Snapshots

Successful Bureau of Land Mangement hazardous fuels projects in the wildland urban interface...

September 26, 2001

California

Creating defensible fuel breaks along main road systems

Spring of 2001 found the Alturas Field Office Fire Program working on the first chapter of an on-going Wildland Urban Interface project designed to reduce accumulations of forest fuels along main roads in the area to create defensible space fuel zones.

The Muck Valley prescribed fire.

The Muck Valley Prescribed Burn was a successful 50 acre underburn in Ponderosa pine designed to produce low flames which crawled along the forest floor burning only the duff layer of vegetation while avoiding the tree canopies. By reducing brush densities and ladder fuels which had accumulated as a result of past fire suppression activities, future wildfires that occur will be of lower intensity, easier to control, and less damaging to the ecosystem.

An engine patrols the Muck Valley prescribed fire.

Additional work in this area is scheduled to begin this fall and will include more underburning and a 360 acre biomass, brush mastication project.

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National Conservation Area Benefits from Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

The 50 acre High Rock prescribed burn was conducted in December 2000 by the Surprise Resource Area's engine and fuels crews, with assistance from other fire and resource personnel. It was located in High Rock Canyon, Nevada, which is part of the Black Rock/High Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.

The goals achieved by this burn include:

- Reduction of the fire hazard by creating fuel breaks;
- Removal of old growth sage and grasses, creating a mosaic of open and brush areas throughout the canyon complex;
- Restoration of native brush and grass species to help wildlife, and;
- Protection of historic sites.

BLM is carefully returning fire, a critical part of the ecosystem, back to High Rock Canyon. In doing so native plant species, and the wildlife that depends on them for forage, will benefit.

Partnering for Restoration

The Newland Area Restoration Project, started in 1999, is an ongoing effort which has thus far improved approximately 450 acres. Partnering with the California Deer Association, this project involves mechanical treatment of juniper. The objective of this project is to break up the continuity of the existing hazardous fuels on the site and reduce encroaching junipers to protect mahogany and aspen stands in the area.

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The BLM fuels crew from the Surprise Field Office is doing the work. The photo was taken from an existing photo point and shows the dead, cut juniper in the foreground and an uncut section of junipers on the right in the background.

Montana

Shepherd -AH-Nei Area

BLM lands are adjacent to homes in an extensive rural sub-division 20 miles from Billings, Montana. The area, referred to as the Shepherd AH-Nei area, was heavily timbered with Ponderosa pine brown from several years of drought. Topography of the area is rugged and covered with dense timber. Bringing in equipment for crews was nearly impossible in order to prevent a fire from spreading.

Under these conditions, BLM used engine crews awaiting calls to fire duty this summer to thin the trees and create a "fire break." The Miles City field office did some computer modeling and looked at the worst-case scenario. As a result, the flame length height of a fire going through this country would be about 7 feet. The fire crews selectively thinned the trees first, to make sure there was enough space between them to prevent crown fire, then limbed the

trees to 7 feet, above projected flame lengths.

The new fuel break is a mile long and 200 to 350 feet wide. Piles of slash (debris) were created, and will be burned this winter. BLM may also make some of the slash available for firewood. The fuel break will not only slow or stop fires, it may allow for other uses in the future. With fewer trees, more grass will grow and more grazing may be available. In the long-term prescribed fire may be introduced to keep dangerous fuels at a reduced level.

Nevada

Indian Creek Recreation Area

BLM's Carson City Field Office has management responsibility for lands in Alpine County, California and started a fuels management program in the Indian Creek Recreation Area in 1992. The Indian Creek Recreation Area is a high use recreation area that is very important to the local communities and their recreation-based economy, and is in close proximity to the communities of Woodfords and Markleeville, California. Portions of the Indian Creek Recreation Area have burned in large wildfires in the past twenty years. Since 1992 the BLM has mechanically thinned 450 acres and conducted prescribed burns on 150 acres, treating a total of 600 acres.

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The primary objective of the Indian Creek fuels management program is to reduce dangerous fuel loadings and alter fuel arrangement. But the program's other important objectives are to maintain aesthetic values, reduce dwarf mistletoe and insect pest infestations, improve the timber stand natural regeneration process, rejuvenate browse, and increase herbaceous plant production and availability.

The fuels management program at Indian Creek is ongoing. A forest thinning project is scheduled to begin in October 2001 and additional forest thinning and prescribed burning will continue in 2002.

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