

Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...



Mark Anderson of the Kooskia Volunteer Fire Department and Bruce Martinek of BLM met to sign agreements under the Rural Fire Department grant program.

BLM Upper Columbia Salmon-Clearwater District

Coordination, Communication, Cooperation, and how the “Three C’s” are increasing wildland firefighting capability for BLM in north and central Idaho.

The Upper Columbia Salmon-Clearwater District administers land north of the Salmon River in Idaho that is steep and dense with timber. Many people joke about how a north Idaho acre can contain more tree species per acre than anywhere else in

the United States. BLM land in central Idaho reflects this with a vegetation shift from fire tolerant to fire prone tree species.

An issue for fire managers in this area is how to increase their wildland fire fighting capability while also providing for the maximum degree of safety for the firefighters on the fire lines.

One answer is with the U.S. Department of the Interior Rural Fire Assistance Program. Assistance Agreements are negotiated with rural fire departments servicing communities with populations of less than 10,000 residents. The program can fund fire prevention activities, fire vehicles, training, and personal protective equipment (fire resistant clothing). The highest priority for items that will boost the safety for personnel engaged in wildland fire fighting.

The first “C”, to increase wildland fire fighting capability in north and central Idaho, is for Coordination. In January 2002, Bruce Martinek, BLM’s rural fire coordinator, began assessing how to approach the agreements for 2002. The Rural Fire Assistance Program was newly formed in 2001 and, as with any new program, BLM was looking for the most efficient way to get dollars into the hands of the rural fire departments needing assistance.

The second “C”, Communication, started the ball rolling. In 2002, Bruce contacted, either personally or through mailings, 102 rural fire departments. He logged over 2,000

August 23, 2002



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miles traveling to the often-remote community fire departments to complete the assistance or Mutual Aid agreements.

The agreements initiated between BLM and individual departments allow them to compete for, and receive assistance for up to five years. Requests for assistance were received from 44 departments requesting \$482,060. BLM was faced with deciding how to distribute just \$160,000 to best meet the requests.

This is where the third “C” comes into play, Cooperation. On May 9, 2002, representatives from rural fire departments, Idaho Department of Lands, the Forest Service and BLM met to review the assistance applications. A ranking and prioritization process was developed resulting in awards for 31 departments. Those receiving funding are required to provide a 10% cost share contribution of either cash or in-kind services, such as hours spent on training firefighters. The grants can be used by the rural fire departments to purchase items such as radios, personal protective equipment, shovels, water pumps, hose, gloves, goggles, and training materials.

Armed with these agreements and new equipment, the rural fire departments assisting BLM, the Forest Service and Idaho Department of Lands in wildland firefighting are safer, more effective, and pretty excited to be working as our collaborative partner.

The true measure of success, however, comes from the people this program serves. The Curley Creek Volunteer Fire Department, recipient of the largest assistance funding in the amount of \$19,400, recently recognized the Upper Columbia Salmon-Clearwater District with a Certificate of Appreciation. Funding from BLM literally made dreams come true for the 12 Curley Creek volunteer fire fighters and the 335 residents they serve. The money has been used to make much needed repairs to their 1978 Ford, Type 3, Wildland Fire Engine that has been sitting idle and collecting dust since 1998 when it quit running due to engine, pump and transmission problems.

On a \$12,000 annual budget, made up of donations and contributions, the rural fire department could not come close to covering the repair costs to the engine. The Curley Creek Volunteer Fire Department chipped in \$2,000 and, along with the BLM funding for \$19,400 and a private donation in the amount of \$1,800, the engine is now more than just back in service. It is certified by the Idaho Department of Lands and the Kootenai National Forest Service and ready to fight wildland fires!

Contact: Bruce Martinek, Upper Columbia Salmon-Clearwater District (208) 769-5007

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