

Efforts under way to preserve Nevada butterfly habitat

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Through much of March, Ramona Cordasco and friends were in New Orleans rebuilding homes ravaged by Hurricane Katrina.

Last week, they were in the middle of the Nevada desert, climbing hills of sand so steep some likened it to trying to scale a vertical treadmill.

Cordasco, 22, and colleague Gina Giraldo, 25, paused part way up the slope, dug a hole, and planted a knee-high shrub pulled from a patch of nearby desert.

Volunteers with AmeriCorps, the two women were among a crew erasing some established off-highway vehicle trails at Sand Mountain, one of the West's largest and most popular sand dune formations.

It's part of an ongoing effort to protect a rare butterfly, the vegetation it depends upon and preserve the ability of off-roaders to continue to enjoy their sport at one of their favorite places.

"I like to think that I'm helping," said Cordasco of Cherry Hill, N.J. "It's definitely hard work climbing up and down every day, but I really hope it's going to help."

Work is being headed up by the nonprofit Great Basin Institute, which has taken over implementation of a near-\$1 million grant to manage activities at Sand Mountain and in doing so, protect the Sand Mountain blue butterfly.

Read the whole story