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Oregon

Camp Participants Discuss "Burning Issues"

This summer, 52 students and 11 educators participated in the 13th Annual Resources and People Camp in southern Oregon. The week-long Resources and People Camp, or "RAP Camp" provides natural resource education for high school students. Participants receive science credits, and educators receive college credits for participating.

Sessions included hands-on learning, with demonstrations and field trips taking place throughout the week. The students learned about topics as diverse as evaluating stream flow, determining recreation impacts on the land, studying aquatic insects, identifying noxious weeds, and learning about fire management.

Additionally, participants traveled to Crater Lake National Park, Kingsley Field Interagency Air Tanker Base, and Thomas Lumber Mill in Klamath Falls, Oregon, to gain first hand perspective.

Resource specialists and volunteers from private, state, and federal agencies who sponsor the camp offer first hand knowledge about the type of work and tools that are used in their respective fields. Through presentations on archaeology, wildlife habitat restoration, range conservation, and fire management, camp participants received an inside look at the intricacies of working in a variety of natural resource disciplines.

Educators and students attending RAP camp get hands-on experience learning about combustible fuels, fuel loads, and factors taken into consideration when Fuels Specialists determine fire prescriptions.



This year the 11 educators participated in a breakout session on fire management in the Pacific Northwest. Facilitator Kelly Hollums from BLM's Klamath Falls Resource Area

presented information from the *Burning Issues* curriculum and accompanying CD program. "We begin with the basic concepts of the fire triangle, move toward understanding the role fire plays in a natural ecological cycle, then engage in role playing scenarios that discuss topics like 'Who Should Pay the Cost of Fire Protection?'" Hollums said.

"Teachers are provided with fire curriculum, and we encourage them to use it in their classrooms. Incorporating the topic of fire—particularly wildland fire issues into the classroom—is one way agencies can educate students and their parents about wildland fire and resource management issues," said Hollums.



Dave Henifin, BLM fire support assistant, discusses fuel loading and its effect on wildland fire suppression. After receiving safety instruction, students were given fire fighting tools to dig line.



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Some of the topics covered in this session of the RAP Camp included being “Firewise,” learning about defensible space, and understanding the use of prescribed fire.

Burning Issues was jointly produced by the BLM and the Interactive Media Science Project at Florida State University in cooperation with Partners in Resource Education, an interagency group devoted to educating citizens about federally managed natural and cultural resources.

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Oregon and Washington Prepare National Fire Plan Accomplishments Report

The federal, state and local agencies implementing the National Fire Plan in Oregon and Washington have cooperated in publishing combined accomplishment reports in fiscal years 2000, 2001 and 2002.



Accomplishment report front cover.

When fiscal year 2003 National Fire accomplishments are compiled this fall, the partners will again publish a report highlighting the collaborative accomplishments in the four major National Fire Plan areas of firefighting, rehabilitation and restoration, hazardous fuel reduction, and community assistance. The reports will include maps of grants and projects in Oregon and Washington, as well as implementation success stories in the two states. The reports are online at www.nwfireplan.gov.

Idaho

New Franklin County Fire Station Highlights Partnership with Federal Agencies

The Franklin, Idaho, County Fire District hosted an open house and ribbon cutting at its new headquarters fire station in Preston, Idaho, on Saturday, October 11, 2003. The ceremony was attended by more than 150 people, including interagency fire cooperators from BLM, the U.S. Forest Service, Cache County, Utah, fire district personnel, local citizens and dignitaries. The event also drew participation from Smokey Bear. Activities included the dedication of a fallen firefighter memorial, parade of 28 pieces of fire apparatus, Dutch-oven lunch and an afternoon of demonstrations and displays.



Bagpipes and a vintage engine lead a parade of fire vehicles through Preston, Idaho.



