

Snapshots 2003

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California

Reducing the Risk, Reaping the Benefits

When residents in and around Sawmill-Hungry Gulch participated in “Fire Safe Community Chipper Days” this spring, they had no idea how important that event would become in their life. Within a couple months of clearing debris off roofs and thinning vegetation around their homes east of Bakersfield, California, a wildfire pushed through their community threatening more than 100 homes and burning four residences and five outbuildings.

The outcome could have easily been much worse. When the Sawmill Fire was at its most threatening, 120 homes were at risk of being burned, and more than 500 residents were evacuated. Yet only nine structures succumbed to a fire that moved directly through the community. One year ago, the story was very different, when more than 60 homes burned in the Deer and Borel fires in the Kern River Valley.

The hazardous fuel reduction projects completed since last fall in and around the Sawmill-Hungry Gulch community, including fuel treatments along the narrow access road into Lake Isabella, turned what could have been a disaster into a success story. More than 100 homes survived the Sawmill Fire, which started in a residence, moved through the adjacent wildland, and then into the community.

Homeowners, in cooperation with the Kern Valley Fire Safe Council of which BLM Bakersfield is a member, volunteers and federal agencies, cleared roofs and thinned vegetation around homes. Through a BLM Grant, the Fire Safe Council purchased the chipper, which is being used in Kern Valley communities organizing projects. Cuttings and trimmings were piled and chipped or burned by BLM. BLM fire crews thinned vegetation 20



These four photos show examples of dense ponderosa pine regeneration, post-treatment area, and burning near the Sawmill-Hungry Gulch area.



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feet on either side of the main road to community, thus improving access during emergencies. BLM also co-hosted a National Firewise Workshop in the area and is currently hosting a Student Conservation Association Fire Education Team to supplement their wildfire outreach and education efforts.

These efforts, along with those of the community and other stakeholders, have everyone feeling proud of the progress they've made to make the community more fire safe. Fire will always be part of the Kern River Valley but by working cooperatively with local residents, the losses resulting from this fire were greatly reduced.

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Partnering With Pinyon Pines Community

Pinyon Pines, California is located in the high desert area of Riverside County, California. It is one of 1,100 communities at risk of wildland fire in California. Surrounded by the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, the area is jointly managed by the BLM and the US Forest Service. Drought has affected the pinyon junipers and pines in the region and the proximity to the extreme tree mortality being experienced in nearby mountain communities is proving to be a powerful call to action to deal with the Pinyon Pine's heavy fuel loading.



BLM and California Department of Forestry crews work the chipper.



Piles of thinned vegetation is chipped.

Recently, fire staff from BLM's Palm Springs – South Coast Office partnered with Pinyon Pine community volunteers, local Fire Safe Council members from nearby Idyllwild, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the Riverside County Fire Department to reduce the drought-stricken heavy fuels around the community. The thinning and chipping project was scheduled for a weekend to maximize both community interest and involvement and over eight acres of thick brush was treated. Local press coverage was good and word-of-mouth about the project is expected to generate even greater participation and results during future community chipping days.

The BLM continues to offer assistance to communities-at-risk of wildland fire in an effort to



Brush thinned by community members awaits chipping.



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reduce their risk of catastrophic wildfire. BLM's commitment to the Pinyon Pine area, including the stationing of a wildland fire engine in the immediate area during the past two fire seasons is acknowledged and appreciated by the community. By working together, these wildland urban interface communities are becoming safer places to live.

Contact: Ron Woychak, (858) 674-2968

Taking It to the Streets

Fire Prevention Officer Clay Howe, of BLM's Palm Springs- South Coast Office, remembers from his childhood pickup trucks from the Cleveland National Forest with large fire prevention signs mounted on the tailgates. The television show "Lassie" was on TV at that time and the Forest Ranger who cared for the star drove the same trucks. This publicity provided for some great public relations for the Forest Service as well as a positive message to the public to help prevent forest fires. Little did Clay know then that he would one day get to experiment with this type of public outreach!

BLM's Palm Springs-South Coast Office jurisdiction includes San Diego and western Imperial counties in southern California. This area experiences a fire season that essentially lasts all year and has many communities at risk of wildland fire. In an effort to compliment the traditional fire prevention and education activities occurring in the Palm Spring's South Coast Office, Clay decided to supplement his patrol vehicle with fire prevention messages similar to what he recalled from his childhood.

In an effort to make the messages attractive and appealing, an image of Smokey Bear was selected by employees and now adorns both sides of the patrol vehicle. Two messages accompany the image; "Be Careful With Fire" and "Prevent Wildfires". As semi-



Fire prevention messages at the international border.

annual analysis is made of the area's fire problem, these messages can be changed. For example, due to the large numbers of structures lost in recent fires, the fire staff is now considering several new defensible space and Firewise messages

The patrol unit has been very popular with the public presenting a memorable fire prevention message while also providing for good public relations for the BLM. The vehicle has traveled over 60,000 miles in the past two years, averaging 150 miles per day while patrolling an area with a population exceeding four million people.

