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Arizona

Aerial Task Force Ready to Go

Arizona is experiencing prolonged drought and heavy levels of fuel in many areas of the state. Last winter had very little snow pack and rainfall was non-existent for a 142-day period between December and March in many desert areas. These conditions have prompted BLM-Arizona fire managers to request funding for early staffing of fire resources beginning in late January.

One such resource included an Aerial Task Force or ATF. This task force is composed of three single engine air tankers (SEATs) and one air attack airplane. The three SEATs are Airtractor 802s capable of speeds up to 160 mph with a payload of 800 gallons of retardant, foam, or gel. "Having an aerial task force such as this allows our firefighters on the ground to have highly mobile initial attack support virtually anywhere in the state, wherever the fire danger or the need is the greatest," stated Pam McAlpin, Arizona BLM fire management officer.

The air attack aircraft is an Aero Commander 500. It provides tactical support to fire suppression personnel and provides air space coordination where multiple aircraft are involved in fire suppression. Air attack planes circle fires high overhead, directing air tankers and helicopters to critical areas for water or retardant drops as well as manage airspace when joined by members of the news media. The air attack supervisor is an experienced agency firefighter while the pilot and aircraft are contracted from private industry.

The purpose of having this type of task force is to provide close air support to on-the-ground firefighters. The aircraft can utilize their inherent speed, mobility, and strength as additional tools during initial and extended attack situations. The task force can deliver 2,400 gallons per mission equaling that of a single heavy air tanker. That equals approximately 3,000 feet of fire line for each round of drops by the task force.

The Aerial Task Force is a nationally funded severity resource and is used primarily for initial attack of wildfires. However,



the Task Force is available to all federal agencies for extended attack fire suppression as well as initial attack.

An Aerial Task Force has the advantage of arriving with "self-contained" aerial supervision which provides airspace coordination and alleviates some of the span of control demands on incident commanders at the incident. Additionally, the task force requires minimal logistical support and can be moved to any portion of Arizona that may be experiencing high fire potential. They also arrive with three mobile retardant mixing units, one for each SEAT.

Personnel assigned to the Aerial Task Force include an ATF leader, a logistics coordinator, a SEAT Manager, and SEAT support Vehicle Drivers.

The ATF is currently staged at Williams Gateway Air Tanker Base in Mesa, Arizona, thanks to interagency cooperation with the Tonto National Forest. Because of the composition of the task force, it is highly mobile and can be set up at remote bases at local airstrips thereby decreasing turnaround time between drops.

The Aerial Task Force onboard in Arizona is part of a 2006 National Interagency Aviation Program consisting of 107 single engine air tankers, 16 heavy air tankers, 258 large and medium helicopters, two CL-215 water scoopers, and 8 military C-130s aircraft equipped with MAFFS (Military Airborne Firefighting Systems).



Riparian Restoration, Firebreak, and Biomass on the San Pedro River

A firebreak was recently completed on the northern edge of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) as part of the Gila District Fire Management Program. In addition to wildland fire protection, the firebreak project also helped restore a riparian area and promote biomass utilization. Six different community groups were involved in various aspects of this two-year long project.

Local BLM fire crews were used to implement the first phase, which consisted of cutting and chipping mesquite brush. In the spring of 2006, a state land department crew completed the second phase which involved thinning the remaining mesquite trees more intensively. The state crew then chipped some fresh mesquite and a local conservation corps crew bagged the wood for use as BBQ or smoking chips.

Two thousand bags of labeled mesquite chips have been delivered to Forest Service, Cooperative Extension, Fire Departments, and BLM offices in Arizona to promote use of biomass from fuels projects. The Safford/Tucson fire management zone is now trying to encourage local businesses to help tackle a 2,000-acre grassland restoration project on the Las Cienegas NCA. The Tucson Field Office staff hopes that local businesses will become interested in exchanging goods for services during this multi-year project. If businesses removed unwanted mesquite, BLM could exchange the wood to the companies for their labor, giving them an inexpensive source of wood to produce furniture, art work, firewood, chips, and other products.



One of the two thousand bags of mesquite chips used to promote biomass utilization from fuels projects.

A large grinding implement called a “bull hog” was used to reduce the volume of the heavy salt cedar infestation in the firebreak area along the San Pedro River. In a matter of seconds, this piece of equipment reduced thirty foot invasive trees to scattered shreds of wood. BLM severity crews followed the “bull hog” on private land improving the aesthetics of the project and establishing tree-planting locations. This work entailed pulling stumps, chipping, and removing the remaining waste. Next year, native trees will be planted in the area at a fifteen foot spacing matching the trees left in the firebreak.

BLM planners are beginning work on an environmental assessment which will outline the methodology for spraying chemicals on stumps after the trees are severed. This tool will eliminate the pulling of stumps that would later sprout.

Fire Management staff installed a two-sided fire mitigation and prevention sign along the road in the recently completed firebreak, as well as posting the NCA boundary.

State land crews will be used to maintain the four thousand foot long firebreak that winds along a road and river. Future plans call for installing a Firewise Demonstration sign at a high use area along the road.

For additional information contact David Peters, Gila District Fire Mitigation Specialist, at 520.258.7207.



The Tamarisk Bull Hog 4.

Arizona 2006 Firewise Campaign

Starting this April and going through June, the Arizona State Office and the Gila District Fire Management programs began airing thirty-second TV and radio spots throughout the state. Lute Olson, the basketball coach for the University of Arizona and Marshall Trimble, Official Arizona State Historian, both donated their time free for the Firewise PSA's.

