

Snapshots

Successful BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Oregon

Building Partnerships in Southwest Oregon

To help property owners reduce the fire hazard around their rural homes, the BLM's Medford District recently initiated a new program through funding from the National Fire Plan in the community. People who own land or reside on land bordering public land may now get free special use permits to thin small trees and brush on federal land to reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to their property. When combined with similar work on private property, this strategy for reducing fuel loads creates a "defensible space" area for firefighters.



Before photograph illustrates the need for brush removal and tree thinnings.

Due to decades of successful fire suppression and fire exclusion in southwest Oregon, vegetation fuels have built up to alarming levels. Dead debris and live vegetation starts have accumulated to the point that fire conditions become extreme during the summer months. These conditions exist in the urban interface where federal land borders private property.

This past spring, approximately 25 community volunteers, along with BLM employees, completed a successful fuel reduction project on public land next to a rural fire station in the Applegate Valley. This project was done in conjunction with the developing "Applegate Fire Plan," a collaborative fire protection strategy financed by grants from the National Fire Plan. Volunteers learned more about thinning, slash pile construction, and burning. BLM employees answered questions about fuel reduction activities and a fire engine was available in case the burn piles got out of control.

A recent article in a local newspaper advertising the new fuel reduction program has generated additional interest from the community. Several site visits with private landowners and residences by a BLM Fire Mitigation Specialist have already occurred and more are scheduled in the near future. It is anticipated that the Medford District BLM will issue numerous special use permits for hazard fuel reduction in the near future.

While there are a number of alternatives for fuels reduction, generally, live vegetation three inches in diameter at breast height and less, and dead fuels six inches or less, are removed. Mowing of herbs and grasses is encouraged to prevent a build up of dry summer fine fuels.

July 10, 2002



Snapshots

Successful BLM hazardous fuels projects ...



After photograph shows the defensible space created through a new program made possible under the National Fire Plan.

Neighbors who use overgrown BLM roads for access/egress to their property may also obtain a roadside-brushing permit to thin and brush these roads for safe travel and evacuation should a wildfire occur.

Permit stipulations require property owners to remove severed debris to their own property for disposal. Gathered debris may be used as home heating fuel or for other purposes. Permits generally allow landowners to thin into BLM land 100 feet from their boundary. Vegetation should be relatively sparse within approximately 200 feet of structures.

Cooperative efforts under the National Fire Plan like these help both community members and federal agencies reduce the potential wildfire hazard in southwestern Oregon. These projects focus on protecting life and property from wildland fire starting on public lands while reducing the risk to public lands from a fire originating on private property. Working together, we can make a difference.

Contact: Karen Gillespie, Medford BLM, (541) 618-2424

Colorado

Using “Teachable Moments” to Discuss the Benefits of Prescribed Treatments

Capitalizing on the current interest in wildland fire in Colorado, on Saturday, June 29, the Uncompahgre Plateau Project sponsored a field trip to three fire sites on the Uncompahgre Plateau to view and discuss the benefits of prescribed treatments in Ponderosa pine. Approximately 70 people from the partnership attended the field trip. The Montrose BLM fire ecologist



A diverse group of ranchers, loggers, environmentalists, elected officials and agency personnel observe as Dan Huisjen, BLM Fire Ecologist explains how several thinning and prescribed fire units decreased the spread and intensity of the Bucktail Fire.

July 10, 2002



Snapshots

Successful BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

and two Forest Service range conservationists from the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forest used these “teachable moments” to explain the benefits of fuels treatments in reducing extreme fire behavior and fire effects.

The first stop on the field trip was a 2002 fire site: the Bucktail Fire, which burned 2,244 acres in May of this year. This site was used to illustrate the impacts of wildfire on untreated stands of Ponderosa pine versus stands treated with thinning and prescribed fire. The speakers addressed the benefits and effects of prescribed burning and mechanical treatments as well as the importance of seeding and other rehabilitation efforts on disturbed sites to out compete invasive species.

The second stop was a 1982 prescribed fire treatment site, which was used to illustrate the level of regeneration 20 years after harvesting and prescribed burning in Ponderosa pine. The third stop was at a 1996 fire site (Telephone Draw Fire - July 1996). This site provided a good context for viewing and discussing regeneration in Ponderosa pine six years after an intense wildland fire.

This field trip was just one of many sponsored to educate the public on public land management issues.

Uncompahgre Plateau Project is a coalition comprised of the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and the Public Lands Partnership, a citizen group representing diverse interest groups from four Colorado counties: Ouray, Montrose, Delta, and San Miguel. The coalition was formed about 3 years ago for the express purpose of coordinating planning and management of the 1.5 million acres on the Uncompahgre Plateau in south central Colorado.

The desire is to provide more comprehensive, seamless management - that is, to manage the Plateau as one ecological unit and to more adequately address the ecological, economic, and social impacts of land management decisions. Through public meetings and public outreach, The Uncompahgre Plateau Project has been successful in creating partnerships to leverage money for projects and research. They are currently assisting the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forest in the first phase of their Forest Plan Revision.

Contact: Maggie McCaffrey, Fire Education Specialist, Montrose Interagency Fire (970) 240-5396.



Using a tree ring to illustrate, range conservationist Floyd Reed discusses recent fire research on the Uncompahgre Plateau.

July 10, 2002



Snapshots

Successful BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Idaho

Decreasing the Risk of Fire in Sun Valley



Nordstrom's cutting machine was designed to work on steep slopes to remove fuels.

The city of Sun Valley is one of 11 towns in South Central Idaho that was designated in 2001 as a "Community at Risk." The designation makes them eligible for money from the National Fire Plan to make their town more fire safe. Of those 11 communities, Sun Valley is one that is now putting the money to work.