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Before October 2000 the only structural fire protection in the county was provided by the City of Preston Fire Department, which also served the surrounding area. Fire personnel and local citizens decided it would be better to form a county-wide fire district to better serve the 11,000 full-time residents spread across the county's 667 square miles, and recommended that a referendum be held.

Many volunteer hours were spent educating the public on the benefits of forming a fire district. As a result, voters overwhelmingly approved the referendum and tax levy, and the new Fire District was formed in October 2000. The new 12,000 square-foot, five-bay fire station was completed in 2002 at a cost of \$590,000. The fire department acted as the general contractor and firefighters helped provide some of the labor, which resulted in significant savings to taxpayers.

The new station was built with commercial cooking facilities, showers, and sleeping quarters – all of which are available to federal firefighters when needed for wildland fire suppression operations within the county. The fire district recently purchased a new Pierce pumper/water tender that carries 2,750 gallons of water as part of a fleet of modern fire apparatus that is also available to support wildland fire operations.



An axe was the tool of choice to cut the ribbon to the new fire station.



More than 150 people attended the open house of the new Franklin County, Idaho Fire District station. The new facility will also provide support for wildland fire operations within the county limits.

The fire district employs 29 paid-on-call personnel under the leadership of Fire Chief Mike Lower and Assistant Chief Jeff Phillips. The department also has specially trained personnel in rope rescue and extrication techniques, and supports the county ambulance operation which responds from the new station. Twenty-two firefighters are certified emergency medical first responders, emergency medical technicians, or advanced EMT's available to respond on ambulance calls.

The Franklin County Fire District has participated in the BLM Rural Fire Assistance Grant program for the past three years. With rural fire assistance they have not only upgraded their wildland fire capabilities, but have also developed an extensive wildland fire training library. The Caribou-Targhee National Forest and the BLM assist the fire district with fire prevention, education, and mitigation efforts as well.

Besides the new facility, fire fighters plan to build a new fire station in Dayton within the next two years and another station between Franklin and Preston.

Don Gosswiller is a Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist for the Bureau of Land Management in Idaho Falls, Idaho.



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Private Citizens the Key to Pocatello Fuels Project Success

When representatives of the BLM Pocatello Field Office and the Caribou-Targhee National Forest began the environmental assessment for the Portneuf-Westbench fuels reduction project they recognized from the start they would have to gain the support of hundreds of local residents between the southern tip of Pocatello to the town of Inkom in order for the project to be successful.

“If you look at the land pattern in the wildland-urban interface, there are scattered small tracts of federal land interspersed with private land. That meant that anything we did to remove hazardous fuels on federal land would only work if there were similar fuels reduction projects on private lands, too,” said BLM Fire Use Specialist Bill Swann.

The Portneuf-Westbench was one of fifteen pilot projects announced by the White House in December 2002 under the President’s Healthy Forests Initiative. The goal of the initiative was, among other things, to expedite the National Environmental Policy Act process and get fuels reduction projects implemented faster in the interface.

While the initiative was seen as a means to speed up the environmental assessment, federal officials knew there was one piece that could not be sped up – the interface with the public.

“In fact, we probably worked harder on the public involvement process with this project than with other similar projects because the Healthy Forests Initiative raised the attention level,” said Swann.

Besides a public open house explaining the process and proposed



BLM fire crews work to limb up dense stands of juniper on Cinnamon Ridge, near Pocatello, Idaho.

treatments that attracted about 70 people, the agencies enlisted the help of the Gateway Interagency Fire Front, a consortium of city, county and federal emergency agencies in the greater Pocatello area.

The Gateway agencies, led by former Pocatello Fire Chief Richard Wolfe, contacted many of the homeowners in the environmental study area with information about the project and the need to create defensible space around their homes. The agencies also conducted public and media tours of the project area, and conducted a 30-minute public affairs program on the local cable access channel.



Johnny Creek residents use a chipper to turn branches and limbs into ground cover.

Wolfe found that while people weren’t opposed to the project in principle, actually cleaning up the interface area was presenting some interesting problems.

