



open SPACES

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACE

 Sagebrush
Steppe Land Trust
For Generations To Come

SPRING 2026

Our mission is to protect, connect, and enhance wildlife habitat, working lands, and community spaces in Southeast Idaho, now and for future generations.

Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust

109 N. Arthur Ave., Suite 300
PO Box 1404
Pocatello, ID 83204
208.240.6045
www.sagebrushlandtrust.org

Mission

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Cover Photo

By: Sarah Jackson, a juniper hairstreak butterfly on a showy goldeneye flower at Century Heights Preserve.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Wow, what a year! 2026 is off to a great start with the closing of two easements in the Bear River Watershed. These two easements increase our protected lands to just over 11,000 acres.

Thanks to our hard-working team led by Matt Coombs, our partnerships, members, and donors, this work is completed. This is why we are here, and this allows us to keep the Idaho that we see to today the Idaho we will see tomorrow!

I am honored and humbled by every gift, donation, and sacrifice made by our members, our partners, and our team. What a joy to be a part of a group of people working so hard and giving so much to ensure that we protect our little corner of the globe.

Please help us to continue our work, and celebrate our accomplishments, by remembering that our work does not get done without the generosity of our communities, our partners and our members. Help us continue this work by remembering to contribute during Idaho Gives in May.

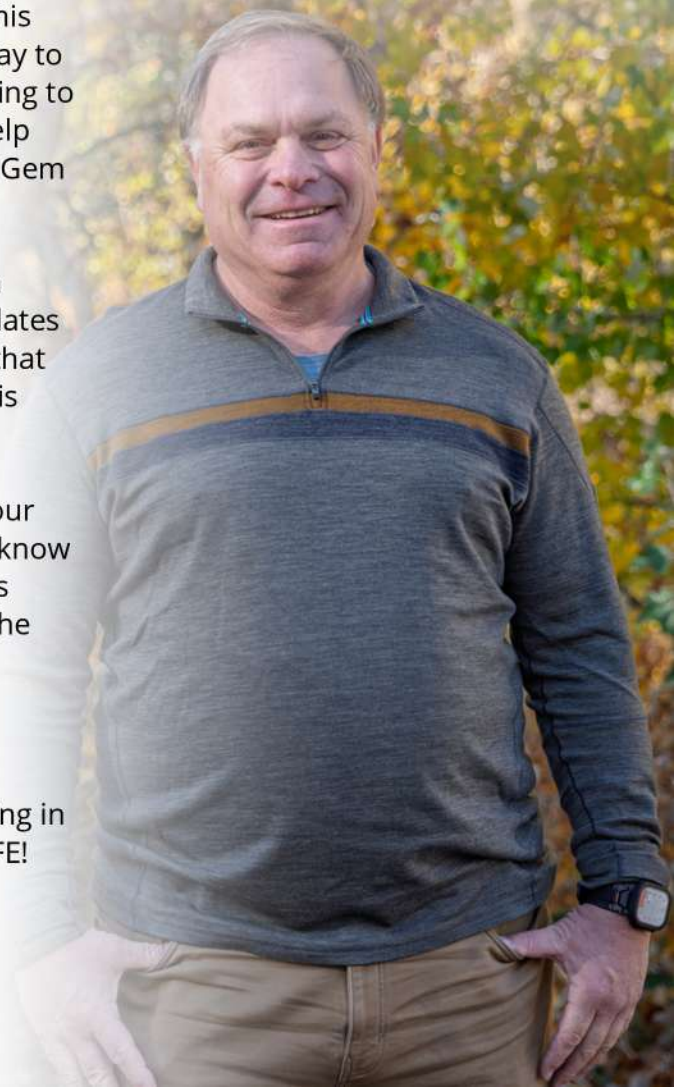
We are specifically targeting the growth of our internship program with the proceeds from Idaho Gives this year. I cannot think of a better way to further our mission than by helping to endear the next generation to help preserve our beautiful state, the Gem of all States!

