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New Mexico

Fuels Crew Assists with Community Firewood Program

Cold weather arrived early this year to the high desert of northwest New Mexico where many people rely on firewood gathered on public land to heat their homes.

The BLM's Farmington Field Office sells thousands of firewood permits each year. A permit allows for the gathering of one cord of firewood from designated areas of dead pinon and juniper trees. As some local residents that are either physically or financially unable to participate in this program, opportunities are now being offered to these residents so that they too may receive firewood donations through the assistance of the Four Corners Interagency Fire Program, comprised of firefighters from the Farmington Field Office and the Jicarilla Ranger District of Carson National Forest.

Jonathan Smith, acting Fire Management Officer for the BLM and Forest Service Four Corners Interagency Fire Program, said donating wood to those in need fits well with the agency's multi-purpose fuels management program. "It's hazardous fuels removal, it's thinning the forest, and it's providing a service to the community," Smith said.

The supply of firewood available for donation comes from multiple sources. BLM and Forest Service rangers confiscate wood from people they catch gathering wood without a permit. Oil and gas production companies, who clear production pads of all trees, are required to leave the wood on site for pick up by permit holders. Recently Energen Resources, a local oil & gas company, offered to go one step farther and transport the wood they cut to the donation area as a community service.



Fuels crew stockpiling donated firewood.

To guard against abuse of the program, the Interagency Fire Program relies on recommendations from the local Salvation Army Director and Navajo tribal officials to identify local families that are most at need. Upon receiving a recommendation from these community partners, the interagency fire crew delivers the wood.

"It feels good when we donate firewood because there really is a need for it, especially in the fall with the cooler weather moving in," said Carlos Murillo, a fuels crew leader for the fire program.

Murillo noted that mid-September temperatures in northwest New Mexico were 10-15 degrees below average for that period. Murillo said the fire crew delivered 25 cords of firewood last year to the areas most in need and expects to meet or exceed that amount this year.

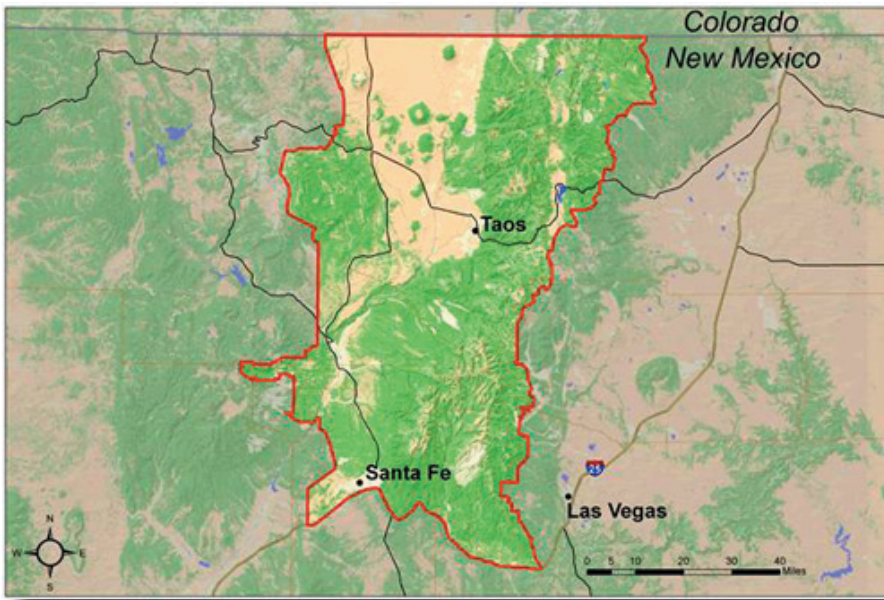
Contact: Carlos Murillo, 505-632-2956 (x229)

Taos BLM Partners with Northern Arizona University in Forest Ecosystem Restoration Analysis Project

In 2003, the Taos BLM Fire Management Program partnered with Northern Arizona University (NAU), Forest Guild, and other agencies and groups in an application for a Joint Fire Science Project grant. The proposed project, now known as the *North-Central New Mexico Landscape Assessment*, was intended to design a landscape assessment and planning system that could be an effective tool in planning forest restoration and community protection activities on a landscape scale. This project encompasses approximately 3.4 million acres, located in the upper Rio Grande watershed of north-central New Mexico from Santa Fe to the Colorado border as displayed on the map.



Fire staff at Navajo Chapter House after delivery of firewood for tribal elders.



North Central New Mexico Landscape Assessment project area.