“There was always a question of ‘what do we do with the material once it’s all piled up?’” said Wolfe. “One of the obstacles



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people ran into was the fact that they would get charged by the truckload when they took the branches and debris to the landfill. Sometimes they would have many truckloads of material in their yards, and so taking it to the landfill became cost-prohibitive.”

Wolfe worked with the Bannock County Commission to implement a certificate program for those living in the project area. With a certificate signed and in hand, local residents could take woody debris to the landfill and dispose of it free-of-charge. So far, Wolfe estimates that local residents have collectively saved about \$1,800 this year, and dozens more are expected to take advantage of the certificate program before the snow is on the ground.



A sign at the entrance of Johnny Creek educates passers-by about the fuels reduction project near neighborhood homes.

Several chippers were also brought into the neighborhoods through a grant from the Three Rivers Resource Conservation & Development District. Residents removing limbs and trees from their yards would bring them to a chipper, which shredded the woody material for mulch. Signs in the entrances of the neighborhoods notified residents that the chipper was in use. On one Saturday in September 2003, residents of Johnny Creek in southern Pocatello removed more than 80 tons of juniper from 12 homes, much of which was converted to mulch. The residents donated about 641 hours of labor to the cause.



A chipper provided by Three Rivers RC&D helped turn woody debris into useable ground cover.

Wolfe and the Gateway Interagency Fire Front agencies have more projects with homeowner associations and neighborhoods planned for this fall, and will also organize more cleanup days in the spring.

BLM and the Forest Service are also working on adjacent federal land to limb and thin trees, a project that is scheduled to take place over the next nine years. Both agencies also have plans to implement similar projects in Bannock County, and will refer

to their experiences with the Portneuf-Westbench project as a model.



David Howell is a public affairs specialist with the BLM Upper Snake River District, headquartered in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

Richard Wolfe of the Gateway Interagency Fire Front speaks with Idaho State Journal reporter Emily Jones.



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Lower Snake River District BLM

The seasonal transition from fall to winter has seen some projects in the Lower Snake River District come to a conclusion, while others continue in preparation for next year's field season. The following is a brief summary of recent activity.

Largest Prescribed Burn in a Decade Completed

The Pixley Basin prescribed burn, designed to stem the encroachment and domination of juniper into an otherwise ecologically and biologically diverse area, was completed this fall. The project included a target of 2,800 burned acres in an overall project area of approximately 7,000 acres, which was achieved, making it the largest burn project in the district in more than a decade. Additional site work included mechanical thinning of juniper. Monitoring on the site will continue for several years.

The Pixley Basin project provided a valuable foundation for similar future work. A lessons-learned meeting held in late October brought together all parties involved in planning and implementation to assess what went well and what



A Lower Snake River District firefighter uses a drip torch during the ignition phase of the Pixley Basin prescribed fire. The project, the largest prescribed fire in more than a decade in the district, was planned to stem the encroachment and domination of juniper into an otherwise ecologically and biologically diverse area east of the Owyhee Mountains.



In some areas firefighters used foam and in others just water as they create black control lines around the perimeter of the Pixley Basin prescribed burn project prior to the main ignition.



Fire crews use a foam line and fire to create black control lines around the perimeter of the project area prior to large-scale ignition at the Pixley Basin prescribed burn. Crews spent several days creating solid control lines before the main area was ignited.

areas need improvement. The result of this meeting is a fuels management and prescribed burning staff better positioned to successfully accomplish future projects.

Contact: J.R. Epps, 208-384-3486



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Goal Achieved with Creation of Accredited Degree Program in Fire Management

Three years ago, when the Southwest Idaho Fire Training Group, which includes the Lower Snake River District BLM, the Boise National Forest, and the Idaho Department of Lands first teamed with Boise State University to offer a concentrated week of fire training each year, the long-term vision was to establish an accredited associate degree program in fire management. In October, that vision reached fruition when the university announced it would begin offering the degree program through its Sella College of Applied Technology.