Please enjoy this edition of Open Spaces. I hope this gives you updates and insight to our progress and that you enjoy the beauty of Idaho this spring and summer.

Best wishes and thank you for your generosity and kindness. Please know that any donation — whether it is money, time, energy, smashing the like button or subscribing — is helpful to our mission and greatly appreciated.

Thanks again, think about swinging in for a coffee, and please STAY SAFE!

Heath Mann
Executive Director



Meet our newest sagebrush stepper

We are thrilled to welcome Charlotte Holman to the team as our 2026 stewardship intern. Charlotte is a graduate student in ISU's Geography Information System. Originally from France, Charlotte loves the outdoors and getting to enjoy Idaho's abundance of open spaces.

"I can't wait to see what this internship will teach me and how I'll learn from the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust team," she said.

Charlotte will be supporting our stewardship team in monitoring and managing SSLT's 11,000-plus acres of protected lands. We are grateful to have her on board this season!



Sign up for our new e-newsletter

from the field
Conservation news and notes



PROTECTING WHAT MATTERS:

New easements safeguard habitat and heritage

This winter, we were thrilled to announce the permanent conservation of over 800 acres of open space, wildlife habitat and agricultural land through conservation easements on two adjacent properties in Franklin County.

With the addition of these two important conservation easements, Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust has now protected more than 11,300 acres across Southeast Idaho.

"These are red-letter days for us," said Heath Mann, SSLT's executive director. "I am humbled by the landowners' desire to preserve their legacy. Together, we are protecting the Idaho we love today for the Idaho we hope to see tomorrow."

The conserved lands provide important habitat for mule deer, elk, moose, sharp-tailed grouse, Bonneville cutthroat trout and several other conservation-priority species while also preserving southeast Idaho's strong agricultural heritage and boosting rural economy. The properties connect thousands of acres of public lands in the area, preserving wildlife migration corridors and the landscape connectivity that supports long-term ecosystem resilience.

"These conservation easements are a win-win for both agriculture and wildlife," said Matt Coombs, the Bear River Watershed conservation director for SSLT and the Bear River Land Conservancy in Utah.

"It's been a pleasure to work with the landowners to protect their legacy as well as the many public benefits these lands provide."

Both properties have been owned and managed by the same family for several generations and will remain in active agricultural use. The permanent protection of these properties reflects the landowners' long-standing commitment to caring for the land and keeping it open and available for agriculture and ranching for future generations.



A moose on one of the newly-protected private properties. The conserved lands provide important habitat for other species as well, including mule deer, elk, sharp-tailed grouse and Bonneville cutthroat trout.

“Our motivation for doing a conservation easement is simple,” said one of the landowners, who asked to remain anonymous. “We love the land and the wildlife that lives there and want to preserve its quality for the future.”

In addition to its ecological and agricultural values, the protected acreage offers striking scenic beauty, with mountain views, rolling hills and a winding creek. The diverse landscape supports significant riparian corridors and a wide range of native plants, including big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, Rocky Mountain maple and native grasses.

Conservation easements are voluntary agreements that limit development in order to protect agricultural lands, wildlife habitat or other open space resources that provide significant benefits for current and future generations while keeping the land in private ownership. Landowners and land trusts work together to establish the specific terms of a conservation easement, tailoring each agreement to the unique conservation values of the property and the goals and interests of both parties.

Funding for these projects was provided through partnerships with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), PacifiCorp through the Bear River Hydroelectric Project Environmental Coordination Committee and support from private donors.

These projects illustrate the continued success of the larger Bear River Watershed Collaborative among SSLT, Bear River Land Conservancy, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Intermountain West Joint Venture, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and others to provide conservation opportunities that enable private landowners to continue farming and ranching while preserving important wildlife habitat and open space resources.

“These new agreements are landmark conservation gains for the Bear River Watershed,” said Mark Gamblin, past president of SSLT’s board of directors. “We are proud to help landowners secure the legacy they want for their land and way of life.”

