

National Elk Refuge News

New Shed to Support Habitat Conservation – June 10, 2016



IBEW Local Union 322 workers construct a much-needed shed that will store elk antlers on the National Elk Refuge.

Though the phrase, “the Shed Shed” seems redundant, it’s the appropriate nickname given to a structure near completion on the National Elk Refuge, one that came to be through conservation partnerships and community service volunteers.

Each spring, thousands of pounds of elk antlers are collected on the National Elk Refuge. The antlers are then stored until they’re bundled and sold at a public auction in May. The funds generated from the sale are used for habitat management projects on the Refuge.

For lack of a more secure and adequate-sized facility, the antlers are kept for several months in multiple locations, temporarily displacing Refuge equipment and storage space for employees. Though the Refuge had considered building a small structure to consolidate all the antlers in a central location, the costs and necessary staff to construct a more secure building kept the project from becoming a higher priority.

That’s where the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and the Union

Sportsmen’s Alliance came into play, two labor union organizations committed to habitat and wildlife conservation and community service work.

The IBEW represents approximately 750,000 active members and retirees who work in a wide variety of fields, including utilities, construction, telecommunications, broadcasting, manufacturing, railroads, and government. The IBEW is one of the largest American unions in the AFL-CIO and has members representing a wide array of skilled occupations.



parks as well as inside electricians and linemen, bringing to the project a diversity of skill sets. Roughly 40 volunteers donated their time to construct the shed, including building parts of the structure off-site, hauling them to the Refuge headquarters, and assembling the shed on site.

Johnson had tee shirts made up for those that worked on the project, with the Local Union 322 logo on the front and the phrase “Shed Shed” prominently displayed on the back. In addition to referencing an outbuilding, a ‘shed’ is a term often used to describe an antler that has dropped off a bull elk in the spring. “We had some fun with the name,” Johnson explained, “and it really added to the team dynamics during the construction.”

Bruce Johnson, an organizer for Wyoming’s IBEW Local Union 322, had read about the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance (USA) and its conservation initiative that organizes Union members who share a passion for the outdoors to complete hands-on, community-based conservation projects. It piqued his interest in identifying a service project somewhere in Wyoming where the Local Union 322 could volunteer trade skills that would benefit conservation work in the state. Johnson connected with USA staff at a membership development conference, and the meeting resulted in outreach to the Department of the Interior to find pending Wyoming conservation projects in need of volunteer assistance.

“So many of our members are elk hunters,” Johnson explained, “there was a lot of interest for this particular project, and we could offer the trade skills to make it happen.” USA Development Manager Walt Ingram agreed it was a perfect fit for their group, and the project was selected.

Numerous businesses provided services or donated materials for free or at reduced costs. They included:

The IBEW Local 322 is comprised of carpenters, painters, mechanics, electricians, and other skilled laborers from two area national

- Evans Construction
- Four Corners Concrete
- Teton Trusses
- Jackson Lumber

The National Elk Refuge, already a leader within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mountain-Prairie region for recruiting and securing volunteer hours, submitted five potential projects for consideration. The one most appealing to both the IBEW and USA was the construction of a 20’ x 26’ storage shed for housing the antlers collected on the Refuge.



Volunteers working on the shed brought a variety of skills to the project.

- TruLog Siding
- Garage Door Handy Man
- Lower Valley Energy REA
- 98 Electric
- Echo Services
- Mountain Electric

Additionally, several Local Union 322 members stepped out of their routine areas of expertise to take on leadership roles. Steve LaRosa, Greg Moyer, Jack Shinkle, and JD McMurdo, who all reside in western Wyoming near the Refuge headquarters in Jackson, were key players in both planning and logistics for the project.

In addition to the Refuge now having a building for antler storage, local youth Nathan Watson has completed the service work required for his pursuit of achieving an Eagle Scout status. The award represents the highest achievement within the Boy Scout organization, based on skills such as leadership, organization, and

the ability to work with others. It also includes working from beginning to end on a project that will benefit the community.

Nathan has volunteered for the National Elk Refuge through his Boy Scout organization since the age of six. For the past 12 years, he has helped with the Jackson District Boy Scout antler auction, working with Refuge staff to collect antlers and helping display antlers on the day of the sale. His image was used on a poster produced by the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce in 2010 to advertise the auction, and he is also featured on an interpretive panel produced for the Refuge's visitor center in 2009. Selecting an Eagle Scout project that would benefit the Refuge, then, was a fitting choice.

Nathan's primary focus on this job was the planning and implementation of the shed's

foundation, which was finished several weeks ago. However, he will continue working on the building again this weekend to see it through to completion.

IBEW will film at the Refuge this weekend, capturing the final stages of work to use in an "IBEW Hour Power" episode, a short news brief video highlighting USA's "Work Boots on the Ground" initiative.



Left photo: Nathan Watson, left, stands on stage with his brother, Trevor, and Will Dykema during the 2008 Boy Scout Elk Antler Auction. Right photo: Eight years later, Nathan helps Kevin Anderson pour concrete for the shed's foundation at the National Elk Refuge.

