

Snapshots 2003

September 5

Idaho

Rural Fire Assistance Surplus Engines Help Foster and Strengthen Partnerships

Of the many programs and efforts spawned by the National Fire Plan, perhaps none are hailed as more successful and efficient than the Rural Fire Assistance Program. At least that is the case in southwest Idaho. While a number of county mitigation plans are successfully being done, involving a broad spectrum of partners for projects being implemented, the Rural Fire Assistance program is out front in showing immediate benefits to the BLM Lower Snake River District and its partners throughout the area.

In the three years since its inception, the Rural Fire Assistance program has enabled the Lower Snake River District to foster new partnerships and strengthen existing ones on the way to delivering approximately \$670,000 to 43 community fire departments. The funding assistance for

equipment, training, and prevention for these departments, many which are small and often financially-strapped, has made a significant difference in their capabilities and safety in preparing for wildland fire.

This summer, four departments were able to use the funding to purchase surplus BLM wildland fire engines. Departments in the communities of Mountain Home and Yellow Pine, and the Robie Creek and Murphy-Reynolds-Wilson fire districts each used their funding to purchase 90's-model Type Four heavy wildland engines. BLM District Rural Fire Assistance coordinators facilitated purchase of a surplus engine from out of the area for a fifth department.

Each of the five departments has significant wildland areas within their jurisdictions and the addition of an engine makes a tremendous improvement in their ability to safely and effectively respond to wildfires, especially in wildland-urban areas, as well as work more closely with BLM crews on the scene.

In ceremonies transferring title and keys to the engines, fire chiefs, county commissioners, and representatives from Idaho's Congressional offices, the Lower Snake River District Manager and others lauded the success and efficiency of the Rural Fire Assistance Program. The success of the program is grounded in a variety of ways, from the quick turnaround time from application for funding assistance, to dollars transferred and increased cooperation and coordination between the BLM and partners, as well as increasing the capabilities and safety factor for small community departments responding to wildland fire.

Rosemary Thomas, Lower Snake River District Fire Management Officer, described the program as "win-win-win" for everyone involved. "This program has helped foster and improve relationships with our partners, and benefited them and their fire programs. Ultimately, we think it will result in improved safety and protection of life, property, and resources during wildfire events," she said.



(l to r) Lower Snake River District Rural Fire Assistance Coordinators Leigh Ann Hislop and Elden Alexander join Fire Management Officer Rosemary Thomas in handing the keys to the 1990 International Type IV engine to David Haney, Fire Chief of the Robie Creek Volunteer Fire Department. Haney's department was able to purchase the surplus engine with funds from the Rural Fire Assistance Program.



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BLM Works with Home and Property Owners in Education and Community Cleanup Effort

A couple of years ago, residents of the Rivers Point Subdivision in Garden Valley, Idaho watched a fire run up the mountain across the South Fork of the Payette River from their homes and cabins. They also knew there was a strip of public land between them and the river below; a strip of land where anglers and rafters occasionally stopped and built campfires or warming fires.

Aware of the potential for wildfire to threaten their subdivision, residents began working around their property to clean it up and make it more resistant to the threat from fire. Then, pursuing their efforts further, the president of the homeowners association contacted the Lower Snake River District BLM for educational materials. Subsequently, Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist Randy Eardley attended the subdivision's annual association membership meeting June 19.

Approximately 30 homeowners attended the meeting and gained an enhanced knowledge of wildfire behavior, home ignition causes related to wildfire and how to prevent them, suppression requirements and capabilities, and more. Several residents took advantage of an offer for individual property assessments following the meeting.

The following day, a fire crew from the Lower Snake River District worked alongside homeowners and assisted them in thinning some tree stands near structures, trimming and removing brush in hazardous locations, cleaning pine needle accumulations from roofs and rain gutters, and general cleanup.

While some work remains to be done, and completed work needs to be maintained, the result of this educational effort and cleanup partnership is that one subdivision is far down the road toward being a fire-safe community, with homes, cabins, and structures better able to withstand a wildfire.



Jessica Gardetto, a fire information officer at the Lower Snake River District, stand in front of a large slash pile created by homeowners in the River's Point Subdivision in Garden Valley, Idaho from debris cleaned up around their property and neighborhood. A fire crew worked alongside homeowners one weekend to help thin, trim, and haul away vegetation in an effort to reduce the risk of loss to wildfire.

Fuels Work Becomes a Four Legged Affair

There was no heavy machinery. There were no complex burn plans. But with the help of about 1,000 sheep there is a fuel break along the wildland-urban interface south of Kuna, Idaho, in BLM's Lower Snake River District.

The rangeland south of Kuna includes one of the most popular and heavily used portions of the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area. It also has a history of frequent fires that threaten homes on the outskirts of Kuna.

In the past decade, a number of ideas for creating firebreaks have been discussed by the Bureau of Land Management, local officials, and the public. The use of sheep was one of those ideas, but until this year, most contractors who grazed livestock had shied away from the project due to the roads and traffic in the interface area.