The vehicle has also been displayed at Camp Smokey at the California State Fair at Sacramento, the Wild Horse and Burro Adoption at Roseville, Southern California Association of Forester and Fire Wardens, Firewise Workshop at Asilomar and Operation Imperial Dunes with the El Centro Field Office.

While it's impossible to quantify how many fire prevention impressions this project has generated, one thing is clear...this patrol vehicle is getting noticed and seldom fails to elicit a smile or wave from the kid inside of all of us. And who knows, maybe a future fire prevention officer will remember the message well into the future!



Big Sur receives the fire prevention message.

Contact: Clay Howe, (858) 676-0894



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Montana

Cooperation the Key to Successful Projects

A multitude of agencies cooperated in the recent, and successful, H-Cross and North Breaks fuels reduction projects in the Missouri Breaks of eastern Montana. The purpose of the projects was to reduce the dense stands of pole-size ponderosa pine, improve the vigor of native plants, forbs, and shrubs in the pine-savanna ecosystem, and reestablish a low-severity fire regime.

The 2,300 acre H-Cross project and 3,450 acre North Breaks project consisted of mixed BLM, state, and private lands. Several agencies cooperated to achieve success on the projects. Included were BLM staff from the eastern, central, and South Dakota zones, BLM and US Forest Service smokejumpers from Boise, West Yellowstone, and Missoula, a National Park Service fire use module crew from Yellowstone National Park, Custer National Forest crews, and the Jordan, Montana Volunteer Fire Department.



Missouri Breaks topography in eastern Montana.



Conditions allowed part of the project to be done in the spring of 2003.



A post-burn area of the Missouri Breaks.

The crews completed the H-Cross fire and 950 acres of the North Breaks fire in the spring of 2003. The remainder of the North Breaks project will be completed this fall.



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Nevada

BLM Nevada Hosts Three Student Conservation Association Volunteer Teams

BLM Nevada is hosting three teams of volunteers from the Student Conservation Association's Fire Education Corps this summer.

The BLM Carson City Field Office is hosting two SCA Teams, Team Reno and Team Carson City.

Based in Reno, Team Reno members have been concentrating their efforts communities in the valleys north of the city.

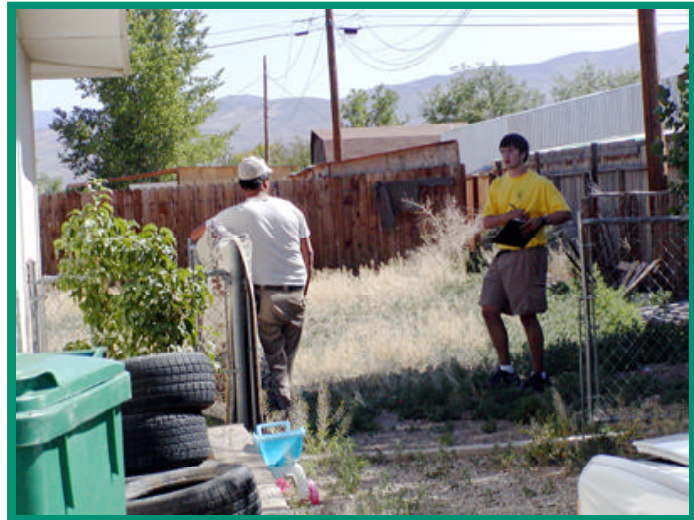
Team Carson City has returned for a third year and is currently working in the Mound House, Virginia City Highlands, Kings Canyon, Timberline, and Pinion Hills communities, which surround Carson City.

The BLM Winnemucca Field Office is hosting it's first-ever SCA Team. Team Winnemucca has been targeting Winnemucca-area rural communities in the wildland urban interface.

Before coming to Nevada in June, members of the Winnemucca, Carson City and Reno teams all completed extensive training in fire ecology, mitigation, and education in McCall, Idaho.

Once in Nevada, members were given specific training for the Great Basin area, including the University of Nevada, Reno's, "Living with Fire" program, local fire history, and identification of native plants and species that promote and retard the spread of wildland fire.

Working in cooperation with the BLM Carson City and Winnemucca Field Offices and local area fire departments, the three SCA teams have been conducting wildland fire home evaluations. The focus of these activities is to provide homeowners and community officials with all the information



Like all SCA Fire Education Corps volunteers, Richard Sluznis from Team Reno has been trained to identify dangerous wildland fire situations around homes, such as this buildup of fuels too close to a home in Lemmon Valley.

and knowledge they need to protect themselves, their property and their community from the wildfires that sweep through the region nearly every summer.

