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Wyoming

Cheatgrass Task Force Created at Casper Conference

Nearly two dozen speakers addressed the impacts of cheatgrass at the Wyoming Cheatgrass Awareness Conference sponsored by BLM in Casper, Wyoming on February 24 and 25.

Impacts on livestock grazing, wildlife and ecological systems, the history of cheatgrass infestation, fire risks, and current management and reclamation practices were topics of discussion. As a result of the meeting a task force comprised of representatives from local, state and federal agencies and private interests was formed to evaluate, prioritize and implement action items suggested by participants.



More than 150 people attended the Cheatgrass Conference in Casper, Wyoming.

“We are encouraged by the conference participant’s level of interest and commitment to address the cheatgrass infestation before it becomes an even bigger problem in Wyoming,” said Jim Schwartz, Deputy Director of the Wyoming Department of Agriculture.



Cheatgrass (Bromus tectorum)

Schwartz summarized the conference key findings as:

- need to learn from other states and work together regionally to address this concern using proven, cost-effective best practices
- set goals that address key interests such as wildlife, livestock production and recreation
- take a collaborative approach involving all agencies and affected parties
- develop and implement integrated cheatgrass management plans that include a variety of control methods including mechanical and herbicide treatment, reseeding and grazing regimes
- use good science proactively, and monitor trends to effectively manage cheatgrass infestation.

Key cheatgrass facts discussed during the Conference include the invasive threat, fire danger and control options.



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The list of action items for task force members to prioritize and address focused on the need for education, funding, policy changes and interagency coordination to manage the cheatgrass threat. Conference findings have been posted to an internet web site at:
<http://www.wy.blm.gov/cheatgrass/>

Contact Vicki Herren, Wyoming BLM State Office (307) 775-6120



State and federal agencies along with private industry developed posters and set up booths at the conference.



Cheatgrass is a significant problem in Wyoming.

Colorado

Hinsdale County Completes Phase One of County Fire Plan

Representatives from Hinsdale County and the town of Lake City in south central Colorado have worked with personnel from the Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, and Colorado State Forest Service over the last two months to complete Phase one of a comprehensive fire plan for Hinsdale County. The objective of Phase one was to develop a preliminary plan that will integrate fire planning and fuels management among the 12 federal, state, and local fire and emergency management jurisdictions.

The county's land base is approximately 85 percent federal ownership. The economy is largely dependent on tourism with most homes being second residences for owners. The 2002 fire season had a significant impact on the county. Fire restrictions went into effect on federal and state lands throughout most of the state in early June and continued through the better part of the summer. Gunnison County, north of Hinsdale County, had numerous large fires, and last July residents were evacuated in the area of the Wiley Fire. To address the problems that surfaced during the 2002 fire season, the county and their federal and state partners wanted to fully coordinate all aspects of fire management such as fire restrictions and closures, suppression, emergency evacuation, mitigation, and fuels reduction.



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In the initial phase representatives from each of the agencies met with county personnel to define the scope of the plan, outline objectives, and assign roles and responsibility of each party. Through a series of meetings, the group decided on a format and compiled the necessary information for each section identified, then discussed and revised the information as the plan developed.

Important in the initial phase was developing geographic information system maps for the county. A BLM specialist provided data for surface management status, county boundaries, roads, towns, fire protection districts, vegetation, elevation, aspect, slope, and digital orthophoto quads. Geographic information system training was provided to the county staff. This helped them develop preliminary maps for risk assessment, integrating data from adjoining Gunnison County, where some hazardous fuels mapping on private land has already been completed.

Phase two of the Hinsdale County fire planning effort will begin as soon as the county secures additional funds to collect geographic information system data for fuel loading and structure density on private lands. In Phase two partners will work together to model fire risks and develop a risk assessment map, then identify and prioritize areas for mitigation treatments. So



Coordination was accomplished by discussing the contents for each of the sections.



Preliminary maps were used to provide additional substance to the planning process.



Hinsdale County location.

far the county has obtained financial support for planning through grants from the Bureau of Land Management, the US Forest Service, and the Colorado State Forest Service. Interagency support will continue to be crucial throughout the next phase of planning.

