

Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Utah

Salt Lake Field Office

Lake Mountain Fuel Modification

Fragmented land ownership presented a challenge in designing a project for the protection of two growing Utah communities, Saratoga Springs and Eagle Mountain Estates at the base of Lake Mountain located southwest of Salt Lake City.

The area has a history of frequent fires and protection problems due to steep terrain of Lake Mountain and the wide, grass and brush filled valley. To begin a program, BLM met with Utah County fire marshal and the Utah County fire warden early in the development of the Lake Mountain project to identify priority areas.

Several focus areas with various treatments were selected to begin the process of increasing fire protection for nearby communities and businesses. A contract crew was hired to thin 307 acres of juniper trees in four locations. A mixture of native and non-native seeds that are less fire-prone species will be broadcast-seeded in the thinning areas. The cut juniper will be left for the public to use as firewood and for posts and poles via permit.

Other treatments within the focus areas include 53 acres of chaining or disking of the existing cheatgrass and other unwanted species. This treatment will be followed by a seeding application of fire resistant plants during the fall/winter when soil moisture is greater. The ground will then be chained again to cover the seed. Forage kochia, a fire resistant plant that competes well against unwanted species, will be spread over a skiff of snow in some locations through a separate application during the winter.



A contract crew member thins juniper in Reformation Canyon. The wood products generated are available for the public to use as firewood or posts and poles. Wood is distributed through permits.

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Residents of Eagle Mountain Estates learn about the Lake Mountain project and steps they can take to protect homes and the community.

In addition to the fuels treatments, a plan was developed to bring awareness to fire issues and maintain contact with the various groups and community leaders. Firewise and “Utah Living with Fire” concepts and materials have been shared with city officials, at public meetings, fire department meetings and community events. Media outlets have been and will continue to be used to highlight the importance of individual and community responsibilities. The BLM is working through the Utah County fire marshal and fire warden to encourage these communities to develop fire plans and to pursue assistance agreements.

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Richfield

Interagency Fire Program

How does it work? Sharing is the key to it all! It began over 20 years ago when the Fishlake National Forest and the BLM Richfield District started combining operation functions. A BLM grader and a USFS grader were able to maintain more miles of road by working jointly. Borrowing a horse trailer here a van there combined with a good working relationship started the ball rolling.

Presently the Richfield interagency fire program coordinates the fire management for over 11 million



Location of a building in the wildland urban interface being recorded using the global positioning system.

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acres that involves the BLM, USFS, NPS and State lands. The benefits have been significant for the federal agencies as well as private land holdings in the area.

The concept of closest force response has reduced initial attack time from over an hour to just one-half hour. This has reduced fire size and resource damage without increasing the size of the fire organization. Wildland urban interface problems continue to be a problem and the smaller the fire the smaller the problem. Cost savings can be used to upgrade the condition or replace existing equipment. Additional benefits include reduced risk to firefighters and the public.

Cost savings have also been utilized to provide additional training for individuals working with the fire program. With an aging work force, qualifying and adding younger people to fill various positions is very important.

Additions of prevention specialists, fuel management specialists and NEPA specialists round out a diverse organization. Even with the addition of scarce skill positions the combination of the organizations have reduced the overall budget.

Having all the agencies working together has led to the next step of working with communities at risk. Oak City is a community that has had fire threaten their community from all directions over the years. The community was very receptive to doing wildland-urban planning in cooperation with the interagency office.

Data gathering began by using the global positioning technology to identify water sources, bridges, gates and structures. Working with the Oak City mayor, county fire warden, and concerned community members, an evacuation plan was drafted. Major concerns about timing and conditions to initiate an evacuation order were discussed. The final plan included identification of evacuation locations and methods to account for all residents.

To reduce the light flash fuels a break was completed. Cleared areas were reseeded with fire resistant plants along the east and south sides of the community.

The success of the project was due to the joint work of several agencies and the community.



Fire break near Oak City being reseeded with an all-terrain vehicle.

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Cedar City

Inside and Outside the Subdivision

The Bureau of Land Management fuels program in Cedar City, Utah has been working the past year to create a 260-acre shaded fuel break on the slopes below Cedar Highland Subdivision. Cedar Highland has 165 lots with 31 homes currently built and others under construction on the steep slopes southeast of Cedar City. At present, there are around 50 fulltime residents with 150 part-time seasonal residents.

In conjunction with the fuel break the homeowner association has completed a community fire plan and established several chipping days. During their annual association meeting held the end of August they focused on wildland fire mitigation topics. BLM and interagency partners have used Firewise program actions inside and outside the subdivision to create a safer environment for the public and firefighters.



Prior to the implementation project, dead wood was scattered throughout the area.