WHO COMES AFTER US?

Fostering the next generation of conservation stewards

By Emma Morton, Development Coordinator

As we see increased threats to open spaces across southeast Idaho, we recognize that an integral part of our work is preparing the next generation of conservation professionals to continue this vital work.

One of the ways we do this is by hosting an annual intern with our stewardship team. This internship position gets on-the-ground experience working to monitor and manage protected lands while also being able to improve their GIS, writing, research and other in-office skills.

This program has set up a number of interns to pursue further graduate education or careers in the environmental science or conservation-related fields. We are proud of the work our interns do with the stewardship team, and hope to sustainably support and build this opportunity for years to come.

Often times, these interns have come through the Idaho State University Career Path Internship program, which helps our organization offset some of the associated costs. To fill the remaining funding gap, we fundraise an additional \$8,000 to \$10,000 each year. This helps ensure that we are providing a well-compensated, impactful work experience in the conservation field.

One of our long-term goals is to build a self-sustaining internship program while expanding its impact. We believe that creating accessible pathways into environmental careers — by offering paid opportunities to learn and work — is just as important as providing meaningful, hands-on experience in both the field and the office.

By supporting early-career development, we not only strengthen our own organization but also contribute to the broader conservation community by helping cultivate the next generation of conservation stewards.

This May, you can become part of the effort to support interns and future conservationists.

This Idaho Gives, make a difference and double your impact

This year, we are proud to focus our Idaho Gives fundraising campaign specifically on strengthening our internship program. On top of that, we will **match your gifts dollar-for-dollar up to \$10,000** thanks to a generous donor, Karla Drewsen. Karla has been a longtime supporter, board member and advocate for Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust. With a background and professional career in land and conservation work, Karla is passionate about fostering the next generation of conservation stewards. She is excited to provide this matching gift to double your impact this Idaho Gives.

"I am thrilled to champion the internship program at Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust, dedicated to shaping the conservation leaders of tomorrow," Karla said. "This initiative is a gateway to understanding the inner workings of a land trust. SSLT is already doing an exemplary job in preserving and protecting the unique landscapes of southeastern Idaho. Now, we have the chance to inspire our youth with knowledge and passion for conservation, empowering them to safeguard the natural wonders they cherish."

Join Karla by donating to Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust's internship program during Idaho Gives, May 4 -7. Your donation — no matter the amount — will be doubled. And your impact will be felt for generations to come as we build conservation professionals from the ground up, starting in the field right here in Southeast Idaho.

IDAHO GIVES

May 4th -7th

Donate to support our internship program and help foster the next generation of conservationists. Every dollar, up to \$10,000, will be matched!





Karla Drewsen, a longtime supporter, board member and advocate for SSLT, is matching Idaho Gives donations dollar-for-dollar, up to \$10,000. "SSLT is already doing an exemplary job in preserving and protecting the unique landscapes of southeastern Idaho," Drewsen said. "Now we have the chance to inspire our youth with knowledge and passion for conservation, empowering them to safeguard the natural wonders they cherish."



The internship with SSLT "did open doors for me in other scientific fields and allowed me to be an advocate for the conservation and environmental field," said 2019 intern Sasha Black.



Charlotte Holman is our 2026 stewardship intern. "I can't wait to see what this internship will teach me and how I'll learn from the SSLT team," she said.



Alec Lundell was a 2025 intern for SSLT. "The field data gathering paired with report writing will greatly help hone the fundamental skills required for all future environmental science endeavors I choose to pursue," Lundell said.



Our stewardship team, Eric Pankau and Hannah Clawson (from left), out in the field with 2025 intern Alec Lundell (on right). Photo by Sarah Jackson.

