

The project took 1,393 hours, of which 1,023 hours were logged by volunteers. Based on the federal pay scale, the volunteers saved the Service \$21,330.



“We rely a great deal on volunteers for help on the wildlife refuges,” said Kevin DesRoberts, deputy project leader for the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex. “Our volunteers save the taxpayers a great deal of money and they truly enjoy supporting the Service mission.”

The Desert NWR (www.fws.gov/desertcomplex/desertrange) is approximately 23 miles north of Las Vegas on U.S. Highway 95. A sign on the east side of the highway marks the turnoff to the four-mile gravel road leading to Corn Creek. The wildlife refuge was established May 20, 1936, for the conservation and development of wildlife resources, including the desert bighorn sheep. At 1.5 million acres, it is the largest national wildlife refuge in the continental United States.

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(From Left) UNR students Toby Marble, Kelli Belmont, and Carlos Toca take a well-deserved break during a day of work on the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. They joined six other Nevada college students on an alternative spring break as volunteers helping the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service tear down and remove more than one-half-mile of wire fence on the Desert National Wildlife Refuge near Las Vegas. The old fence was impeding Desert bighorn sheep and other wildlife from reaching a water source. *Photo courtesy of Kurt Kuznicki, Friends of Nevada Wilderness*

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.