After implementation. The project area extends to the BLM-private property boundary line.

Fuel and fire crews as well as a contract crew worked on this project. Slash piles of the piñon and juniper trees will be burned this winter completing the C-Trail Fuel Reduction Project. Thinning crews focused on removing dead and down trees and the young understory trees or ladder fuel. The remaining trees were limbed to four feet. This fuel break was designed to lower the intensity of wildland fire being pushed by prevailing wind that can reach speeds of 20-30 miles per hour up draws and chutes (a natural landscape feature that funnels fire and wind up the face of a mountain).

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Some piles resulting from project work. Note limbing on trees.

In the event of fire, these steps will help by lowering fire intensity and rate of spread to enable fire fighters in suppressing the fire before the flames reach the subdivision.

A fuel break alone is only one step in making the community safe from wildfire. An interagency partnership of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Land, Five County Association Of Governors for Southwestern Utah, Cedar City Volunteer Fire Department, Cedar Highlands Homeowner Association and BLM have been working together to educate home and

property owners of the risks from wildland fire and steps they can take to mitigate them and create appropriate defensible space. During the latest annual association meeting state and BLM representatives attended to and answer questions home and property owners had about defensible space.

Through community fire plan training, discussions with homeowners and the home owners association over the last year, residents have been implementing clean out projects on their property. Recently property owners developed a community fire plan.

Their plan is designed to give focus in making their community fire wise for years to come and more competitive for grants to fund new projects. The association is creating fire kits that can be put outside homes. The kits would contain hoses, nozzles and other fire protection materials for firefighter use. The goal is to continue



Overview picture of the project showing clear demarcation on the boundary line.

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the fuel break from the BLM land through the subdivision. Educational programs for home and property owners will continue to be provided to resident and absentee property owners to establish and maintain defensible space.

Within the BLM shaded fuel break project area recreational and resource values were addressed along with fire mitigation. The area is critical winter deer range making the shrub component important to the plant composition. Esthetic landscaping and seclusion are desired values along the C-Trail recreation hiking and biking trail. Maintaining the healthy mature trees along the trail, low stump cutting and feathering of the thinning project mitigated public concerns along the C-Trail.



Dry Fork Canyon area.

fuels treatment project. Dave Howell, Field Office Manager conducted a briefing on the current fire situations and previous fire situations that had occurred in the urban interface during the 2002 fire season. He also explained the National Fire Plan for the audience.

Fuels specialist Rowdy Muir explained the purpose of the scoping meeting and told the group about the need for information from the public to help develop a fire plan. Using maps and digital photos, Rowdy explained issues surrounding the project area. The audience expressed interest in alternatives to burning and concern about the removal of the debris of slash piles or chipping.

Additional meetings will be held with more detailed and specific information about the proposed project.

Vernal

Dry Fork Canyon Hazard Fuels Treatment Project

On August 20, 2002 the BLM Vernal field office conducted its first of several scoping meetings for the Dry Fork Canyon hazard



New home construction in the Dry Fork Canyon area continues to expand the wildland-urban interface.

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New Mexico

Farmington Field Office

Reducing the Risk of Fire and Supplying the need for Local Firewood

Firewood supplies in the lands administered by BLM's Farmington Field Office are diminishing slowly each year. At the same time, public demand for firewood is increasing as the population in San Juan County and the outlying areas grows. Shortages of downed dead wood are especially notable in areas close to population centers.



Local resident gathers firewood generated by the project.

The Farmington Field Office decided to tackle the problem by incorporating a multiple use strategy. This strategy is to reduce the risk of fire to oil and gas production facilities by mechanical methods, such as thinning, and making available these areas for firewood gathering, thus increasing the supply of firewood in the area.



Oil and gas well adjacent to the project.

Brian Watts, BLM's Farmington Field Office fuels specialist developed plans to achieve the dual goals with the Pump Mesa project. The overall objective of the project was to open up the existing stand of piñon pine and Utah juniper to mimic a more natural savannah condition, reduce the risk of wildfire to existing oil and gas facilities and create a balanced plant community in which piñon and juniper trees provide wildlife cover while not out-competing understory forage plants for space, sun, water and nutrients. The burn would provide a seedbed of ash for the manual seeding of native

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Excess slash not used by gathering are removed by burning.

grass, forbs and shrub species. The public would help in the project by removing the excess wood in the form of firewood.

The project design specified three phases of implementation. Phase one involved the thinning of piñon and juniper trees by the field office fuels crew and the removal and utilization of firewood generated by the general public. This phase was implemented June 2001 through December 2001.

Phase two involved the use of prescribed fire to reduce the amount of remaining juniper/juniper slash. This was phase was completed during the winter months of 2002. Phase three involved the seeding of the project area with desirable herbaceous forbs and shrub species for wildlife.