In October of 2006, NAU will meet with all stakeholders in Taos, NM for the *North-Central New Mexico Landscape Assessment Workshop* to prioritize landscape attributes and develop models based on collaborative management recommendations. For the Taos BLM Fire Management program, this Joint Fire Science Project will yield a useful tool in fire management planning on a landscape scale throughout the field office.

More information on this project can be found at <http://forestera.nau.edu> or contact Pat Pacheco, fire Management Officer at 505/751-4717.

For this project, NAU used the ForestERA (Forest Ecosystem Restoration Analysis) to compile a variety of spatial data layers in collaboration with local stakeholders. Principal stakeholders for the *North-Central New Mexico Landscape Assessment* were all affected parties who were interested in the development of the project. In addition to the Taos BLM and NAU, stakeholders included the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, New Mexico Division of Forestry, four Counties, four Pueblos, and four non-government organizations. In meeting with stakeholders, NAU determined data needs for all management interests involved. Basic data layers developed for the project area included soils, water features, elevation, and a variety of data sets on vegetation composition and structure. These layers, in turn, formed the foundation for other layers that represent stakeholder interests such as fire behavior, wildlife habitat, or post-fire watershed effects.

Specific details in data layers requested by stakeholders, including the Taos BLM Fire Management program, are currently under development. Vegetation layer development will include details on canopy cover, basal area, and other characteristics used to determine forest stand structures. Some other data layer details requested by the Taos BLM included a planned urban development layer to be used in WUI fuels management; a rangeland vegetation structure detail layer for landscape wildlife project planning; and a tree “clumpiness” layer which measures the extent to which trees are aggregated that cannot be represented by canopy cover over a larger area and ultimately determining potential for crown fire in pinyon-juniper woodlands.

Nevada

Smith Valley Thinning Project Helps Protect Expanding Wildland-urban Interface Areas

Western Nevada’s population growth has fueled a rapid expansion of the wildland-urban interface into rural areas. For example, a building boom in the Upper Colony Road area on the west side of Smith Valley has resulted in a dangerous mix of flammable fuels in close proximity to new homes and developments.

Citing extreme fuel hazards, the 2004 Nevada Community Wildfire Risk/Hazard Assessment Project for Lyon County placed the west side of Smith Valley in the high hazard category.



Typical Upper Colony Road fuels near residential developments.



Rapidly developing wildland-urban interface in Smith Valley, Nevada.

In many cases, homes have been built adjacent to flammable fuels with little regard for the threat of wildfire or firefighter safety. A wildfire in these areas would put homes, fences and other structures at extreme risk of damage. Firefighters attempting to protect homes in these areas from an intense wildfire would find themselves in a very dangerous situation.

The Carson City Field Office worked closely with the Smith Valley Fire Protection District, the Nevada Fire Safe Council and residents of the area to develop and implement a fuels treatment project in the Upper Colony Road area. Wildfires are common in the Pine Nut Mountains, so the project was designed to protect homes from the very real threat of intense wildfires and provide firefighters with an extra margin of safety.

The collaborative development process included home evaluations and presentations by the Student Conservation Association's Fire Education Corps, meetings with Chief Jim Hardison of the Smith Valley Fire Protection District,



Treated area adjacent to recently constructed home.

contacts with Pat Murphy of the Nevada Fire Safe Council, several well attended public meeting and numerous follow up meetings with individual home owners.

Public meetings were held at the firehouse in Smith Valley and jointly hosted by the Smith Valley Fire Protection District, the BLM and the Nevada Fire Safe Council. Tribal consultation and a Class III cultural resource survey were also completed prior to project implementation.

The project that developed through this collaborative venture resulted in the thinning of 115 acres of brush and trees on public lands adjacent to four rapidly developing wildland-urban interface areas. Thinning operations created protective areas, which averaged 150 feet wide.

More than six miles of wildland-urban interface in Smith Valley will be protected from the danger of wildfire by these treated areas. The contractor who conducted the thinning operations also made his services available to landowners in the Smith Valley area for work on the community's private lands.



Gary Schenck (left), equipment operator, and Pat Murphy, Fire Safe Council, examine equipment used to thin trees and brush.



A local deer herd grazed in the treated area soon after the project was completed.

After thinning operations were completed, informal contacts with homeowners near the project area indicated a high degree of satisfaction with both the process and resulting project. Issues regarding visual impacts, effects on wildlife and post-treatment use of the project area were successfully mitigated during project development and through close coordination with the contractor and the equipment operator during thinning operations.