Over 2600 TV and nearly 2800 radio spots will play over the course of three months in Arizona. The TV spots will air on Phoenix and Tucson stations and the radio PSA's will play

at stations around Arizona. A third component of the Firewise campaign for the Gila District is the placement of Firewise messages with the state clearinghouse website address on thirty bus benches throughout the Tucson area.

A third spot will be the animated cartoon campaign which is now being prepared. It will play for at least a month in Arizona this year, in unison with the other two PSA's. The animated spot will highlight the new fire mitigation spokesperson for Arizona, Billy Brushwacker. Billy is a billygoat that teaches homeowners, living in wildland urban interface areas, how they can be Firewise by creating survivable space.

The Billy Brushwacker program was developed by the Pine-Strawberry Fire Department through a FEMA grant and is specifically a third and fourth grade level state approved school curriculum. The Arizona Firewise Subcommittee is working with the Pine-Strawberry FD to update the program with a second grant that the department received this year. There are plans to take the baton from the FD to promote the program throughout the state through various Arizona Firewise partners.

For more information contact David Peters, Gila District Fire Mitigation Specialist at 520.258.7207.



Billy Brushwacker sticker promoting the newly developed campaign to promote Firewise concepts.



Marshall Trimble, Official Arizona State Historian, also in radio and TV PSAs which aired across Arizona.

Nevada

Fuel Break Maintains Wildlife Habitat

Maintaining wildlife habitat in an area with an active wildfire regime can be quite a challenge. Several partners are working together to reseed more than 1,340 acres of checkerboard public and private lands on the west side of the Sheep Creek Range, some 20 miles north of Battle Mountain, NV. Partners in the restoration effort include Glamis Dee Gold Mining Co., Barrick Goldstrike Mines, Inc., Nevada Chukar Foundation, 25 Ranch LLC, Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the BLM. The cost of the project is approximately \$148,000.

Recent large fires in the Sheep Creek Range area include the 1984 Lander Fire, and the area burned again in 2001. Wildlife habitat and big-game winter range were severely impacted by the 1999, 2000, and 2001 fire seasons, which burned extensively across northern Nevada.

“What makes this project different from many of our normal activities is its intensity,” said BLM Elko wildlife biologist Ken Wilkinson. He explained that the revegetation efforts comprise an interconnected set of treatments, including disking, drill seeding, and over-seeding. Further, the treatment areas will be buffered by a fuelbreak.

“We’ll also be establishing a 600 to 800-foot by 3-mile-long fuel break to protect the area,” Wilkinson continued. “The newly drill-seeded main area and surrounding fuel break are adjacent to an unburned, pristine area of sagebrush habitat that’s critical wildlife winter range.”

According to Wilkinson, the shrubs, grasses and forbs planted on the fuel break area provide cover and forage for wildlife, plus the plants can slow down or stop a wildfire. During the next phase of the project, the fuel break will be “over-seeded” with forage kochia and yarrow and the main area will be “over-seeded” with sagebrush, forage kochia, yarrow, and winterfat. The plants seeded onto the fuelbreak have been proven to withstand drought conditions reasonably well.

Over-seeding equipment donated to NDOW by the Mule Deer Foundation and Newmont Gold will be used for the job. The same equipment has been used over several thousand acres for big game habitat rehabilitation efforts on public and private land since the early 1990s.



The Sheep Creek Range fuel has dual opportunities in providing valuable cover and forage for wildlife as well as helping to slow down or stop a wildfire, which in turn protects a nearby "pristine" unburned area.

"Although the project area is just over 1300 acres, it's important for several reasons," Wilkinson said. "Since 1964, more than 90 percent of big game winter habitat in this specific area has burned. We're trying to protect one of those few unburned areas."

Wilkinson added that the project also fulfills the mandated offsite mitigation work for mule deer and antelope for the Glamis Dee Gold Pit and is the last of several mitigation projects for the Barrick Goldstrike Mines' Betze Pit.

Eagle Scouts Create Defensible Space Displays

Logan Myers and Ben Gibson of Boy Scout Troop 321 have completed projects to help people get a better understanding of what it means "to create defensible space" around their property. As a reward for constructing the two displays the two seniors at Winnemucca's Lowry High School will receive Eagle Scout badges.

BLM Winnemucca initiated the project in order to educate the public about ways to reduce the threat of wildfire to homes and other structures in the area. Working with other members of his troop, Logan built the folding box that houses the two sides of the display. "The worst part of constructing the folding box was making sure it lined up together," Logan said. With the box completed, the models could be built to fit inside. According to Logan, this was his favorite part of the project, because it was fun and he was able to do high quality work but he added that "it was very tedious." The scout started the project in February 2005 and completed it in June 2005. The

Eagle Scout Board of Review approved Logan's project so he could receive a badge for his efforts.

Ben Gibson also worked with fellow troop members on his defensible space display. "My favorite part of the project was building the models and the worst part was dealing with the glue to make everything stay in place," Ben said. "I also learned a lot about basic carpentry skills, model building and, of course, the concept of defensible space." Ben's project is currently being reviewed by the Eagle Scout Board of Review.

The defensible space displays will be featured at county fairs, community safety and education days, as well as school programs that demonstrate the benefits of creating good defensible space around homes, structures, and property.



Ben Gibson proudly holding the display he made to earn his Eagle Scout badge.



Logan Myers displaying his defensible space project currently being reviewed by the Eagle Scout Board of Review for merit.