

Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

New Mexico

Lincoln! The name conjures images of Billy the Kid and range wars. But a new villain, every bit as dangerous as a six-gun toting bad man in a Louis L'Amour novel, threatens the historic buildings of the village. Over the years juniper invaded the pastures surrounding historic Lincoln and salt cedar took hold along the Rio Bonito River. Left unchecked, these brush and tree species are the volatile portion of the fire hazard in the area. Planning began in September 1999 and work on the project began in October 2000.



BLM crews used chainsaws to clear trees.

With the unwanted trees and brush cut, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) faced the choice of what to do with the debris. BLM opted to cut firewood and fence posts from the juniper and chip the remaining debris. The firewood was made available to the public and the fence posts will be used in future projects. The chips were scattered so that the resulting depth would not smother the existing grass.

One of the features of the project is a memorandum of understanding between BLM and the surrounding landowners that allows all parties assist each other in the reduction of wildland fuels in the project area. One of the properties in the Village of Lincoln is an adobe building. BLM crews cut the brush and dead trees on the property, cut trunks and limbs into firewood lengths, and chipped the debris for the owner. The owner has commenced further clean up of the property to increase fire resistance.



Owner of the adobe building joined with BLM for reduction of fuel.



Cleared area after treatment work was completed.

January 25, 2002



Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

A large portion of the Lincoln Village Tract was an old field succumbing to an invasion of junipers. Historic photos indicate a much lower density of trees than existed prior to the fuels work. The crews reduced the density of juniper to three trees per acre to achieve a spacing of 100 to 120 feet.



The riparian project before fuels treatment.

to reestablish native riparian vegetation, BLM will plant cottonwood poles and wait to see if willows will come in on their own. If they do not, BLM will plant willows in the riparian area. Once the cottonwood and willows are established BLM will consider gradually removing the elms.

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California

Northeastern California Project Focused on Reducing Hazardous Fuels

The Cottonwood Mountain Project is located in northeastern Lassen County, California, three miles west of the Nevada state line and twenty-five miles south of the small community of Eagleville. The project area provides high value transitional and summer range for deer and its stands of bitterbrush, mountain sage, mountain mahogany and aspen provide both feed and cover for deer and other wildlife.

Results of clearing a riparian area of invading juniper and salt cedar proved to be successful. Prior to treatment it was difficult to walk through the area due to the density of the vegetation. Crews were told to leave all deciduous trees and a large number of introduced Chinese elm remain in the area. In an effort



A view of the riparian project after successful fuels treatment.



Heavy vegetation in project area before treatment began.

January 25, 2002



Snapshots

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The BLM Surprise Field Office Fuels Crew provided the handwork for this hazardous fuels project. A fuel break is under construction that interrupts the contiguous vegetation that has built up in the area due to the lack of, or suppression of, wildfire. Local support of the project is evidenced by an agreement with an adjacent landowner to allow the crew to continue their work across his private property. In addition to the fuel break, decadent brush has been removed, junipers cut back, and trees limbed up to reduce ladder fuels. Cut vegetation has been piled and burned.



Early snow did not hinder burning fuel debris.



Completed section of the fuel break.

Thus far, more than 50 acres have been treated and more work is planned including expanding the fuel break and treatments to improve the health of the area's aspen stands. Many benefits from this project are already being realized including the reduced risk of catastrophic fire, protection of natural resources found on both public and private lands, improved habitat, and increased accessibility for firefighting equipment if the need arises.

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January 25, 2002



Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Folsom Field Office

Improving Forest Health... While Keeping The Lights On!

BLM's Folsom Field Office's Succor Flat project was a 140-acre effort to reduce hazardous fuels and improve forest health in rural Placer County, California. Located along one of the only escape routes for the communities of Iowa Hill and upper Foresthill, the site was heavily overgrown with manzanita and other plants that would have provided volatile fuel ladders into the mixed conifer trees in the event of a wildfire.



Project reduced fuel loading by almost 90 percent.

Three different processes were used to reduce the fuel loading at the project site. First, the area was thinned of marketable trees. Then the slash was chipped and sent to the local co-generation plant. This phase of the operation took place during the height of the energy crisis - these forest chips produced electricity that helped keep California's lights on! Finally, the residual plant material on the site was further reduced and then allowed to decompose back into the soil using a new, powerful masticator affectionately known as the "Brontosaurus."



The project improved the health of the forest.

By project's end, the fuel loading had been reduced from 273 tons per acre to 30 tons per acre. As a result, ecosystem health has been improved and mule deer and other wildlife have been observed using the project area. In addition, the likelihood of an accidental start originating from the roadway and traveling into the adjacent canyons has been greatly reduced while access to BLM lands has been improved. Future plans in the area include extending the project boundaries to increase the overall benefits.

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January 25, 2002



Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Utah

Salt Lake Field Office

Emergency Fire Rehabilitation

As part of fuels management, BLM's Salt Lake Field Office hosts an active fire area rehabilitation program. Although emergency fire rehabilitation is not considered a fuels or wildland urban interface program in terms of funding sources, it nevertheless reduces the negative impacts of wildfire on communities and resources. The Salt Lake Field Office is planning wildland urban interface and fuels projects in combination with completed emergency fire rehabilitation projects to reduce the overall fire hazard.



