

# Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects in the wildland urban interface...

## Nevada

### Student Conservation Association Volunteers Do Home Inspections

Lynne Kistler, a retired high school art teacher moved into her brand-new retirement home in the Ruby Mountains in the community of Lamoille, not far from Elko, in Northeastern Nevada last December.

Lynne did the best she could with the landscaping to create a defensible space around her new home, but every time she saw the lightning strike the too-near slopes of the Ruby Mountains she worried.



*Student Conservation Association volunteers review firesafe practices.*

Then she was contacted by a group of young volunteers from the Student Conservation Association Fire Education Corps (SCA) who offered free home assessments for people who live in the wildland-urban interface.

“I am very much afraid of fire, and I live in dry country, so I accepted the SCA’s offer,” Lynne said. “I’m also anxious for this area to be better mapped and identified by the county.”

Three members of the Elko SCA team came out to Lynne’s house on a hot day in July to take a look around and offer a few suggestions.

One of the SCA volunteers used a hand-held device to acquire the Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates for Lynne’s house, along with the coordinates of the other homes in the area; the access roads and all fire hydrants and water sources in the area. Both the GPS coordinates and the home assessment results will be provided to local, state and federal wildland firefighting agencies.

In the event of a wildland fire, such information can be quite valuable, according to Elko SCA Team Leader Eleni Vagelatos. The GPS coordinates will make it easier for firefighters to find these homes during a fire, because existing maps of these new developments are often incomplete. The home assessments will give firefighters the

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defensible space information they need to protect these homes from wildland fire.



*Rural home evaluated under the SCA program*

The Student Conservation Association is a national nonprofit organization that provides

volunteers to assist local, state and federal agencies with conservation projects, according to Eleni. The SCA's Fire Education Corps is a group of 50 student volunteers, working in teams, who are trained in recognizing the possible threats to homes should a wildfire occur.

Two of the seven-member SCA teams are based in Nevada: one in Elko and one in Carson City. The Nevada teams are funded as a part of the BLM's fire prevention, education and mitigation program, which was expanded as a result of the National Fire Plan.

All team members were trained in the first half of wildland firefighter Rookie School in Boise in June, and at the end of August they will return to Boise to complete their firefighter training and receive their Red Cards.

The volunteers usually go out in teams of two, and while one student interviews the landowner, the other conducts a property evaluation. Team members evaluate the structure of the building, wood piles, vegetation and landscaping, and livestock. They also assess occupant medical problems, as well as access to electricity and water.

Through the summer, the Carson City SCA team conducted 30-40 assessments per week. This was the first year for the SCA Fire Education Corps program, with only seven teams in Nevada and Idaho. Planning is already in the works for 15-20 of these teams during the summer of 2002.

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## Colorado

### Reducing Fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface in Southwestern Colorado

On a 50-acre tract of classic Wildland Urban Interface area in southwestern Colorado, the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Program and the Colorado State Forest Service are working in conjunction with the Log Hill Fire Department to reduce fuels and demonstrate to local landowners the positive results of mitigation treatments. This particular brush cutter project is designed to reduce fuels along County Road 1, which is the primary access route that winds up through a canyon on a steep escarpment at the south end of Log Hill Village. In addition, this project will include mitigation around homes at the top of the escarpment to model for homeowners that well-planned thinning and pruning around a home can be both effective and attractive.



*Brush cutter obtained under fire plan grants ready to work.*

These treatments are all being conducted on private lands. The project funding and the purchase of the Fecon Bull Hog Brush Cutter (locally known as the “cedar eater”) comes from the federal and state grants made available through the National Fire Plan. This is just one of many Wildland Urban Interface projects funded by federal and state grants in and around the 1800-acre Log Hill community.

Over the past 8 months, the Montrose Interagency Fire Program and the Colorado State Forest Service have worked closely with the Log Hill Volunteer Fire Department and the Southwestern Colorado Red Cross Volunteers trained in Firewise principles and techniques. Joint demonstration projects are educating homeowners about the

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threat from wildland fire. Some entrenched skeptics are being won over. For example, one family has a home right along the edge of the escarpment. Every New Year's day for the last 11 years they have performed the ritual of tossing their dried-out Christmas tree off their front deck into the canyon below, believing that by "recycling" the tree they are improving the ecosystem. They have now signed on to clear a large amount of the vegetation around their home, including many of the trees that grow (or have accumulated) along the edge of the escarpment.



*Interagency managers and private land owners review brush work.*

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## **Sullivan Creek Prescribed Burn a Success**

A prescribed burn was conducted on October 15 – 17, 2001, about 4 miles northwest of the small community of Hillside, at the base of the beautiful Sangre De Cristo mountains in south-central Colorado. The Royal Gorge Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management, in conjunction with the San Carlos Ranger District, San Isabel National Forest, successfully completed another phase of the Sullivan Creek Hazardous Fuels Treatment project. This multi-year project which began in 1998, not only uses prescribed fire as a treatment tool, but dense stands of Gambel oak have been mechanically cut or 'roller-chopped' on several sites within the 1,200 acre project area.



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*Sullivan Creek prescribed burn does it's planned work.*

Mixed conifer, pinon-juniper and Gambel oak plant communities adjacent to and throughout the Eagle Peak subdivision have not burned in a hundred years or more. The entire project area has been a fire waiting to happen, not only because of historic fire suppression efforts, but because the area is prone to frequent lightning storms, and the risk of wildfires from hunting and other recreation uses is high. So,

the primary objective of this project is to reduce hazardous fuels density in the mixed conifer and Gambel oak adjacent to the subdivision, thereby reducing the potential for catastrophic, stand-replacing wildfire.

Another benefit of the project is to improve elk and cattle forage production and quality, and to shift elk distribution from private lands and pastures to public lands. To assist BLM, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Habitat Partnership Program have provided financial support for various phases of the project.

The most recent 3-day phase of the Sullivan Creek project burned an estimated 350 acres of forested and shrub habitats on public and private lands. This is not the first time a fire has been ignited adjacent to the Eagle Peak subdivision, and private landowners understand that with fire comes smoke. While they may not be very happy with the smoke, the majority of private landowners in the area understand the importance of the project and are very supportive of the prescribed burn. One resident most affected by several days of smoke said, "It's a small price to pay for being able to live out here."



*Smoke in rural subdivisions is an issue.*

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