SOUVENIRS OF SPRING

Shed hunting, seasonal change, and the role of protected landscapes

By Matt Martens

Conservation easement project manager (Southeast Idaho)

The first one I found was in a long field of grass in the Oklahoma panhandle. I was walking with my father pheasant hunting. We were skirting the edge of a crop field, a long expanse of stubbled wheat stalks. It was cold and clear. Late December. To the east, the horizon birthed an orange paint across a wide blue canvass. An old windmill dotted an otherwise unbroken view. The sound of our twelve-year-old yellow lab Gunner flushed in and out of my ears. He panted and huffed as he swerved left to right, trailing the scent of long-gone roosters. I stopped to catch my breath, looked over to my father. He was walking with his head down, watching his step. I followed suit. There on the ground, huddled like an easter egg in a sea of Buffalo grass and Big Blue Stem, was a shed antler.

Ungulates such as deer, elk, and moose shed their antlers once a year between December and April depending on location and species. It is a mysterious act, and I've personally watched bulls and bucks shake their heads with one antler until the other one plops off and sits there placid on the ground, waiting for a rodent to gnaw on the nutrients or a hiker like me to pick it up. Sometimes they drop both antlers on top of one another. Sometimes they carry a single side for miles. The decrease in daylight hours triggers a drop in testosterone which weakens the connection between skull and antler. Antlers are the fastest growing bone in the world, and this annual discarding is part of the regenerative process.