Workers prepare the helicopter seed bucket.

The field office Fire Management Plan includes emergency fire rehabilitation as a proactive way of creating fuel breaks and improving fire control methods. In August 2001, a programmatic environmental assessment was completed to facilitate seeding of burned areas. One of the criteria is a need to establish "green strips," or fuel breaks of less flammable vegetation, to protect resources and private property. Whenever possible, native species are used in the seed mix for their fire resistive qualities and benefits to watersheds and wildlife by restoring natural vegetation.



Seeding is typically done in the fall, winter, and spring.

The fire problem in the West Desert has been exacerbated as the native plants are being converted to the aggressive and more flammable cheat grass. Cheat grass has an ecologically detrimental effect on watersheds and crucial habitat for wildlife in the Great Basin. By seeding immediately following a fire, the spread of cheat grass may be mitigated. In fiscal years 2000 and 2001, 32 areas were rehabilitated with an additional 16 projects to be completed in fiscal year 2002. During the past 10 years, more than 800 fires have burned in excess of 531,000 acres.

January 25, 2002



Snapshots

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Wildland Urban Interface Assessment

In June 2001, eight projects were submitted for wildland urban interface funding to be implemented in fiscal years 2002 and 2003. An assessment of wildland urban interface areas is being completed during this winter that will provide information important to project planning and ultimately to reduce the fire hazard near communities. Once funding is made available, fire managers will be prepared to implement the projects.

The assessment includes verifying ownership, contacting community members, mapping vegetation and fire scar areas, and developing a list of methods that would be feasible based on vegetation, topography and values in the area. Photographs of the project areas will also be taken to document the fuel conditions for assessment purposes and long-term monitoring.

The mixed ownership within the project areas has made initial public contacts essential to success. During this winter, city council members, volunteer fire departments, county officials, State of Utah officials, and other individuals were contacted to begin building partnerships essential for project implementation. These preliminary discussions will also help identify alternatives in treatment types and design.



Lake Point, Utah, was threatened in July 2000. A project to reduce hazards to the community is planned.

January 25, 2002



Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Southern Utah

In the southwestern part of Utah a group of fire, resource, and management personnel of the BLM, Forest Service and Utah Forestry, Fire and State Lands gathered for a tour of the New Harmony / Harmony Heights and Central interagency wildland-urban interface focus areas. There, they discussed ways to combine efforts and to jointly plan and implement projects to protect these communities from wildland fire.



Population growth is adding potential threats to the communities of New Harmony and Harmony Heights in Utah.

The Southern Utah land managers have chosen these areas as high profile areas with the highest probability of catastrophic fire and the greatest opportunity to implement the direction in the National Fire Plan.

Over the next few weeks an interdisciplinary team of specialists will develop risk assessments for these communities. This will provide important information on how projects will be designed and implemented over next few years.

New Harmony / Harmony Heights lies at the head of a canyon, upwind from a 1,500 acre of hazardous fuel load. This area has a history of several fires each year that could and have been threats to these communities. The BLM is currently implementing a combination of hand thinning and chemical treatments over the 1,500 acres of BLM administered land. The group is identifying opportunities for the Forest Service to continue treatment on their land to give a complete fuel reduction buffer. Forestry Fire and State Land will be working with developers, private landowners and local fire department to continue treatments onto developed lands.

Central is a growing community is intermixed in with the natural vegetation (refer to photo). The Utah Forestry, Fire and State Lands has worked with home owners to reduce fuel loads over the past year and this coming summer. This fuel reduction and break will be continued on the Forest Service and BLM lands. The group is identifying opportunities for the BLM and Forest Service to contribute to the education and fuel reduction effort in and around Central.

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January 25, 2002



Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Moab Field Office

Grand County, the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands, the Bureau of Land Management, Utah Department of Transportation, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and the Moab Nature Conservancy have joined together to improve conditions along recreation sites and visitor pathways that border the Colorado River on the north edge of Moab.

These joint labors are an effort to beautify recreation areas, reduce the threat of wildfires, eradicate noxious weeds and the invasion of non-native species, and improve vegetation health.

The first area targeted is Lions Park and the new pathway being constructed along side the Colorado River. This pathway will go under the Highway 191 river bridge and provide a safe passageway for hikers and cyclists to cross the busy highway. Heavy tamarisk growth has been cut, piled, and burned to reopen up recreation sites and provide, once again, a view of the Colorado River and the spectacular red rock canyon country.

The Utah Division of Forestry has the lead on the project, and BLM's Moab Field Office has been involved in the planning of the pathway and in the burning of slash piles.

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Lion's Park was established in the 1960s. BLM land borders the park on the east.



Overgrown tamarisk totally blocked the river view in the park.



Reduction of tamarisk was done by volunteer hand crews.

January 25, 2002

