

Snapshots 2003

March 21

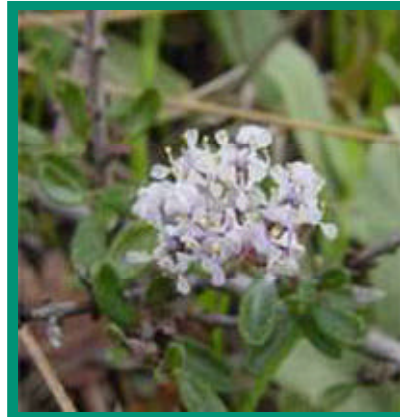
California

Project Protects Community and Its Rare Plants

The rapidly growing community of Cameron Park, California, located in the Sierra foothills outside of Sacramento, is a community at high risk of wildfires. Heavy fuel loads of manzanita, toyon, chamise and other chaparral vegetation in and around the community are an annual concern for firefighters and residents alike. In an effort to mitigate the situation, BLM's Folsom Field Office has initiated the Cameron Park Phase I fuels project on its Pine Hill Preserve situated in the hills above the town.

The preserve was a tangled sea of heavy chaparral cover growing right up to the yards of local residences. Beneath the fuel load, however, grew a variety of sensitive plants—some of them federally listed as endangered or threatened. The BLM, in concert with cooperating agencies, developed a plan to reduce the fuel load while protecting and even benefiting the sensitive plants. Many of the plants, including *Ceanothus roderickii*, actually need openings in the shrub canopy in order to successfully reproduce.

The fuel reduction treatment project was accomplished through the use of BLM and contracted California Department of Forestry and



Ceanothus roderickii

Fire Protection hand crews. The BLM Preserve Manager gave the crews training in plant identification and low-impact brush removal techniques. The final results, over 24 acres of thinned fuels, include not only a fuel break to protect the local community and provide better access to the

preserve, but also an increase in suitable habitat for endangered plants.



Crews work in heavy fuels close to homes.



Fire crews work to thin brush in the Pine Hills preserve.

With fire season still a few months off, the fuel break is already doing its job by offering local residents in the Cameron Park community a sense of security and new opportunities to discover their public lands and the rare species found only in their area.

Contact: Ken Hood, Fire Management Officer, Folsom Field Office, 916/985-4474



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Local Effort Result In National Workshop

More than 120 people recently met in Bakersfield, California at a national Firewise Communities Workshop. The diverse group included ranchers, homeowners, real estate and insurance professionals, recreation and fire management specialists, elected officials, and other concerned residents. The goal for the participants was to learn about wildfires and their threat to residential areas within the wildland urban interface. Most participants came from Kern and Tulare Counties, two areas which last year experienced one of the worst fire seasons on record.



The Kern River Valley Fire Safe Council hosted the workshop and received kudos for all their efforts.



More than 120 people from all walks of life participated in the Firewise workshop held in January.

The workshop was sponsored by the California Fire Alliance and hosted by the Kern River Valley Fire Safe Council. This was the second in a series of workshops that have been specially designed to highlight California-specific wildfire-related issues within national Firewise principles. Members of the fire safe council recognized that hosting such an event could provide significant benefits as local people learned to address the risks and hazards associated with living by applying Firewise principles in their communities. They believed the workshop could provide opportunity for community networking, relationships to be built, and future partnerships to

develop. Comments received at the end of the workshop indicate that participants headed home with a renewed “can-do, will do” attitude that will translate into more fire safe communities in the Kern and Tulare County region of California. The Kern River Valley Fire Safe Council continues to be a leader in the area of local wildfire prevention and mitigation.

Contact: Debbie Santiago, BLM Bakersfield Field Office, 661/391-6097



The Bakersfield Firewise Team ready to reduce wildfire threats in their communities.



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Fort Ord Gains Ten More Miles of Essential Fuel Break

Just outside Monterey, California lies an overgrown continuous sea of shrubs that has not seen fire in more than 70 years. The area is surrounded by dense, residential neighborhoods and exclusive “ranchettes.”

Complicating the scenario are large areas of land restricted to access because of unexploded ordnance on former training grounds of the U. S. Army.

To counter the potential threat of wildland fire in this volatile setting, the BLM’s Fuels Module located at Fort Ord along with hand crews from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection’s Gabilan Conservation Camp, have worked since July 2002 to improve and extend fuel breaks throughout the backcountry of the former Fort Ord Military Base.

Another ten miles of fuel thinning has recently been completed along Reservation Road. This segment of the project joins an existing network of roads, trails, and other breaks in the wildland vegetation that will protect neighboring communities from the threat of wildfire coming off these BLM lands.