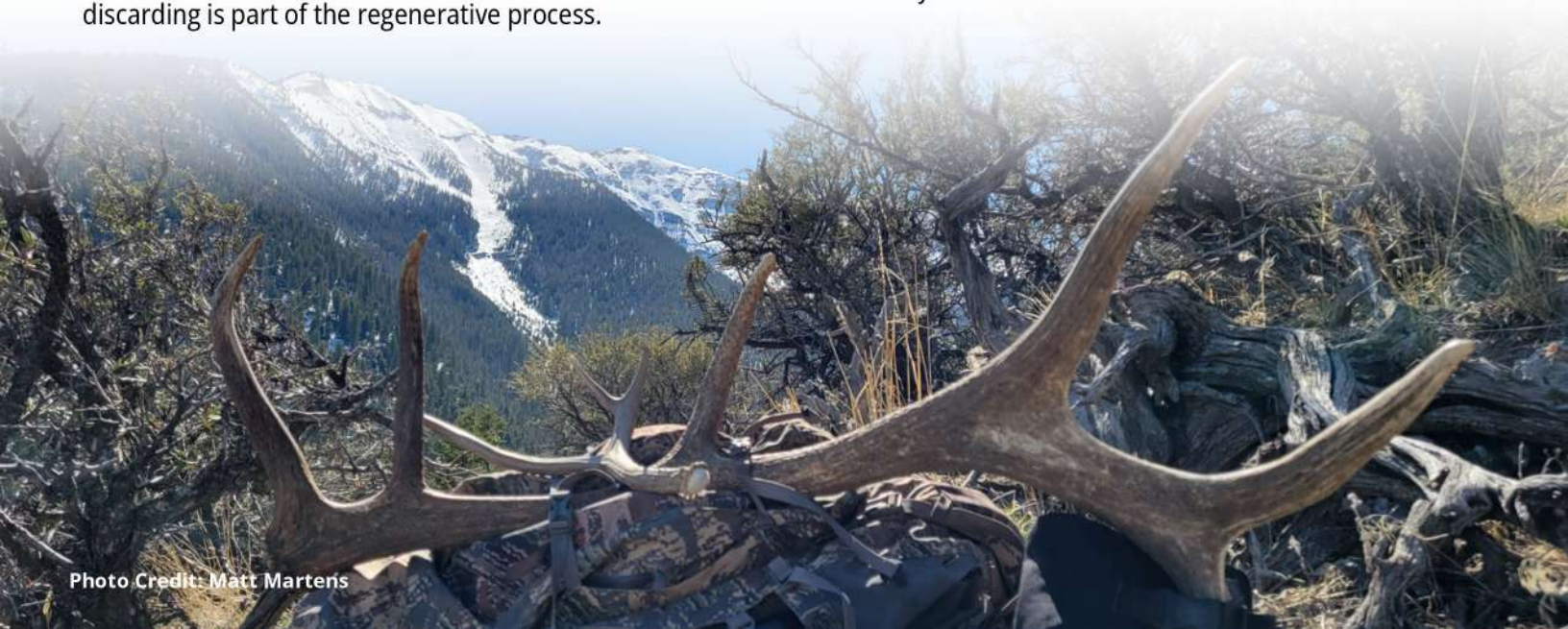


These males use their antlers to battle for breeding rights, and when the rut is over, it's time to rest and replenish their reserves. This is also at a time when winter is kicking into high gear, and this headgear can weigh anywhere from 3 to 20 pounds per side. Dropping their antlers helps in the recovery process, trimming weight as these animals get back into fighting shape. Nature's version of a New Year's resolution.

“...at daybreak I am the sole owner of all the acres I can walk over. It is not only boundaries that disappear, but the thought of being bounded.

– Aldo Leopold – A Sand County Almanac

The sport of shed hunting, that is, walking and hiking in the woods and hills in search of these antlers, has boomed in popularity over the last decade. Large scale antler buyers hit the highways every year, stopping at rural crossroads to offer cash for as much “poundage” as they can get. This trade, combined with popularity on social media, has put tremendous pressure on wildlife populations at a time when they don't need it.



The old-timers talk about the days when they had the mountains all to themselves, leaving with heavy packs and truck-beds full of “brown gold”, a term hash-tagged by influencers today to increase their following. Now, trailheads are crammed on opening days – established kick-off dates much akin to the beginning of hunting seasons. The demand has once again surpassed the supply, and regulations are put in place to manage the resources. Many states, like Idaho, require some form of license to participate. This time of year is extremely vulnerable for big-game species. Here in the west, they are moving from their traditional summer and fall ranges to wintering grounds at lower elevations. This allows them to find sustenance not buried in snow, and they huddle together in herds reaching the hundreds, if not thousands. If these animals are pushed at a time when their reserves are down, it can be deadly.

Conservation easements are part of the mosaic of a protected landscape, and with this increased pressure, they become an important tool. As these animals move across a region, they need large acreages where they can roam undisturbed. Much like wildlife management areas and national parks, conservation easements can serve as a safe space for migratory and resident herds as they recover and prepare for another year. In fact, since conservation easements are negotiated on private lands, and private lands make up the largest portions of these vital transitional zones, they become an essential component of a network of ever-changing lands. It's a balance, and it's tough to manage, but it becomes a win-win. The more we can ensure healthy wildlife populations, the more antlers there will be shining in the sunlight come spring, whether we pick them up or not.

Shed hunting, when done responsibly, can be a great way to get outside and gain appreciation of our natural resources. I lace up my boots and head out every year. It's an excuse to hike after sitting inside most of the winter. I try to make sure I go when the herds have moved back up the mountain, but it's not an exact science. Some animals move sooner than others. Some lag behind. Some never leave at all. Part of recreating in the great outdoors means there will be some crossover. We do the best we can. It's about limiting risk, not eliminating it entirely.

SOUVENIR – Something kept as a reminder (as of a place once visited)

There is something invigorating about cresting a ridge or weaving through a sagebrush ravine with a hopeful eye. Each step unveils new topography, like a movie showing you a new scene every few seconds. These experiences build reverence which serves as a catalyst for a desire to protect what you see. And just when you least expect it, there's an antler lying there in the middle of nowhere, a kind of natural treasure once worn by the princes and kings of mountains and prairies. Sometimes it's big and fresh, the smell of pine still permeating from the grooves between the tines. Sometimes it's old and cracked, partially chewed by mice and squirrels and porcupines who savor the calcium, phosphorus, and protein inside. Regardless, it's a kind of wild souvenir. You can take it home to decorate your fireplace hearth. You can take a picture and toss it back on the ground, leaving it to the mice and bears. I like to think of it as a gift. An offering. And the best offerings are reciprocated. Supporting land trusts and other conservation groups is a way of giving back to the process. I doubt the deer and elk notice, but that doesn't really matter. What matters is that they have a place to exist at all.