Team Reno is working in cooperation with four volunteer fire departments under the umbrella of the Reno Fire Department. These include Lemmon Valley, Red Rock, Palomino Valley and Silver Lake. These fire departments cover areas in the valleys north of Reno, which are separated by small mountain ranges.

In addition to working with the local volunteer fire departments, Team Reno is advertising its availability to do home evaluations through various media and community outlets. These include volunteer fire department meetings, community and church bulletin boards, community service events, and public service announcements on the radio.

Team Reno has just finished canvassing the Lemmon Valley community, where they visited 560 homes. Visits include going door-to-door talking with homeowners about defensible space.



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As a result of this canvassing, Team Reno has completed 70 home evaluations in Lemmon Valley alone.

The Team has also planned home evaluations in the communities of Rancho Haven, Red Rock, Silver Lake, and Palomino Valley.

Team Reno has made a free dumpster available at the Lemmon Valley Volunteer Fire

Department for residents to dispose of vegetation removed from around their homes. The Team will soon be conducting a fuels reduction and demonstration project in concert with the Lemmon Valley Volunteer Fire Department.

Team Carson City returned for a third year and is currently working in the Mound House, Virginia City Highlands, Kings Canyon, Timberline, and Pinion Hills communities in the Carson City area.

This is the first summer for an SCA Team to work with the Mound House community east of Carson City. Team members have been coordinating their efforts in Mound House with the Central Lyon County Fire Department and the Mound House Volunteer Fire Department. Home canvassing efforts have gone smoothly.

Team Carson City recently created four fire awareness signs that have been placed throughout the Mound House area. These signs highlight the possibility of wildland fires, their devastating potential, and offer homeowners the opportunity to sign up for wildland fire risk home evaluations. These signs have been in the field for several weeks, and have received a positive response from the community.

Team Carson City's canvassing efforts in the Virginia City Highlands northeast of Carson City



Richard Sluznis and team leader Katie Myszka from SCA Team Reno discuss defensible space with a homeowner in Lemmon Valley, north of Reno.

have also gone well, working in concert with the Storey County Fire Department. The bumpy gravel roads, wild horses, and cool mountain breezes make the Highlands a great place to canvass during hot summer afternoons. The team's goal is to finish canvassing the Highlands area, and eventually revisit homes that have received SCA Team assessments the previous two summers.

In August, the team will be working with the BLM Carson City Field Office on a fuels reduction project in the Mound House area. Team Carson City will help the BLM create a fuel break behind this community, which has a high fire risk.

Team Carson has also begun work with the Virginia City Highlands Volunteer Fire Department and the Nevada Division of Forestry to create a fuels reduction demonstration project in the Highlands.



Team Carson City poses with one of the signs that have been placed throughout the Mound House neighborhood.



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Both the Reno and Carson City Teams have made a point of attending events and meetings sponsored by the Alpine County Fire Safe Council, Fire Safe Highlands, and the Nevada Fire Safe Council, as well as other interested public service organizations.

Both teams have begun monitoring their respective areas to see if homeowners have implemented defensible space suggestions made by SCA Teams in 2001 and 2002. Monitoring results will be used to determine the success of the SCA Fire Education Corps in Nevada.

“These SCA Teams have had great success getting their message out to the public in an engaging and non-invasive manner through a variety of outreach methods,” said BLM Nevada Fire Management Officer Kevin Hull. “These young people are working hard to raise public awareness about the dangers of wildfire, help home and business owners protect both their lives and their property, and also help the people of Northern Nevada create fire safe communities.”

The members of Team Carson City include:

- Team Leader Melissa Jones of San Marcos, Texas.
- Jena Lund of Detroit Lakes, Minnesota.
- Derek Swingley of Muncie, Indiana.
- Adam Wilson of Richmond, Virginia.
- Carlena Blake of Loon Lake, Washington.

Team Reno members include:

- Team Leader Katie Myszka of Athens, Georgia.
- Richard Sluznis of Potomac, Maryland.
- Michelle Cavanaugh of Randallstown, Maryland.
- Alicia McCormick of Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania.
- Jeannie Miller, of Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania.



SCA volunteers clear brush in the Virginia City Highlands during the summer of 2002. The Reno and Carson City SCA teams will continue these efforts in 2003.

Team Winnemucca members include:

- Team Leader Jenny Seiler, of Lafayette, Louisiana.
- Josh Ray of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
- Kember Pollington of Great Falls, Montana.
- Erika Dinkel-Smith of Menomonie, Wisconsin.
- Ryan McDonald-O’Lear of Portland, Oregon.