Close coordination with military munitions experts was necessary to allow crews avoid areas of unexploded ordnance. The chaparral is being thinned by hand with the removed



Section of Reservation Road before being treated.

vegetation being chipped back onto the site. The resulting fuel breaks are from 100 to 300 feet wide, adjacent to existing trails and roads and will provide a defensible space and anchor points for suppression crews in the event of a wildfire.

Contact: Jon Haag, Fuels Module Leader, BLM Hollister Field Office, 831/394-8314



Same section of the road following treatment.



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Otay Mountain International Border Fuel Break

Another section of an international fuel break located at the border between the United States and Mexico in San Diego County California, has recently been completed. The BLM Palm Springs fuels crew and crews contracted from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection restored the Otay Mountain section of the international fuel break after years of little or no maintenance.

This on-going project has several goals that include protection of life and property in adjacent communities, improved endangered species habitat, reducing the risk of large scale fire in the protected tecate cypress groves on Otay Mountain, and enhanced national security due to open areas that deter illegal immigration across border.

This section of the fuel break contained some of the most rugged terrain found anywhere along the 30 mile project. As a result, the width of the fuel break was widened to almost 600 feet in spots in order to remain effective if fire approaches from the steep slopes of the area. In addition, special considerations were required due to the rare and endangered species found in the area, including the critical habitat for the Quino checkerspot butterfly and the protected tecate cypress stands.



Steep terrain required special consideration in this area of the break.



State and federal fire crews worked cooperatively on the fuel break project.



Fire crew members attending large pile burns on the international fuel break.



Tecate cypress.



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Over 100 acres of decadent fuels were thinned and the removed brush piled during this past summer. Finally, in January of 2003 conditions were right to allow burning of the piled brush. During a ten day period beginning on January 21, all piles except those on the steepest slopes were burned. Those few remaining piles will wait for greener conditions to assure their safe burning.

The on-going work on the international fuel break is an excellent example of fire mitigation on an interagency basis that provides multiple benefits to the local communities in both the United States and Mexico.

Contact: Ron Woychak, Fire Management Officer,
BLM Palm Springs-South Coast Office, 858/674-2968



Large piles of cut brush being burned along the international border.

Idaho

Salmon Field Office Teams Up to Build Fire Management Plan

The BLM Salmon Field Office is preparing the first draft of a fire management plan to identify priority public land areas and develop guidelines and alternatives for applying fuel treatments and managing fire suppression. The project is being developed as part of the National Fire Policy and National Fire Plan.

A local natural resource consulting firm, North Wind, Inc., was hired to help facilitate the process. The first phase initiated in mid-August 2001 by gathering information developed at working meetings. Working members included people from the Salmon Field Office, Salmon-Challis National Forest, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Lemhi County Commissioners, local ranchers and citizens. Options and concerns regarding fire management were thoroughly discussed at the meetings.

With assistance from North Wind, a consensus process was used to develop and publish a template of fire management needs by June 2002. Titled "Interdisciplinary Activity Plan for Fire Management," it identified ten geographic areas at

the field office watershed level with targeted issues or areas of concern. These are resource management issues, social and economic concerns, areas of wildland fire use for resource benefit, and the wildland urban interface. Vegetation types and associated acreages were also included as issues. The activity plan served not only to initiate the fire management plan, but will also be useful with other aspects of resource management.



(l to r) Jim Tucker, fire use specialist, Dave Krosting, BLM Salmon field manager, Hadley Roberts, public representative, and Bill Diage, U.S. Forest Service discuss fire management issues during a public meeting.



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Beginning in August 2002, the core group involved in creating the interdisciplinary plan began work on the fire management plan. Based on advice from Upper Columbia-Salmon Clearwater District planning coordinators, the group determined the fire management plan should recommend fire management practices and provide guidelines and alternatives rather than mandating decisions. A key element was to ensure it was consistent with the Salmon Field Office Resource Management Plan amended in August 2001.

North Wind, Inc. facilitated weekly meetings and a final public meeting in late February 2003. They also assisted field office and district staff with editing and finalizing the draft fire plan. It is anticipated that the first draft will be ready for review soon. A final plan document is anticipated by June 2003. The fire management plan will be combined with the Coeur d'Alene, Cottonwood and Challis Field Office plans to form the Upper Columbia Salmon Clearwater District Fire Management Plan.

Contact Jim Tucker, Fire Use Specialist (208) 756-5490

Cottonwood Field Office Making Strides Fire Planning

BLM's Cottonwood Field Office is making great progress in implementing the wildland urban interface portion of the National Fire Plan for several northern Idaho communities.

This is being accomplished through an assistance agreement with the Clearwater Resource Conservation and Development Council, a rural non-profit development and natural resource conservation organization that has been helping to improve communities of North Central Idaho for over 30 years. Under the agreement, the council and BLM work with other local, state, federal, tribal and private sector wildland fire fighting organizations, local private contractors, and consultants to implement goals and objectives aimed at protecting local communities from catastrophic wildland fires.