Oh, and that first shed I found at sixteen walking with my dad? It was found in what we called a CRP field. Conservation Reserve Program - a program offered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) established to pay farmers an annuity to preserve soils and promote native grasses. Dad and Gunner aren't walking with me anymore, but the program still exists. Much like conservation easements which are made in perpetuity. That means there's a deer in Oklahoma or an elk in Idaho carrying an easter egg on its head today. He's going to drop it this spring. If you're lucky, you just might find it.



Author's note: Shed hunting can be a fun and rewarding pursuit, but it needs to be enjoyed responsibly. Make sure and research the laws and regulations governing the land you plan to explore. Shed hunting is banned in certain areas like Yellowstone National Park, and regulations change annually to account for changing weather conditions and the status of wildlife populations. If you see herds huddled up, back out and come back in a few weeks. Use your best judgement. Clout on social media doesn't mean much if there's nothing left to take pictures of.



FROM IDAHO ROOTS TO CONSERVATION ART: Meet Mary Arnold

We're excited to introduce you to our new Artist in Residence, Mary Arnold. Arnold is a native Idahoan and a passionate conservation artist.

"I'm so thrilled to be the new AiR for the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust for 2026," Arnold said. "I'm especially excited because of my interest in how we can conserve migration paths for our wildlife, and SSLT has a strong focus on preserving critical migration and overwintering properties."

Arnold grew up outside of Buhl, Idaho, in Twin Falls County, as the youngest child of farmer-rancher parents. Her fiercely independent childhood was full of experiences with animals. She built forts in rock piles to hang out with marmots, explored Idaho's fields and hills, and rode her horses to steep-walled canyons or rocky buttes.

She worked on the farm, competed in rodeos, and spent summers in the Sawtooths. She named and tamed every farm cat, and still laughs remembering how she played hide-and-go-seek with her dogs in the cornfields. Animals were her companions and the landscapes of Idaho were her playground. It was then that the roots of being a conservation artist were planted.

Growing up rural, the connection between the stewardship of land and animals and the success of humans was a very real daily lesson. As she grew up, she carried with her the lessons of youth and her concerns for preservation of holistic ecosystems. She attended undergraduate school in Austin, Texas, and graduate school in Arizona, and her love of the west spread beyond Idaho. Now she resides in Boise with her husband and two dogs.

"I direct my art practice in support of heritage and conservation topics, collaborating with land trusts, state and national parks, nonprofit organizations, and wildlife rehabilitation efforts," Arnold said. "I seek to explore the crossroads of our western mountains, plains, and sagebrush ecosystems, the balanced use of the land, and the impact on wildlife and species survival. I'm very interested in figuring out what prompts us to take steps to preserve our heritage, wildlife, and open spaces."



Mule Deer in Snow Storm by Mary Arnold



Snow Geese Migration by Mary Arnold

Arnold just completed a two-year project aimed to better understand the science behind ungulate migrations in Idaho, spending countless hours in the field photographing animals, attending a pronghorn workshop, reading scientific studies, and researching how animals move through, around and in our environs. This project culminated with a solo exhibition of 49 pieces of art covering 30 different species this March at the Crossroads Carnegie in Baker, Oregon.

"This was a very intensive project for me which resulted in an even deeper interest in studying migrations and learning what we can do to help our wildlife," Arnold said. "Some of the biggest risks to wildlife migrations are climate change, more roads and cars, lack of wildlife-friendly fencing, and increased development causing fragmentation of the migration paths, especially for species who have high fidelity to their migration paths. Pronghorns are especially susceptible to migration path fragmentation. A simple fence can affect the whole herd and cause it to die out.