In each of the past two years, the training group, in conjunction with Boise State, has offered a spectrum of classes ranging from wildland-urban fire operations and fire business management to fire prevention and investigation during a one week period each June. Each year, between 400 and 600 professional and volunteer firefighters from federal, state, city, community and volunteer fire agencies and departments have taken part in the training.

Qualifying fire departments can apply funding they receive through the Rural Fire Assistance program to cover firefighters' tuition costs.

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Mitigation Assessments and Planning Continue

All ten counties within the Lower Snake River District are now involved at various stages in completing wildland fire hazard assessment and mitigation plans. Agreements signed for planning in Ada and Canyon counties in September marked the participation of 100 percent of the counties within the district.

The counties have opted to use a mix of avenues to complete the planning. Six counties opted to have the local Resource Conservation and Development Districts take the lead for the effort, while four are completing the planning in-house or hiring a local

contractor. The districts have hired local coordinators and Northwest Management, Inc., a contractor, to accomplish the planning effort.

Only Boise County has completed its plan. The others have completion dates ranging from the end of the calendar year to next spring. The focus for 2004 will be on implementing identified field projects and providing public education programs in wildfire mitigation.

Contact: Randy Eardley, 208-384-3444

Public Service Announcements recognize public's help in reducing fire numbers

The Lower Snake River District produced and is airing public service announcements recognizing and thanking the public for helping minimize the severity of the 2003 fire season. Weather and fuel conditions in the spring had fire officials concerned that 2003 could have been a particularly costly summer in southwest Idaho in terms of burned resources and suppression costs. All of the conditions were there, including heavy fuel loads, predictions for above normal temperatures and low humidity, as well as predictions for above normal fire activity.

However, for the second season in a row, human-caused ignitions were less than 50 percent of average, dropping to 42 percent of average in 2003. This decrease largely contributed to it being one of the lightest fire seasons on record within the Lower Snake River District. Acreage burned this year was less than 10,000 acres, or below ten percent of the nearly 100,000 acres typically burned in the district during an average fire year.

Recognizing the public's awareness of the fire danger, and their obvious precautions to reduce human-caused ignitions, the public service announcements are a thank-you for everyone's help during the fire season.

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Nevada

Fuels Projects Completed Near Rural Nevada Communities

BLM's Elko Field Office has completed work on the first phase of fuels treatment projects near the rural Nevada communities of Lucky Nugget and Ten Mile, located about ten miles southwest of Elko.

The multi-year project is designed to reduce the risk of wildland fire to these rural communities.

Fuels treatment efforts this fall included the removal of more than 400 hundred acres of heavy fuels using brush beaters and roller choppers. Crews removed the vegetation in strips about 500 feet wide and more than seven miles long.

Afterwards, crews reseeded these disturbed areas with Siberian wheatgrass and Nordan crested wheatgrass. These vegetation species are fire-resistant and can slow or stop the spread of wildland fires. When the



BLM Elko field office staff began brush beating as part of a fuels reduction project near the Lucky Nugget and Ten Mile residential areas. The project was seeded and temporarily fenced.

wheatgrass germinates in the spring, the end result is a "greenstrip" which protects the communities and provides a defensible space from wildland fire.

Creation of greenstrips this year were designed to protect the south and west sides of the Lucky Nugget and Ten Mile communities. Crews will create additional green strips to protect the north and east sides of the communities in 2004.



Lucky Nugget area after brush beating and drill seeding were done.



Heavy fuel loading in the Lucky Nugget area adjacent to the future greenstrip before brush beating and seeding.



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Fuels Treatment Project Includes Prescribed Burning and Aerial Herbicide Drop

The BLM Elko Field Office has completed a fuels treatment project about four miles west of Midas, Nevada, using prescribed burning and aerial application of herbicide to treat large stands of sagebrush.