For the past 14 months, Sun Valley has been actively involved in developing a unique plan to reduce fire fuels and make the town more defensible.

"The first step is to explain to residents that there is actually a fire risk," Phil McCaffray, project coordinator with the Sun Valley Fire Department said. "Once they realize that, then we can start to get serious."

Sun Valley is unique due to resident's strong desire to maintain the area's natural, aesthetic surroundings. From the beginning, Sun Valley Fire Department understood that using herbicide or back burning to reduce fire fuels was not an option.

They then got in contact with Jay Nordstrom of Nordstrom Mechanical in Kingston, Idaho. Nordstrom's company designed and built a machine to be used specifically for forest treatment. Sun Valley Fire Department contracted with Nordstrom and began a 20-day project to create a "buffer strip" around homes at risk in Sun Valley.



The unique design allows a 270 degree cutting radius for sage and other fuels at a six inch height.

The company charged \$270 an hour for the Sun Valley project, which included an operator, a standby service vehicle and one other person. McCaffray said the machine can operate on grades as steep as 35 to 40 percent.

July 10, 2002



Snapshots

Successful BLM hazardous fuels projects ...



Homes in Sun Valley that are now protected with a buffer strip from clearing of hillside fuels.

Nordstrom's machine makes two passes over the sage-covered ground, cutting and then mulching. Snow pack will cause the soil to absorb the debris, eliminating continued fire hazard. The head of the arm is much like a giant weed eater, cutting 6 inches above ground, while the machine itself rotates 270-degrees and keeps with the contour of the land. Grasses are left essentially untouched, while the overly mature sage surrounding Sun Valley is knocked down, leaving a clearing that could save homes from wildfire.



Two photos showing adjacent treated and untreated areas for the project.

"We are achieving our goal and meeting expectations for Sun Valley with this project," McCaffray said, "Sightliness was a concern and we took that into consideration. Both the citizens and the fire community are benefitting with this method."



July 10, 2002



Snapshots

Successful BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Upper Snake River District

Fire Danger Signs Provide Service on Many Levels

Fire danger signs have long been a fixture at the entrances to the nation's public lands and national forests, warning vacationers if the fire danger gets too high. In Eastern Idaho, the system has been expanded into cities and towns, too. And this public service reaches many different levels.

"We started this program after the Point Fire," said Fred Judd, Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist for the Eastern Idaho Interagency Fire Center (EIIFC). The Point Fire (1995) resulted in the tragic deaths of two Kuna, Idaho city firefighters and prompted many fire organizations to examine how critical information is relayed to all firefighters, in and out of the federal system.

Among the questions was whether local communities had access to the day's fire danger readings. Many federal weather stations are now accessible on the web, and dispatch centers help interpret weather and fuel moisture data to find a local area's fire danger.

A key to the success of the Fire Danger signs is the development of EIIFC's website. The website has been in development for the past four seasons, and is updated daily using data from Remote Access Weather Stations. From the main page, the user can glance at weather information for the Idaho Falls and Pocatello areas, a general summary of conditions in mountain locations, and link to information from specific weather stations throughout Eastern Idaho. For the convenience of the local user, an animated graphic for each station shows the same reading that should appear on fire danger signs at their local fire station.

Fire stations also use the information from the EIIFC website to adjust their signs accordingly. In this way, the website and the signs become integrated into an overall fire prevention campaign.

Distributing that information to a mass audience is a challenge for far-flung cities and towns. Fire fighters seem to have found one answer to the problem of educating the public by posting local fire danger signs for their community. The signs are placed in front of fire



The Ammon Fire Department with a fire danger rating sign completed by Boy Scouts.

July 10, 2002



Snapshots

Successful BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

stations and in other prominent locations in town, and the danger ratings are changed as the fire danger changes – daily, if need be.

Lava Hot Springs, Idaho is one of the communities that is putting the signs to good use. Already the town has four signs placed at the fire station and other locations around town, and two more signs are on order for locations near neighborhoods. “I’ve had quite a few people comment on them and ask questions about them. I’ve been surprised,” said Joel Price, Chief of the Lava Hot Springs Fire Department.

The fire danger signs also provide a public service in other ways, too. For years, the BLM has partnered with local Boy Scouts to build the signs. Boys that are finishing the requirements for their Eagle Scout award are required to plan and implement a service project that benefits the community.

The costs of the project are relatively cheap, thanks to the volunteer labor. BLM supplies funds for materials – about \$140 for two signs. This includes wood posts, plywood, paint, Plexiglas, and plastic decals and arrows.

Once the signs are completed by scout volunteers they are given to EIIFC. The fire prevention staff attaches a small plaque on each sign recognizing the Eagle Scout for his contribution. About 55 signs have been built so far, and new signs are placed in communities about as fast as the scouts can build them.

Judd believes that the high-profile signs may be helping to reduce certain human-caused fires in the local area. “Escaped agricultural burns used to be one of our biggest headaches, and one of the leading causes of large fires locally,” he said. The signs, plus



An Eagle Scout candidate showing the fire danger sign he completed as a part of his project.

July 10, 2002



Snapshots

Successful BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

a heavy emphasis over the past four years on properly preparing fields before burning stubble, help the farm work know quickly whether it's safe to burn.

Fire prevention staff members also encourage the public to get the reading off a sign before burning debris and ditches, firing up charcoal for a Dutch oven, or other common human causes of wildfires.

“So every one wins: the scout can complete his service project, EIIFC advances its prevention message, and the community gets another tool to find out whether burning is safe today,” said Judd.

July 10, 2002

