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Sam Morris / LAS VEGAS SUN

*An inmate from the women's prison in Jean breaks up a hot spot during a controlled burn in the Las Vegas Wash on Tuesday.*

## Wash getting a face-lift

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Officials used a controlled burn in the Las Vegas Wash this week to remove nuisance weeds as part of a program to restore native wetland plants. The Nevada Division of Forestry managed the blaze on 60 acres in the wash, east of Boulder Highway near Sunset Road. The weed-removal fire was part of the Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee's efforts to restore the 15-mile-long wetlands that run along the eastern edge of the Las Vegas Valley, spokeswoman Elizabeth Bickmore said.

The orange glow of flaming weeds died after 11 p.m. Monday, but Clark County firefighters remained at the site Tuesday to put out hot spots, Bickmore said. Three weeks ago another controlled burn cleared more weeds from about eight acres on the north side of the wash, she said.

While most of the weeds are tamarisks, also called salt cedars, Southern Nevada Water Authority biologists discovered another nuisance plant, perennial pepper, that has taken over thousands of acres in Northern Nevada's Truckee River, Bickmore said. "We found perennial pepper early and are trying to stop it from spreading," Bickmore said. In the past three years, volunteers have helped remove more than 1,500 acres of invasive plants.

The Las Vegas Wash plays a critical role in Southern Nevada's watershed, which drains 1,600 square miles from the surrounding mountain ranges. All of the Las Vegas Valley's shallow ground water, storm water, urban runoff and treated wastewater flow through the wash into Lake Mead, the source of about 90 percent of the local water supply. More than 300 species of fish, birds, animals and plants inhabit the wash.

Once nuisance weeds are removed, volunteers plant native trees and marshland vegetation. "The root systems of the shrubs and trees help hold the soil in place," said Keiba Crear, Las Vegas Wash Greenup coordinator. The plants also provide habitats for birds and animals living in the wash, Crear added. The Greenup project has replanted more than 1,000 trees and shrubs this year, Crear said. More than 28 federal, state and local agencies share responsibility for protecting and enhancing the Las Vegas Wash. Representatives formed the Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee in 1998 to develop and implement a long-term management plan for the channel.

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Don Sager from the Nevada Division of Forestry sprays foam on a hot spot during a controlled burn in the Las Vegas Wash on Tuesday.