However, this year, a contractor from Redmond, Oregon, who had other experience with creating



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A herd of sheep finish grazing down the fuels in one area and begin in the next to create a fuels break near a subdivision south of Kuna, Idaho in BLM's Lower Snake River District.

such fuel breaks, took on the task. Using and moving temporary fencing to direct his herd along 300-foot wide strips adjacent to roads in the interface area, the contractor created an estimated 330 acres worth of fuel breaks by the end of June.

Elsewhere in the Lower Snake River District, the BLM worked with local county partners involved in weed control using sheep to cover the double duty of eradicating noxious weeds creating fuel breaks. As a result, both goals are being accomplished along a popular trail, a major highway, and through rural interface areas in the communities of Midvale and Cambridge.

Oregon

Cooperative Research in Prescribed Burning

BLM fuels and fire crews in Oregon's Klamath Basin are cooperating in a long-term research project on the Lava Beds National Monument in northeastern California. The 46,559 acre Lava Beds National Monument is located in northeastern California, approximately 155 miles northeast of Redding, California, and

58 miles southeast of Klamath Falls, Oregon.

Multiple burns have been carefully planned to assess fire's impact to healthy sagebrush ecosystems, sagebrush areas that have been invaded by cheat grass, and sagebrush areas that have been invaded by juniper trees. The burns will be carefully implemented and monitored to determine the impacts of prescribed burning in spring, summer and fall conditions. Results will help refine and improve prescribed burning prescriptions on sagebrush ecosystems on federal lands.

Two seasons of research burning have been conducted by multi-agency fuels and fire crews during October 2001 and June 2003, at the Lava Beds National

Monument. Interagency cooperation was one of the emphasis areas in the National Fire Plan of 2001, which facilitated the use of BLM and Forest Service crews on these prescribed burns, under the guidance of the National Park Service. The BLM Lakeview District's 20-person fuels management crew from Klamath Falls became a primary source of experienced prescribed burn specialists, allowing for a more efficient use of federal funding and manpower.



Prescribed burning at Lava Beds National Monument .



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Prescribed fire is one of the most effective tools for restoring healthy ecosystems in the west, but burning must be limited to parameters that will meet desired resource outcomes, while avoiding the environmental damage that can be caused through unplanned wildfires. Weather and fuels conditions can severely limit the ideal burning windows, restricting opportunities to implement projects and affecting available personnel. Multi-agency cooperation and collaboration to gain a better understanding of environmental effects will be a key to future success of federal fuels and fire management.

Contact: Joe Foran, (541) 885-4117; or Al Augustine, (530) 667-2282



Prescribed burning around buildings requires extra vigilance.



Using water to control fire behavior.



BLM firefighters ignite burn in Lava Beds National Monument.



BLM firefighters ignite burn in Lava Beds National Monument.



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Keno, Oregon Fire Protection District

Using funds from a National Fire Plan grant, the Keno Rural Fire Protection District in south central Oregon has developed a strategy for addressing fuel reduction in the 44 square mile forested district. Keno is located about 20 miles southeast of Klamath Falls, Oregon and has a population of approximately 2,700. The strategy is made up of several key components including: education, fuel reduction, interagency cooperation, addressing forest health issues, combining fire prevention programs, improved GIS mapping, fire planning and the provision of initial attack capabilities. The Keno Rural Fire Protection District will coordinate closely with the Oregon Department of Forestry who has joint jurisdiction in much of the area. Through their planning efforts, the Keno Rural Fire Protection District hopes to serve as helpful model for other fire and planning departments. The funds will be used for training, equipment and fire prevention work.



Old, decadent brush needs fire to produce shoots that are palatable to wildlife.

New Mexico

BLM Fuels Break Work Pays Off

Fire management investments don't often pay immediate returns, but they did this year in southwestern New Mexico.

A blaze erupted about noon May 8 near Pinos Altos, north of Silver City in Grant County. As night approached, work by BLM and other firefighters and an air tanker had minimal effect on the 5-acre blaze. With evening approaching, the fire was rapidly moving to the southwest, toward several communication towers.

About 6:00 p.m., when the fire reached a 50-acre fuels break created only months before, the show was over. Minor clean up the next day was all that was required.

Credit goes to the BLM-Las Cruces field office, which joined the Forest Service, New Mexico State Forestry and others in clearing small diameter ponderosa pine, pinon pine and juniper around the small community at the southern tip of the Gila National Forest.

The project cleared about 150 acres last year. Additional fuels reduction of about 70 acres is currently underway, and work on about 800 more acres is planned. "Sometimes relatively small, strategic acts bring big results," said Amy Lueders, BLM-Las Cruces field office manager.

The Las Cruces BLM field office is expanding its aggressive fuels reduction program near the small Otero County community of Timberon, where drought conditions have accelerated die-offs of pines attacked by bark beetles. About 330 acres are being thinned around the community nestled in the southern end of the Lincoln National Forest.



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