

Project Pinecone

Idaho Daughters Help Regrow Trees in Sawtooth National Forest

BY FIONA BROADIE

Sawtooth Mountains



Somewhere in the middle of the sagebrush seas, alpine tundra, spruce-fir forests and glittering lakes of the Sawtooth National Forest, you will find a tiny town called Stanley. Nestled deep in the Sawtooth Valley, Stanley, Idaho, is the type of town where everyone knows everyone (the population was 116 in 2020).

Janice Beller, Idaho State Regent, grew up camping with her family around nearby Stanley Lake and has many wonderful memories there. Her family has been visiting for generations. That's why it was particularly hard for her when a lightning strike caused the July 2024 Wapiti Fire, which ravaged the lake and more than 130,000 surrounding acres of Idaho forest.

"When Stanley Lake burned, I was absolutely devastated," she said. "It just broke my heart. I also was thinking of Stanley and its residents. Tourism is the economic driver of the small town, and I worried this fire would keep people away."

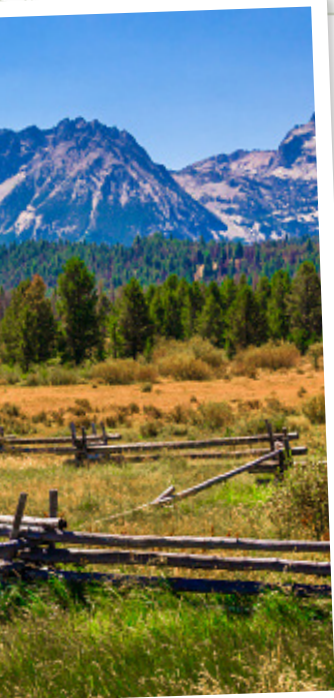
Ms. Beller posted on Facebook about the fire's devastation, which inspired State Chaplain Barbara Grant to contact the ranger station in Stanley and ask what they could do to help with the reforestation process. Sawtooth Recreation Ranger Nelson Mills shared the complicated process with Ms. Grant, who relayed the information to Ms. Beller.

It works like this: Expert pickers climb high into the crown of the trees where the pinecones are. They harvest the pinecones and take them to a forest nursery, where seeds are collected and germinated, growing into seedlings that are eventually replanted in the forest. Lucky Peak Nursery has

"Mrs. Pinecone Head"

A guest at the recent Idaho State Conference gifted Ms. Beller a Mrs. Potato Head in honor of the state's biggest agricultural export. Conference pages quickly decorated the doll with a sash. After the conference, Ms. Beller's father provided the finishing touches—a forest ranger's hat and pinecone—courtesy of his 3-D printer. "Needless to say, she's been a big hit as I've traveled to each chapter to talk about Project Pinecone," Ms. Beller said.





been storing seeds and growing trees and shrubs for replanting in Idaho's national forests since 1959. Still, when the Wapiti Fire started burning, there were only enough pinecone seeds to reforest about 50 acres.

"Thanks to Barbara's action and the information she gathered, my brain hamster went crazy," Ms. Beller said. "I started thinking, this is something DAR could help with."

In November 2024, Project Pinecone came to life. The forest was pining for help, so Ms. Beller started a fundraising page on PayPal and created a graphic symbol for the project. She also designed a souvenir magnet for people who donated \$10 or more.

As State Regent, she visited Idaho's chapters and spread the word about the project, accepting donations along the way. The project's original goal was to raise \$2,500, the amount needed for a single day of pinecone harvesting.

"Idaho Daughters are so incredibly generous; we easily met that goal in a few days," she said.

Then word started getting out. By the end of the month, Project Pinecone had raised \$5,000. With media attention and contributions from corporations such as Boise Cascade and Idaho Power, the Daughters have now raised over \$15,000, which is enough for six days of expert pinecone picking.

"Based on the pinecone math, we knew that six days of picking would yield us 140,000 seedlings—enough to cover the worst-hit areas identified by Stanley's forest rangers," Ms. Beller said.

On their first survey, the local rangers had determined that about 480 acres of Idahoan wilderness had been burned so severely and repeatedly there was no way they would naturally regenerate. Now, with the help of the DAR's project, the pines will grow in those areas again.

Donations for Project Pinecone have come from all over the United States. Almost 200 people have donated already, and Ms. Beller's new fundraising goal is an impressive \$20,000.

"I know what the forest means to me, and it doesn't surprise me that many people feel the same way about our forests and all the beautiful things contained within them," she said.

Ms. Beller believes Daughters must help the natural world prosper as much as possible and that a conservation project like Project Pinecone fits perfectly within the DAR's focus on historic preservation, education and patriotism.

"We have a responsibility to care for the land that nurtured this great country," she said. "By restoring these landscapes, we honor our nation's heritage, provide a resource for future generations to learn from and ensure that the natural beauty of our land endures for years to come."

3 Tips

FOR STARTING A CONSERVATION PROJECT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

1. GET CURIOUS: A successful conservation effort starts with truly understanding and seeking to fill the need. Contact nature experts in your area, such as park rangers or wildlife biologists, to find out what your community needs help with.

2. MAKE SPECIFIC GOALS:

Ms. Beller knew attempting to reforest the entire fire-ravaged area would be too daunting for Idaho Daughters. However, focusing on 480 of the most burned acres made the task more manageable. Specific goals, clearly communicated, are attainable goals.



3. THE MORE, THE MERRIER:

Helping Mother Nature out can take a lot of effort, so it's a good idea to engage a group of people to work together. Conservation projects are perfect for entire state societies or organizations or multiple chapters to help with. Posting about it on social media can also help expand your project's reach.