A tour of the entire project area by an interdisciplinary team of BLM specialists following completion of the burn resulted all the objectives being met.

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Ignition gets underway with BLM and Forest Service crews conducting project work. This photo is a good representation of how the fire behaved without an overstory.



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Montana

Central Montana Fire Zone

Staff members from the Central Montana Fire Management Zone visited several recent and past prescribed burns to assess first and second order fire effects. The first burns, the Cow Creek and BullWhacker, are located in the Missouri Breaks on land administered by the Havre Field Station of the Lewistown Field Office.



The Cow Creek prescribed burn. Burned in April 1996. Photo taken in October 2002.

The 72-acre Cow Creek prescribed burn was completed in the spring of 1996. The objectives of the burn were to improve wildlife habitat diversity, restore watershed health, reduce fuel loads, and to serve as an opportunity for training of zone and field office personnel in prescribed fire procedures.

Little BullWhacker Prescribed Burn

The 4,600-acre Little BullWhacker prescribed burn was completed in the spring of 1999. The objectives of this burn were to reintroduce fire into a fire dependant ecosystem from which it had been absent and to reduce fuel loading, with a cool early spring burn. The intent was to establish a mosaic burn pattern.



Little BullWhacker prescribed burn. Burned in spring 1999. Photos taken in October 2002.

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Fergus Triangle Prescribed Burn

The 692-acre Fergus Triangle prescribed burn was completed in the spring of 2002. The objectives were to stimulate and increase the forage and browse species present on site, improve wildlife and livestock distribution, and reduce fuels.



Fergus Triangle prescribed burn. Spring 2002.

Fergus Triangle prescribed burn, three weeks after the burn. Note the re-growth.

Lower Armells Prescribed Burn

This prescribed burn occurred on the same day as the Fergus Triangle Burn. The burn was 671 acres. The objectives were the same as those for the Fergus Triangle burn.



Lower Armells prescribed burn, implemented in spring 2002. Photos taken October 2002.

Chokecherry patch in the burn. Unburned plant on the right has started into dormancy and was affected by insects and natural maladies. New shoots from the burned plant on the left are not dormant and not affected by insects.

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Montana Grazing Board: Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Tour

The Central Zone and the Lewistown Field Office hosted the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Tour of the Fergus Triangle prescribed burn on August 16. Featured speakers included John Gervais, rancher and grazing permittee on the Fergus Triangle Allotment, Dr. Clayton Marlow, Montana State University, Department of Animal and Range Sciences, Mitch Maycox, Central Montana Zone Fire Management Officer and researcher on long-term responses to prescribed fire who is currently monitoring the Fergus Triangle burn, and Jennifer Walker, fuels technician, BLM Central Montana Fire Zone.



Tour group meeting in central Montana.

About 30 people from several agencies and states participated. Representatives attended from the offices of Governor Judy Martz and Congressman Denny Rehberg, as well as several organizations such as the Montana Stockgrowers Association. Comments on the burn results were all positive.

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Eastern Montana Fire Zone

The Eastern Montana Fire Zone recently completed the final unit of the Bliss prescribed burn. This burn included 2,820 acres in two units. The objectives were to restore fire to the Missouri Breaks ecosystem and reduce fuels. The completion of this burn was a milestone for the prescribed fire program in the Eastern Zone. Burn windows were very narrow or non-existent during the previous year and a half, but persistence paid off. The burn is



The Bliss prescribed burn in October 2002.

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considered a great success because of the cooperation among agencies and the local volunteer fire department that provided necessary equipment and personnel. The Jordan Volunteer Fire Department, Custer National Forest, Central Montana Fire Zone, West Yellowstone Interagency Fire Center, and Powell Ranger District of the Clearwater National Forest assisted in the implementation of the burn.



Members of the Jordan, MT Volunteer Fire Department at the burn site.

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Landusky and Zortman Townsites Hazardous Fuels Reduction

An analysis of hazardous fuels treatments on 1,600 acres around the townsites of Zortman and Landusky in north central Montana was finalized on September 20, 2002. Coordinated between the Central Zone and the Malta Field Office, the environmental assessment was completed by an interdisciplinary team in a little less than a year. The assessment emphasized fuels reduction, but team members also saw opportunities to



Zortman, Montana in 1909

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improve forest health, wildlife habitat and visual resources, as well as protect cultural resources and life and property through the treatment of fuels.

On October 22, 2002, the first “start work” meeting was held at Landusky and Zortman with the contractors, BLM contracting officer representatives, project inspectors, and Malta Field Office personnel. Approximately 250 acres of the project were contracted as the first entry.

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Zortman today.

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