Thanks to the collaborative development process, the fuels treatment categorical exclusion, in-house cultural resource surveys and the Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contracting process, the project was developed, cleared and implemented in less than one year.

Livestock Maintain Green Strips

Green strips have played a critical role this fire season by protecting Northeast Nevada homes and communities, and cows are keeping some of those green strips in top shape.

Green strips are swaths of land planted with fire-resistant vegetation to slow or stop the spread of wildland fires, according to Shane DeForest, assistant field manager for renewable resources at the BLM Elko Field Office. These green strips provide a defensible space around communities at risk from wildland fires. In order to function properly, they must be maintained and be free of large amounts of dead or dry vegetation.

“Typically we mow the green strips to keep the vegetation down,” DeForest said. “This year, however, two of green strips were grazed. One’s north of Elko and one’s in Spring Creek. It’s working great. We put up temporary fences to keep the cows inside the green strips, and haven’t had any problems with livestock wandering into housing areas.”

So far, nearly 250 acres have been grazed inside the green strips. Grazing has cost less than \$10 per acre, compared to the \$25-\$30 per acre cost of mowing. The rancher who owns the cows had his entire allotment burned in last year’s Chance Fire.

“It’s been win-win,” DeForest said. “This project wouldn’t have happened without John Griggs from Maggie Creek Ranch and Jess Sustacha, who provided the labor to build the much-needed Spring Creek fence.”



Livestock grazing on the green strips.

“We’re very pleased with the success we’re seeing on the green strips,” said BLM Elko Fire Management Officer Joe Freeland. “We plan to do more of this in the future.”

“We saw the value of green strips recently during the Suzie Fire. When the fire made a late afternoon and early evening run towards a subdivision on the west end of Elko, firefighters used the Elko North Green Strip as their line of defense to stop the fire from reaching homes.”

Contact: Shane DeForest, 775 753-0210

Utah

Wildfire Hits Habitat of Threatened Species

In August 2006, a naturally occurring wildfire sparked more than flames when it burned in an area managed by the BLM’s Salt Lake Field Office (SLFO). The fire ignited concern and subsequent mobilization of experts over the crucial habitat for the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout which the fire had negatively affected.



Concerns and information were shared by the group until their focus was clear.

Realizing the personal, professional, and emotional time investment of work to-date to help save the Lahontan cutthroat, the SLFO called an emergency rehabilitation discussion before the fire was even contained. Different areas of expertise were invited to meet at the SLFO and those unable to attend in person were able to participate via a conference call. The goals of the emergency stabilization and rehabilitation meeting were to (1) identify and address concerns, (2) generate new alternatives, (3) combine elements of multiple alternatives and (4) check that all participants understood the proposals.

The Lahontan cutthroat is named after the ancient Lahontan Lake of northern Nevada, eastern California, and southern Oregon that receded nearly 12,000 years ago. When the Lahontan Lake dried up the trout were cut off from their original coastal territory. The landlocked fish began to adapt to their new habitat of interconnected lakes and rivers. Lahontan cutthroat now exist in about 10 percent of its historic stream habitat and only one percent of its past lake habitat from the early 1900s as cited by Betsy Mason in *The Magazine of the California Academy of Sciences*, summer 2006.

The SLFO, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Utah State Department of Natural Resources, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and local landowners have partnered in a cooperative agreement to maintain and enhance a captive, wildbrood stock of the Lahontan cutthroat trout in northwestern Utah. Lahontan cutthroat trout were once widespread throughout the basins of Pleistocene Lake Lahontan, covering most of northern Nevada. Today, very pure strains of the trout species can be found in Utah BLM managed creeks and streams. The Lahontan Cutthroat Project is an evolving story of a group of private interests and agencies joining resources to protect this threatened species' habitat.

Streams and creeks found in northwestern Utah have been noted to mirror the original habitat of the Lahontan cutthroat trout in regard to its salinity, temperature and



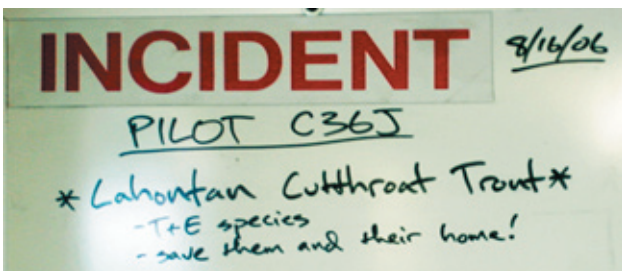
The Lahontan cutthroat trout's habitat before the wildfire.