Deer on Snowy Hill by Mary Arnold

Other species are a bit less susceptible, finding ways around the interruptions."

Arnold is looking forward to the residency this year and getting out into the SSLT properties for monitoring, exploring habitats, painting wildlife, and conducting outreach for our organization. If you see her at any of our tabled events such as the Poky Paddle, please stop by and introduce yourself.

Arnold will also be teaching a Nature Journaling class for us in early June. For more information, go to sagebrushlandtrust.org

You can follow Arnold on Instagram at [@mgarnoldart](https://www.instagram.com/mgarnoldart). Visit her website and sign up for her monthly newsletter at: www.mgarnoldart.com



A Stare of Owls by Mary Arnold



LEARNING TO LOOK CLOSER:

A Year of Discovery in the Sagebrush Steppe

By Abby Kiefner, Office Administrator

I was introduced to Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust (SSLT) through a friend in March 2025 and responded to a job posting that would send me on a new trajectory making the spaces I had come to call home even more dear.

Working at SSLT over the last year has not only taught me about land conservation but also about native plants, animals, volunteers, local history, and the importance of preserving these spaces for the next generations. Before I came to Sagebrush Steppe, I had always been a lover of the outdoors and the peace these landscapes brought, but I now have an even greater appreciation for the connectivity and relationships these spaces provide as a whole.



Curlew National Grassland restoration project
Photo by: Abby Kiefner



Sunset at a local trail in Pocatello
Photo by: Abby Kiefner

Joining the Idaho Fish & Game's High Desert Chapter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program this year has also been instrumental in broadening my perspective on conservation and the value open spaces hold. I have learned about a wide range of topics, from weather patterns in Southeast Idaho, to ungulate migration routes, and even identifying different types of scat (who knew that could be so interesting?) I am constantly in awe of the people, places, plants, and animals that make up our community.

Whether walking my dogs down Main Street on Sunday morning or adventuring around Scout Mountain on a fall day, I find myself taking those moments to really look around and notice the little things. I want to know the name of the budding flower with the blue petals and the bird singing in the tree. I want to know what I can grow in my own yard to encourage pollination and provide a safe haven for bees and monarch butterflies. Taking the time to really pause and witness how often our paths intertwine and how pivotal our roles in each other's lives has been such a humbling and rewarding experience. It's not about being an expert, it's about being curious.

The next time you are out and about take a minute to slow down, look around, get your hands dirty, meet a bee, or lay in the grass; you might be surprised by the questions you find yourself asking and the answers that arise.



Goldenrod Crab Spider blends in on a flower on protected lands
Photo by: Abby Kiefner



Sacajawea Park pollinator garden
Photo by: Abby Kiefner

WUDA OGWA



WEEDING DAYS

*Select Fridays in Spring through June,
beginning April 24, 2026*

10am– 1pm

Volunteer with the **Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation** for an upcoming weeding day to help new plants at the **Wuda Ogwa restoration site!**

Near Preston, ID - 2 hour drive from Salt Lake area.

*Scan to learn more
& sign up:*



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Event Calendar

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES | SPRING AND SUMMER 2026

Volunteer with the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation and partners for weeding and planting days at Wuda Ogwa near Preston. Get more details and sign up at sagebrushlandtrust.org

IDAHO GIVES | MAY 4-7

Contribute to our internship program and help us foster the next generation of conservationists. Your gift will be doubled during Idaho Gives!

POKY PADDLE | JUNE 5

Float the Portneuf River, then celebrate at Centennial Park in Pocatello from 5 – 9 p.m. We will have a booth there and would love to say hi!

NATURE JOURNALING CLASS | JUNE 6

Take a nature journaling class from our Artist in Residence, Mary Arnold, at the Idaho Museum of Natural History. Sign up at sagebrushlandtrust.org.

POLLINATOR CELEBRATION | JUNE 27

Celebrate pollinators with us during this fun, educational event at Edson Fichter Nature Area.