

## Table of Contents

### New Mexico

Working with Our Partners – A Joint BLM / NPS Prescribed Fire..... 1

### Washington

Little Vulcan Mountain Bighorn Sheep Habitat Project enters Third Year ..... 1

## New Mexico

### Working with Our Partners – A Joint BLM / NPS Prescribed Fire

The Joint Cerro Rendija Prescribed fire project is within the El Malpais National Conservation Area (NCA) and the El Malpais National Monument. This project is located approximately 25 miles southwest of Grants, New Mexico.

The project area consists of approximately 1,960 acres of BLM and NPS administered lands centered around the cinder cone named “Cerro Rendija in the “Chain of Craters” of the Bandera lava flow. The project was jointly funded by National Fire Plan Fuel’s program and the Wildlife Program’s Sykes Act Habitat Stamp Program. 1000 acres of BLM lands and approximately 400 acres of National Monument lands were broadcast burned in March and April 2006. In addition, approximately 270 acres of the project area was mechanically treated in 2004-5 under IDIQ contracts and 115 acres is being mechanically thinned this year under an Assistance Agreement with the Ramah Navajo Chapter.

The El Malpais National Conservation Area was very heavily logged from the early to mid 1900’s and heavily utilized by homesteaders and ranchers. As a result, the plant community has changed from a mixed conifer forest dominated by Ponderosa Pine to a predominately Pinyon



Various stages of the Cerro Rendija prescribed fire project.

Pine woodland. This pinyon community is also encroaching into formerly open grass-shrub parks with a resultant decline in understory browse species and meadowland grass species. While the ponderosa pine community is regenerating itself, most of the remaining ponderosa pine is in the 0-80 year age class and is growing in dense stands known as “blackjack” which are susceptible to fire and insect damage. The goal of this project is to employ management ignited prescribed fire in the pinyon, juniper, and ponderosa pine fuel types to reduce hazardous fuels and help to restore the natural plant community for the area with resultant benefits to the area’s wildlife habitat.

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## Washington

### Little Vulcan Mountain Bighorn Sheep Habitat Project enters Third Year

From a high of 150 bighorn sheep roaming Little Vulcan Mountain to only 17 sheep in 2001, the BLM Spokane District saw an opportunity to use National Fire Plan funding to meet two very important goals. On top of bighorn sheep habitat restoration, reduction of catastrophic wildfire potential would make this landscape treatment project near the Canadian border a dually successful project.

The California Bighorn Sheep herd on Little Vulcan Mountain near Curlew, Washington was found to be heavily parasitized (lungworms). A cold and long winter added to the low herd numbers in 2001. The BLM, the USDA Forest Service and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife developed a plan to treat the sheep with medicated



Overstocked stands and accumulated hazardous fuels illustrated the need for a project benefiting bighorn sheep habitat and reducing the risk of wildfire.

saltblocks, while preparing to improve habitat through thinning and prescribed burning. Bighorn sheep from Nevada will be introduced to improve genetic diversity when the existing herd is deemed healthy.

Much help in terms of financial donations and labor was provided the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Safari Club International and the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council. Radio collars were put on some sheep for tracking movements, water troughs were put on the mountain, and seeding and weed control projects were initiated. All the effort is paying dividends today with over 75 sheep counted this year with many lambs on the mountain again. The Colville National Forest served a key role in delivery of spot weather forecasts and other vital fire weather information. Because radio coverage for the project area was best achieved by the use of Colville National Forest radio repeaters, the weather data and other information was radioed from Spokane BLM to the Colville Fire Dispatch office and then to fire crews at the burn site.

The four-year project entered its third year in the spring of 2006. In late April, six Spokane District employees along with a Curlew Job Corps fire crew and Republic Ranger District fire support prepared to burn two units totaling 115 acres in the Vulcan Mountain area in Washington's Ferry County. The prescribed fire plan was to use drip torches to light the fires, and natural fuel breaks, as much as possible, to contain the fire within the prescription boundary. To keep fire away from the grassy perimeter, wet gunny sacks were put in place.

The first area burned was a 25-acre unit on an upper slope of Vulcan Mountain. Both the test fire and burn were within prescription, and the objective to remove undesirable vegetation while retaining the standing larger ponderosa pine



*Fire crews participate in a briefing prior to prescribed burn operations.*

was met. Additionally, opening up the dense understory improved bighorn sheep habitat.

On the fourth day of the Vulcan Mountain burn, a 10-person fire crew from the Curlew Job Corps assisted BLM in conducting a prescribed burn on the remaining 85 acres. Humidity and winds were favorable factors and the resulting prescribed fire completely burned the 1-hour, 10-hour, and 100-hour fuels. On the fifth day, BLM staff conducted an area walk through to determine treatment results. The post fire monitoring noted that burn objectives were met throughout the area.

In early May, just two weeks after the burn, BLM seeded about 30 acres of the burned area with native grass mixture to stabilize the soil and improve forage habitat for bighorn sheep and other wildlife.



*Bighorn sheep graze in the Little Vulcan Mountain project area after prescribed burning and reseeding.*

The BLM will be thinning some stands in the Little Vulcan Mountain area and will continue its cooperative work with its partners on this project.

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*Fire crews conduct a post fire rehabilitation project near a road.*



*During the prescribed fire, the view from across a valley shows the terrain and vegetation of Little Vulcan Mountain.*