Contact: Maggie McCaffrey, Fire Education Specialist, Montrose Interagency Fire (970) 240-5396



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Anasazi Heritage Center Grounds Made Wildfire Ready

Last fall fire crews that spent the summer fighting wildfires turned to projects that will help reduce the threat of future fires. The San Juan Hotshots and Dolores Public Lands Office Fire Crew spent ten weeks thinning hazardous fuels on 60 acres of federal land surrounding the Anasazi Heritage Center, managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The thinning project will help protect the interpretive museum and its archeological resources from wildfire.



Crew member examines thinned areas near the center.



BLM Anasazi Heritage Center, Dolores, Colorado.

“Our landscape looks pretty different but we will have a much safer environment for us and our neighbors,” said LouAnn Jacobson, Anasazi Heritage Center manager. “One of our goals was to make this a demonstration area for fuels reduction so that the public can see what a thinned area looks like.”

Hand thinning is a labor-intensive job, but was the perfect tool for the project by allowing archeologists to mark cultural sites to be avoided. It also allowed crews to leave clumps of vegetation for use by wildlife. The crews thinned trees, brush, and dead material with chainsaws. Removing brush from under trees will help keep fire on the ground where it is easier for firefighters

to control. Putting more spacing between trees will help keep a fire from spreading rapidly from tree to tree. The removal of dead pinyon pines from the recent Ips bark beetle infestation in Montezuma County has made the area more attractive and reduced the fire hazard.

Piled cut material is being burned this spring as conditions permit, or hauled off. Larger-diameter wood was stacked for use by Anasazi Heritage Center volunteers.



Hotshot crew members teaming up with clearing work.



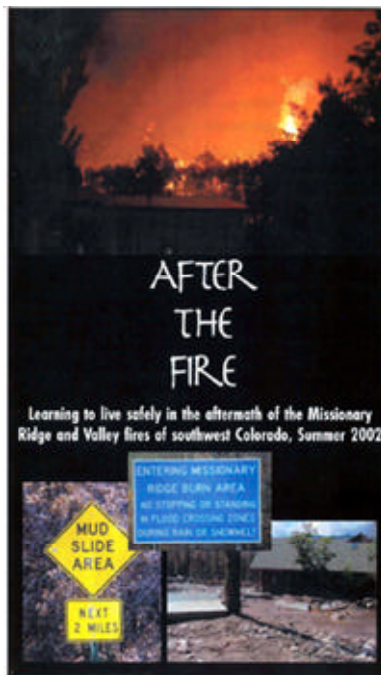
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"After the Fire" Video Screening

More than 200 people attended a screening of "After the Fire" at the Diamond Circle Theatre in Durango, Colorado on February 27. The video, developed by Durango Community Access Television, the Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College, and La Plata County Office of Emergency Management was funded by the San Juan Public Lands Center.

The educational video was produced to alert residents to the dangers facing them in the aftermath of the Missionary Ridge and Valley Fires last summer. The video opens with a short introductory history of the fire, then describes ways residents can protect their homes from flooding, what to do about driving in flood-prone areas, and offers defensible space messages. It highlights safety measures taken by the county such as flashing road signs and flood hazard warning signs. Other safety measures highlighted include Forest Service early warning precipitation gauges, and measures local residents can take such as having NOAA weather radios.

The video is currently being shown on the Durango Community Access Television station and additional screenings will take place during April in Pagosa Springs, Bayfield, Durango, and Cortez as part of Fire Prevention and Education Month. The Lutheran Disaster Relief Coalition is



Poster graphic helps promote the video presentation.

distributing the video, as well as other informational materials, to all residents adjacent to the burn areas. Over 400 copies of the production, funded by La Plata County and the Forest Service, have been given out to local residents so far.

Contact: Pam Wilson, (970) 385-1230

Moffat County Wildland Fire-Fuel Management Plan Completed

Moffat County, Colorado, is working on Phase III of their comprehensive county Wildland Fire and Fuel Management Plan. This final chapter of the plan will tie all the previous work and data together.

The county was divided into three geographic areas that coincide with each planning phase. Phase I addressed the northwest area of the county and was completed in December, 2001. Phase II, which included the southwest part of the county, was completed in August, 2002. Phase III is underway and includes the eastern portion of the county, several small communities and rural subdivisions. Properties within the city limits of Craig are not included. May 2003 is the anticipated finish date for Phase III.