As the water temperatures rose over 20 degrees as a result of the fire and loss of shade, the BLM and the Division of Natural Resources shocked and saved as many fish as they could.

rocky beds. During the spring spawn, the collection of eggs from the brood stock and wildfish of the Lahontan Cutthroat Project help provide technical advice in monitoring efforts and fish populations. Benefits from the Lahontan Cutthroat Project have been realized in far reaching areas such as Pyramid Lake, Nevada and Truckee, California.

Appropriate action was the point of the emergency rehabilitation and stabilization plan discussion. Assignment of actions, monitoring, and follow-up were the key responsibilities. To achieve consensus among the diverse group of technicians and specialists took significant trust. From the onset, the meeting's guiding process was the short and long term health of the Lahontan cutthroat trout. The SFLO's Office Manager served the group not as the 'person-in-charge' but rather than acting in response the the group's collective interests.



The Lahontan cutthroat trout was first and foremost identified as a T&E Species making it necessary to 'Save them and their home!'



John Dunn, bulldozer operator for the SLFO, offers his opinion to the hydrologist, wildlife biologist, and field office manager about the plausibility of navigating a dozer on the steep, rocky terrain affected by wildfire.

Multiple concerns and information were shared on a chalkboard until the focus of the group was clear. The resulting ideas and solutions were owned by the group which had proposed and formulated them. The facilitator helped to identify areas of agreement and encouraged any disagreement to be resolved by discussion. By the conclusion of the three hour meeting, the group felt united in its responsibility for decisions.

A follow-up field trip to the wildfire site was scheduled within a few days of the meeting. Participants awed at the terrain and the amount of devastation created by the wildfire. Photographs of the wildfire effects were offered during the initial meeting as well, however the sense of responsibility seemed magnified when plan contributors went to the site. The 25% slope took on an entirely different meaning when they were walking directly on it. It was at that moment that the field trip attendees suddenly understood what 75% burned-land looks and feels like.

Perhaps it was the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Biologist, Paul Abate, who described it best when he stated, "It's like Mount St. Helen's up there. I was walking in over 8 inches of ash, even the rock broke from the heat."

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Colorado

Partners Help with Fire Education

Anyone who's worked in fire prevention or education knows that it's a big job that can't be done alone. To have a truly successful program you must have the assistance of partners, communities, and other agencies. Southwest Colorado is fortunate to have the assistance of the San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA), a non-profit partner of the Forest Service and BLM, to help with their fire education efforts.

"SJMA is a wonderful entity to work with," said Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist Allen Farnsworth. "They have responded to every issue that arises – from wildfire to drought to beetles – with enthusiasm and interest."

One of SJMA's biggest contributions, according to Farnsworth, is their coordination every April of Fire Prevention and Education Month, a month-long series of events that inform and educate home and property owners on the need to create defensible space and reduce the threat of a devastating wildfire in southwest Colorado. The annual event, with the theme "What Are You Waiting For?" brings together local, state, and federal firefighting and land management entities, media outlets, and local communities for a common cause.

SJMA has also been an integral part of the FireWise Council of Southwest Colorado since the Council's inception in 2003. SJMA has developed and made



Nicole Smith, Education and Outreach Director for the San Juan Mountains Association, with Smokey alongside the Mountain Express train at Cascade Canyon.

presentations to various community groups about the Council, as well as serving as the Council's fiscal agent and providing grant-writing expertise.

"Another great factor in working with SJMA is their ability to partner with other entities and non-profits to get the job done," said Farnsworth.

SJMA partnered with the San Juan Public Lands Center and the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad in a unique effort to make fire ecology a family learning experience. Now in its third year, the half-day train ride on the "Mountain Express" takes passengers north up through the scenic Animas River Valley to Cascade Canyon. Aboard the train, SJMA volunteers talk with visitors about fire ecology, native flora and fauna, and wilderness ethics. Off the train, riders have a chance to meet with Smokey Bear,

participate in guided environmental education activities with a SJMA Education Specialist, look over items at the Discovery Table, and/or take a self-guided nature tour.

SJMA has also partnered with an educational non-profit group, Durango Nature Studies, to provide in-class education programs for 1st-4th graders related to fire ecology, wildfire, and fire prevention.

"The dedicated staff of SJMA and their extensive network of volunteers have helped to provide programs that reach residents and visitors through both traditional and unique venues," said Farnsworth. "Their efforts make it easier for firefighters and land managers to do the job they need to do."

For more information contact Allen Farnsworth at 970-385-1207 or Pam Wilson at 970-385-1230.