Snapshots

Successful BLM hazardous fuels projects in the wildland urban interface...

November 8, 2001

Montana

Lower Blackfoot River Corridor, Western Montana

Montana's Missoula Field Office completed fuel augmentation work this summer for a prescribed burn in March or early April 2002 in the Lower Blackfoot River Corridor. This area qualifies as an intermix community where structures are scattered throughout a wildland area. The area is also a heavily used recreation area. About 25,000-30,000 people recreate in this area during the summer months.

Typical Ponderosa Pine stand in the Lower Blackfoot River corridor.

The objective of the project is to reduce fuel loadings (dense overstocked Douglas-fir understory) and fire severity within Ponderosa Pine stands. Historically, these stands had low fuel loadings and higher frequency/low severity fires. Restoring fire into these areas will aid in recreating the historic stand structure (i.e. large diameter pine with intermittent openings containing pockets of seedling/sapling ponderosa pine.) Another objective of the project is to improve big game winter range by stimulating shrub species, such as serviceberry, willow, and ceantohus.

Project area prior to treatment.

Without fuel augmentation and burning in this area, ladder fuels and the risk of a catastrophic wildfire was increasing. Reducing fuels in these stands and maintaining the fuel loadings with periodic prescribed burns, will decrease the potential for a future wildfire to escape.

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BLM, county conservation district sign $100,000 agreement to aid homeowners with fire prevention (local news used with permission)

by JACQUES RUTTEN, News-Argus Staff Writer (Lewistown, Montana)

Nearing the end of yet another devastating year of drought with the constant threat of fire looming large all across the region, the Fergus County Conservation District and the Bureau of Land Management signed an agreement last week to aid private landowners in reducing fire potential on their property.

The agreement is part of the National Fire Plan and is supported by a $100,000 grant. The bulk of the money will be used for cost-sharing non-commercial thinning projects on private land.

"We cannot eliminate or prevent all fires," said Shannon Iverson, fire management planner for the Lewistown BLM office. "But we can take steps to reduce the severity, intensity and spread by thinning the forests, creating fuel breaks and defensible space around structures such as residences and outbuildings."

In response to the terrible losses from wildfire last year, Congress embarked on the National Fire Plan to thin excess fuels and improve forest health in order to reduce the catastrophic effects of fire.

"We have to get some of the fuels out of the forest or we're going to have another disaster like we've had in our parks and in the western part of the state," said Shonny Nordland at the Fergus County Conservation District (FCFD). "The landowners know that, and I think there will be a lot of interest in this program."

The FCFD is currently developing the application for the program and expects to have them available within a month.

All forested lands in Fergus County are eligible. However, priority is given to lands where catastrophic fire danger is the highest, such as the Judith and Moccasin mountains and the foothills of the Snowies.

Though the bulk of the funds will be used for noncommercial thinning, Iverson said cost-share money will also be used for developing a plan for fuel reduction in more complex cases where there is a need to thin commercial-sized trees. In those situations, the value of the commercial timber would then be used to offset the cost of necessary noncommercial thinning.

The project money will not be used to clean up after, or subsidize, a logging operation. It is intended to help people accomplish pre-commercial thinning that would otherwise be uneconomical. The amount cost-shared will vary, but will not exceed 75 percent for implementation projects.

"Providing assistance to protect communities in the wildland-urban interface is an important component of the (National Fire) Plan," said Iverson. "The special appropriation also directed BLM to focus on collaborating with local government entities and contributing to economic stability of local communities by contracting with private companies."

Educational activities involved with the agreement include the dissemination of the "Living with Fire" brochure (included in today's newspaper).

Additional activities are still in the planning stages, but may include workshops, demonstration tours and forest stewardship courses. Landowners can also find additional information on the Fire Wise Web site at www.firewise.org.

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Utah

Moab Fire District Wildland/Urban Interface Projects - Summer 2001

The Monticello Field Office (Moab Fire District) in southeastern Utah has completed several fuel reduction projects that have reduced the threat of potentially damaging and life threatening wildfire in popular recreational sites.

Indian Creek Campground

The hazardous fuels within and around Indian Creek campsites, that are adjacent to the Newspaper Rock Recreation Area, threaten public safety and the BLM's capitol investments. These fuels have both vertical and horizontal continuity which will support a wildfire on the ground with intermittent torching into the crowns of large cottonwood trees. The camping and picnicking in the area presents a potential source of an uncontrolled, damaging wildfire. The fuel reduction will mitigate the damaging effects of a wildfire.

Ancient Indian petroglyphs are part of the rich archealogical resources near the campground.

Campground site after fuel reduction work.

The popular public use area was at risk from wildland fire prior to treatment.

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Mule Canyon Ruins

Cooperative work resulted in a protective fuel break.

Mule Canyon Ruin is a popular recreation site for fuel reduction work. The fuels that were in and around Mule Canyon Ruin are pinyon pine and juniper that have a 100 percent vertical and 70 percent horizontal continuity. A wildfire in this area could quickly become a plume-dominated, fuel-driven fire given the right weather conditions. Estimated flame lengths for this scenario range from 30 to100+ feet. A substantial shaded fuel break was constructed using local BLM firefighters, Southwest Youth Corp, and the Canyon Country Youth Corp. Ladder fuels (shrubs, low lying limbs and small trees) that support ground dependent crown fires were cut with chainsaws and piled for burning later this winter.

Richfield BLM Area

The Gilson Mountain Restoration Project is 1,076 acres, located at the south end of the Tintic Valley in Juab County, Utah. This burn will clear the cheat grass in preparation for an Oust treatment followed by perennial plant seeding. The project is part of the Great Basin Restoration initiative.

Topography at this site consists of gently sloping benches about 5000 feet in elevation. Vegetation at the sites proposed for prescribed fire treatment is composed of annual

Uncontrolled cheatgrass posed a significant threat from wildland fire.

vegetation, primarily cheatgrass. Highway 6 and the Union Pacific Railroad lie adjacent to the proposed bum sites along the west side. The prescribed fires will prepare the sites for chemical treatment by licensed herbicide applicators.

Intense fire from prescribed burning removed cheatgrass and other annual weeds.

Objectives for the project are to iIncrease the fire return interval on this site from burning every 3-5 years to 18-20 years, use fire to prepare a seedbed that will be chemically treated and seeded with desired plant species, and establish a buffer zone between BLM land and private land to the North and West of the burn area.

New Mexico

Mount Nebo Prescribed Burn

Northeast of Aztec, New Mexico near the Colorado border is a heavily forested (pinon and juniper) area known as the Mount Nebo area. It is situated between the Animas and San Juan Rivers in northern New Mexico. Two years ago, this area was thinned to create brush for deer and opened to the public to gather fuel wood. After the wood was gathered, the area was closed and the remaining slash burned to stimulate growth. The area will be seeded with native grasses, bitterbrush and mountain mahogany for deer habitat.

BLM fire specialist helps monitor Nebo prescribed burn.

Planning and proper conditions helped to complete a successful burn.

This project was done in conjunction with the NM Game and Fish Department to improve deer habitat above the San Juan River. This habitat is being created so that deer will cease being nuisances to local farmers.