This project is a cooperative effort between the county, local volunteer fire departments, sheriffs' office, state land board, Colorado State Forest Service, US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The county developed their fire management plan to tier off the existing federal Northwest Colorado Fire Management Plan in order to achieve seamless fire management. The county plan will be based on the fire and fuels management objectives of each landowner, agency, and community.

The county hosted three public meetings in January 2003 to gather public input and discuss landowner preferences for wildland fire management. The county fire management plan follows the same fire management categories, or polygons, as applied in the federal fire management plan. Each landowner who elected to participate in the plan will have a polygon



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Moffat County, Colorado Commissioner T. Wright Dickinson talks about fire planning at a Craig community meeting.

designation developed for their property. Polygons will include owner desires for fire use, fuel type, slope aspect, land use, constraints, or proposed fuel reduction projects. The final quad map data base will allow for point and click retrieval of landowner preferences that will be accessible to all emergency responders.

BLM has supported this effort through grants, materials, funding data input positions, training, public support at meetings and technical expertise. All agencies involved have either provided funding, material or attended numerous public and community meetings to answer questions and show support for the county.

As a result of developing the Moffat County Wildland Fire and Fuel Management Plan, FireWise workshops, hazardous fuel reduction projects and mitigation efforts have been conducted collaboratively between Moffat County, BLM and Colorado State Forest Service.

Contact: Lynn Barclay, Mitigation, Education Specialist (970) 826-5096

Arizona

Biomass Pilot Project

The BLM Yuma Field Office has embarked on a pilot program to utilize biomass from an 80 acre hazardous fuels reduction project in the wildland urban interface along the southern end of Mittry Lake. The mechanical clearing of salt cedar is estimated to produce about 400 tons of usable biomass, which is chipped and transported by contractors to Colmac Energy's 49 megawatt, wood-fueled, biomass power plant near Mecca, California.

The project may serve as a template for future hazardous-fuels-reduction biomass-utilization projects.

The site, once it has been cleared of chipped material, will be restored to a more natural condition by replanting with native riparian plants. These plants provide better habitat for



Mittry Lake south project area prior to being cleared.



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birds and small animals than salt cedar. When the restoration is finished, it will amount to a significant habitat improvement for birds, including the threatened and endangered Southwestern willow flycatcher.

Contact: David Repass, Fire Biologist, Yuma/Lake Havasu Fire Zone, (928) 317-3211

Material being chipped for transport to the biomass power plant.



A digitally enhanced image illustrating how the biomass pilot will appear when treatment is complete.



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Using Prescribed Fire to Reduce Threat to Communities

Pine Lake is a small community 12 miles southeast of Kingman, Arizona. At 6,500 feet elevation, it perches near the top of a ridge in a mix of chaparral and ponderosa pine forest. Below on three sides are steep slopes and continuous, dense stands of oak brush and manzanita. The large amount of hazardous fuel poses a high risk from wildfire.

A working group was established in April 2001 to address fire prevention, mitigation and education issues. The "Pine Lake Working Group" is composed of the BLM, Pine Lake Fire Department, Mohave County, Arizona State Land Department and the Hualapai Mountain Home Owners Association. Completed projects include a fuel break that encompasses the community on the three sides that present the most risk from the spread of a wildfire. Other planned projects include proposed thinning projects and completing the fuel break to encompass the entire community of Pine Lake.

Three and one-half miles of fuel break had previously been cut and stacked into piles on the break. Some piles were burned last winter, but the break would not be a useful tool until it was cleared. In February 2003, the remaining piles were burned, including a brush disposal site where residents dropped off hazardous fuels from their property.

The fuel break now provides a defensible space between Pine Lake and the surrounding federal lands. The completion of the project has provided a much greater feeling of security for local residents as well as the fire department and BLM fire personnel. The break not only serves as a barrier between hazardous fuels and the community but also provides a safer environment for firefighters in case of wildfire.

In March 2003, another prescribed fire was conducted by the Phoenix/Kingman

Zone fire staff in an area known as Blue Tank. The fire removed dense stands of brush posing a potential threat to the community of Walnut Creek while creating better forage for wildlife and helping to return fire to an environment where it historically played a natural role. The project area is more than 7,000 acres, but the ideal size to be burned is 3,000 to 4,000 acres. In two days, nearly 1,700 acres were burned before unfavorable weather conditions forced a delay.