Rye Patch Residents Welcome SCA Volunteers

In the summer of 1999, Georgia Morgan and her Rye Patch neighbors became true believers in creating defensible space for their rural homes.

In May of that summer, the flames crept all the way to the other side of Old Victory Highway, which runs in front of Georgia’s home. In early August 1999, when thousands of acres were burning across northern Nevada, another wildfire was stopped at the Humboldt River, only two miles away.

“Ever since the 1999 fires we’re all more worried about this,” she said. “It just moves so fast when it burns here.”



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Members of the SCA Team Winnemucca and a sign indicating extreme fire conditions for the area illustrate the importance of their fire prevention and education mission. From the left, Erika Dinkel-Smith, Jenny Seiler, Kember Pollington and Josh Ray, and Ryan McDonald-O’Lear.

After the 1999 fires, one Rye Patch man even used his own tractor to mow the excess vegetation around his neighbor’s homes.

Originally from Coeur D’Alene, Idaho, Georgia and her husband, Wayne, have lived in Rye Patch for the past four years. She is executive director of the Humboldt River Ranch Association, which covers 2,140 lots in the Rye Patch area. Wayne works at the Newmont Mine in Midas.

The sagebrush has grown back in the field across the road from Georgia’s house, along with a lot of cheatgrass that wasn’t there before.

Higher than average rainfall in April and May caused a growth and early green-up of cheatgrass and other annual grasses in Rye Patch and many rural areas near Winnemucca. And much of this spring bumper crop of annual grasses has dried up with the high temperatures and low humidity of June and July.

These dried up fields of cheatgrass only need a tiny spark to start a dangerous, fast-moving wildfire.

So far this fire season, the BLM Winnemucca Field Office has hosted two National Fire Prevention Teams, which are assessing fuel conditions in the Winnemucca area and disseminating fire prevention messages aimed at reducing human-caused fires.

BLM Winnemucca is also hosting a team of volunteers from the Student Conservation Association’s Fire Education Corps this summer. SCA Team Winnemucca is spending the summer helping area home and businesses owners create defensible space from wildland fire around their properties.

On one hot, dry Thursday evening, three members of SCA Team Winnemucca pulled into Georgia’s driveway to do a defensible space home assessment. Kember Pollington, Josh Ray and Erika Dinkel-Smith all had different jobs to do in this home assessment, but not before Georgia gave each of them a welcoming hug and a broad smile.

“I think it’s amazing how they do this,” she said. “These young people have a lot of courage, going up to complete strangers and offering advice on fire prevention.”



Josh Ray from SCA Team Winnemucca discusses defensible space with Rye Patch resident Georgia Morgan.



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Walking around the house, Josh asked Georgia about the roads into and out of her neighborhood. He suggested she apply fire-resistant coating to her wooden deck, and put wire mesh screening under the deck to keep burning embers from igniting the deck's underside.

Rye Patch is a flat location, and winds can be ferocious on hot, summer afternoons. During a wildfire, these afternoon winds can be downright dangerous.

“Nothing much stops the wind when it blows through here,” Georgia said. We’re trying to get some trees to grow, but it’s gonna take about 100 years. Most of the people who live out here have been planting trees, so it won’t look so desert-ish.”

As the team left Georgia’s home to do another home assessment, she reminded them that they were all invited to a barbecue later that evening.

“They’re a close-knit community out here in Rye Patch,” Josh said. “They take care of each other.”

“Our reception here in Rye Patch has been amazing,” said Erika.

Bob Castillo owns three homes in Rye Patch on adjoining lots. He lives in one, and his children live in the other two. All three yards are full of Russian knapweed, and Bob finds himself constantly mowing. “That’s just too much work for me,” Bob said. “I’ll be turning 66 in September, and I’m ready to move to a smaller lot.” Originally from San Francisco, Bob has lived in Rye Patch since 1998. He founded the Rye Patch Volunteer Fire Department.

BLM used special funding from the National Fire Plan to pay for the risk assessments and SCA Team, as well as for work in Winnemucca-area communities at risk in the wildland-urban interface.



Erika Dinkel-Smith from SCA Team Winnemucca shares a lighter moment with Rye Patch resident Bob Castillo.

Like their counterparts in Reno and Carson City, Josh and the other members of Team Winnemucca have been going out into these communities to evaluate accessibility by road, signing and global positioning satellite information on the home location, power lines, other human uses like camping, skiing and roadside picnicking, water and fire hydrant systems, and past wildland urban interface defensible space efforts.

In addition to Josh, Kember and Erika, the other members of SCA Team Winnemucca are Ryan McDonald-O’Lear and Team Leader Jenny Seiler.



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