The purpose of the Little Humboldt Fuels Treatment Project was to reduce the risk of wildfire and to improve wildlife habitat diversity by breaking up the large blocks of thick canopy-cover sagebrush. Crews conducted a prescribed burn on 500 acres of the project area in early October.

“We burned the 500-acre block in two phases,” said BLM Elko Fire Management Officer Joe Freeland. “The second phase was postponed several days in order to accommodate hunters in the area.

“While we don’t intentionally plan to conduct prescribed burning activities during hunting season, our fall window of opportunity, when the conditions are right, is very narrow,” Freeland added. “We burned at night to take advantage of increased nighttime humidity.”

For the second phase of the project, aircraft dropped pellets of Spike 20 herbicide onto sagebrush stands adjacent to the prescribed burn area.

According to Elko Field Office wildlife biologist Kevin Albrecht, “Spike 20 is an herbicide that mainly affects sagebrush and woody plant species. It does not affect grass, wildlife or people.”

When Spike 20 is applied lightly, it thins sagebrush, but too heavy an application of the herbicide kills all vegetation, according to

Albrecht. Crews used the herbicide lightly, at about 1.5 pounds per acre, on about 700 acres.

Light use of the herbicide allows the native grass understory to grow back. Spike 20 does not affect cultural resources, and is a cost-effective method of treating a large area of sagebrush.

“Typically we put it on during the fall so that it gets the winter moisture, which causes it to



Prescribed fire operations conducted at night to take advantage of higher humidity.



Little Humboldt fuels crew at work to reduce thick sagebrush canopy.



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Little Humboldt area under treatment.

dissolve and work on the sagebrush,” Albrecht said. “It can take up to seven years to work, so we’ll begin monitoring next spring, although we may not see much effect next year.”

Fuels Treatment Projects Help Protect Eureka and Austin from Wildfires

Crews from BLM’s Battle Mountain Field Office completed the first phase of fuels treatments in late September near Austin and Eureka, both in a remote area of central Nevada.

These projects were aimed at reducing the threat of wildfires in the wildland-urban interface where Eureka and Austin are located, as well as improving ecosystem health. They are part of the Eureka-South Diamond Valley Environmental Assessment.

In the Eureka area, crews thinned 100 acres of dense pinyon and juniper stands, and plan to both thin an additional 200 acres and mow another 75 acres during 2004.

Near Austin, crews used brush-beating treatments to remove 500 acres of dense sagebrush overstory, and plan to seed these treated areas with fire-resistant seed mixes during 2004.

Fuels treatments near Eureka are part of a larger plan to thin 325 acres of pinyon and juniper

woodlands, in order to reduce the risk of crown fires to that community. This plan also includes brush beating 75 acres of fuel breaks with heavy equipment to remove the dense overstory of sagebrush, which should allow native species to be more competitive with invasive plants.

The treatments will improve the effectiveness of the roads as firebreaks, provide places for future fuels treatments to “tie into,” and improve firefighter safety during suppression operations.

Fuels treatments near Austin are aimed at 1,000 acres of dense sagebrush overstory. Treatment of this sagebrush includes brush-beating with heavy equipment to remove the dense overstory of sagebrush, then drill-seeding the brush-beaten strips with fire resistant seed mixes in order to establish perennial species.

These perennial species have the potential to improve the health of the local ecosystem.

Project areas treated by mechanical mowing, mastication and seeding will be allowed to rest for two growing seasons, or until they meet the Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council’s Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health.



Project work area near Austin and Eureka, Nevada.



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Beginning in 2004, these project areas will be monitored for noxious weeds, as well as to determine whether maintenance treatments are needed. Evaluations will be conducted to determine the progress of the fuels treatment areas.

The size of the project areas, along with the location and arrangement of the treated areas, contribute to an effective fire defense system for the Austin and Eureka communities, as well as the adjacent public lands.



Crews in the Eureka area doing work on the project.



Part of the area after thinning treatment.



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