Idaho County area with potential for treatments to reduce high intensity, large scale wildland fire.

With the council's sponsorship, interrelated projects have been developed and are being implemented under the assistance agreement's five task orders. Progress has been made to assess issues and needs related to fire protection within the communities and rural areas of Nez Perce, Clearwater, Idaho, Latah and Lewis Counties under the first two of the task orders. Fire services provider maps and wildland fire assessment and mitigation plans are being completed. Cooperative agreements with eight of the nine Latah County rural fire departments/districts are now finalized.



A Snake River Canyon area under consideration for mechanical and prescribed fire treatment.



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The third task order is addressing the reduction of fuels in the Wet Gulch area of the John Day Creek watershed in Idaho County, with completion targeted for December 2003.

A fourth task order guides the development of interdisciplinary fire management plans that can be converted into Environmental Assessments on six BLM-designated areas in North Central Idaho. This is scheduled for completion by May 2003.

The fifth and final task order addresses development and implementation of fire/fuels projects that complement the National Fire Plan for areas in Clearwater and Nez Perce Counties.

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New Mexico

Taos Field Office Generates Funds and Reduces Fuels

A solid partnership between BLM and the Boy Scouts of America has improved a popular use area while returning over \$250,000 to the U.S. Treasury over the past four years through fuel wood sales.

Camp Frank Rand lies in one of northern New Mexico's most scenic areas at the foothills of the



The Camp Frank Rand camp area in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The camp, which is located just north of Santa Fe and adjacent to the U.S. Forest Service Pecos Wilderness, poses challenging wildland urban interface problems for reducing hazardous fuels.

The camp's grounds cover more than 2,000 acres of dense pinion-juniper and ponderosa pine woodland and include a beautiful tract of old-growth ponderosa pine forest. The camp has many important archaeological and cultural sites, which contribute to its unique characteristics. Throughout the spring and summer, the camp is busy with more than 400 campers and staff members hiking, biking, viewing the wildlife and enjoying the land.



The project has returned over \$250,000 to the U.S. Treasury over the past four years through sales of firewood.

The land that the camp lies on belongs to the BLM, but has been granted to the Boy Scouts of America under the Recreation and Public Purpose Act. Even though the land is used by the Boy Scout Greater Southwest Council, the BLM retains management of the vegetation, wildlife, mineral and cultural resources.

The physical features of the camp area combined with the unnatural fuel loading contribute to a high potential for wildfire. With the high amount of human activity in a wildland setting, the risk of wildfire to facilities and human safety is an important concern. Recognizing this danger, the Boy Scouts and U.S. Forest Service asked BLM for help in mitigating these fire risks. Since the



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camp is located so close to the Pecos Wilderness, the forest service also has an interest in reducing wildland fire potential. If the camp were to sustain a wildfire, it could rapidly spread into the wilderness.

For the past four years, the Taos BLM fire and fuels crew has been actively mitigating fire risks as a part of their hazardous fuels reduction program. This program includes mechanical thinning, pile burning, and prescribed broadcast burning.

Mechanical thinning with chainsaws is done for critical areas of high human activity in the camp, including administrative facilities, campgrounds, meeting areas, and walkways. Using only chainsaws to thin is a lighter impact method of thinning for this high public exposure area.

Pile burning is completed for excess slash left over from thinning activities. Pile burning is done only in the fall, winter, and spring, when the scouts are not using the camp and risk of an escaped fire is at a minimum.

Prescribed broadcast burning is also done. With the decreased density of the forest, herbaceous ground cover on the site increases and provides carrier fuel for low-intensity ground fires, which are used to maintain the open forest stand structure which is more resistant to catastrophic wildfire.

The Boy Scouts unique agreement with the BLM includes the BLM workforce, capital for the program, the scouts matching some of the funds spent by BLM, and free use of their facilities to BLM employees while working on-site. The Boy Scouts also contribute more than 1,000 volunteer hours a year on work projects that benefit the land, including trail construction and erosion control dams. Without this assistance and cooperation, it would be very difficult to coordinate this project.



Fire crews monitor burning slash piles.

This collaborative effort between the Boy Scouts of America and the BLM has treated more than 800 acres since 1998 and has significantly reduced the potential of damage to life and property in Camp Frank Rand. In addition to reducing the threat of wildfire in the camp, the strategies implemented have also contributed to restoration of the historic Ponderosa pine stands in the camp, reduced long-term erosion rates of the soils, protected the many archaeological sites found on the camp from the effects of catastrophic wildfire, and have improved habitat for wildlife including deer and elk.



A day at the office in New Mexico.



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