Prescribed fire is one of the most effective tools that the Phoenix/Kingman Zone fire staff has to treat chaparral brush communities. Conducting burns requires operating when weather and vegetation conditions are within the parameters of the prescription and sometimes working close to communities. Prescribed fires are quite often conducted on very short notice. Uncooperative weather can push back the more ideal burning times. Fire staff members monitor the weather and fuel conditions constantly, looking for the best window of opportunity to conduct a burn. Communication, cooperation and collaboration continue to be paramount to a successful fuels/mitigation program.

*Contact: Michael Trent, Fire Preventions Officer,
Phoenix/Kingman Fire Zone (928) 692-4451*



Intense heat is created while burning brush piles.



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Interior Employees Return to New York City

Members of the two Southwest Area National Incident Management Teams have returned to New York City to teach a second course for New York City Fire Department Officials. Interior employees from Arizona and New Mexico are part of the instructor cadre teaching the Incident Command System to 35 officers from the New York City Fire Department. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg is taking time out of his schedule to attend a portion of the course simulation.

The second two-week training began on March 24, 2003. Interior employees assisting with the course are: Larry Humphrey, BLM Safford Field Office, Clay Templin, BLM Phoenix Field Office, Ed Ryan, BLM Roswell Field Office, and Bureau of Indian Affairs employee Chris Lyle.

Contact: Diane Drobka, Public Affairs Officer, Safford Field Office (928) 348-4403

Arizona FireWise Educators Workshop Held

In February, the Arizona Interagency Coordinating Group sponsored a workshop in Payson to teach community leaders as well as agency personnel how to present FireWise Communities workshops. Nearly 100 participants attended the two day event.



Clay Templin with BLM and Chris Lyle with BIA teach an incident command system module to New York City fire department chiefs.

The workshop focus was fire ecology and forest health through presentations by the Ecological Restoration Institute of Northern Arizona University, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Bureau of Land Management and US Forest Service.

Topics included information on grant programs administered by the Arizona State Land Department, FireWise perspectives from the City of Payson Fire Department, information on the national FireWise Communities program, and national and regional promotion of the FireWise Communities-USA recognition program. The Burning Issues educational program was also discussed. Participants learned wildland firefighter terminology and heard about climate trends and fire history from the university Tree Ring Lab. Survivable space issues were presented along with models from the Prescott Area Wildland Urban Interface Commission, the Regional Payson Area Project and the Wildfire Alternatives Model.

Participants received a FireWise “fire box,” which included CDs of workshop presentations along



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with Burning Issues and FireWise Communities and assorted FireWise materials for educators to use to promote workshops in their area.

The second day of the workshop included a panel discussion which provided the opportunity for dialogue among the audience, the panel and field personnel from various natural resource agencies and organizations.

An afternoon field trip was a demonstration site in the town of Payson where a hazardous fuels treatment area had recently been completed. The FireWise Communities subcommittee is looking into ways to help fund an information sign at this and other sites. Such signs will provide communities in wildland urban interface areas with a high profile way to review and better understand proper FireWise treatments.

The group saw trees recently killed by the widespread beetle infestation which were removed from the site, as well as other hazardous fuels such as oak and manzanita. This project also allowed the group to consider further the



Firewise participants visit a hazardous fuels treatment area in the town of Payson, Arizona.

magnitude of the forest health issues facing the region and the nation.

The field trip ended at a gravel pit being used as a hazardous fuel dump site. When enough hazardous fuel has been brought to the disposal site, Forest Service and local fire department personnel safely burn the massive piles.



Trees killed by bark beetles are taken to a central location for burning.

The FireWise workshop brought together wildfire prevention professionals in an informative and collaborative forum to exchange ideas and a better understanding of regional and national fire prevention issues. An important message expressed at the workshop was working with communities and organizations in developing and implementing citizen-driven solutions with assistance from wildfire prevention professionals. Building partnerships through communication, collaboration, consultation and cooperation was stressed as a key component.

Contact: Michael Trent, Fire Prevention Officer, Phoenix/Kingman Fire Zone, (928) 692-4451 or David Peters, Fire Prevention, Education and Mitigation Officer, Tucson/Safford Fire Zone, (520) 258-7207



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