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## Colorado

### Larry R. Gebhart Building dedicated at Grand Junction Interagency Air Center

About 30 years ago a local interagency firefighting facility, consisting of one outbuilding, was established at the western end of Walker Field Airport in Grand Junction, Colorado. Through the years, air center staff accomplished aviation support for wildfire and resource management missions from a conglomeration of makeshift sheds and trailers. On April 11, 2006, a large audience looked on as the new 9,200-sq. ft. facility was dedicated in memory of Larry Gebhart, the BLM civil engineer responsible for much of this fire aviation base's conceptual design.

One of the nation's busiest fire aviation centers, the new facility now serves as state-of-the-art headquarters for smoke jumpers, pilots, dispatch, base administration, and the Unaweep Fire Use Module. In support of the National Fire Plan, interagency crews from the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service and Colorado State Forests work together to protect public lands in Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, New Mexico and Arizona. The Grand Junction Interagency Air Center employs six permanent and 30 seasonal positions, and infuses some \$2 million into the local economy through support expenditures.

The air tanker base is the only "green" base in existence, with all water run-off from the base fully contained. The apron was upgraded and the tank farm added in 2000, facilitating a



*BLM State Director Sally Wisely speaking at the ribbon-cutting ceremony.*

5-year average of 483 air tanker missions with an average 463,000 gallons of retardant used in that 5-year period. Since 1994, the number of air tanker missions increased seven-fold, and the need for other fire support activities, such as smoke jumpers and helitack, has grown steadily as well. The facility also serves as the dispatch center for the Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire Management Unit (UCRIFMU), which stretches from the Utah stateline to central Colorado's Continental Divide. Approximately 2,000 dispatch resource orders were filled in 2005 alone.

Speakers at the dedication included Senator Wayne Allard, Regional Forester Rick Cables, BLM Colorado State Director Sally Wisely, Tom Boatner from NIFC, and Mesa County Commissioner Tilman Bishop. Bill Hahnenberg, Fire Management Officer for the Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire Management Unit (UCRIFMU), was master of ceremony.

The collaborative energy of multiple agencies and cooperators will continue, as always, to provide a strong fire program for the future—keeping our public lands healthy and safe for all to enjoy.



*Senator Wayne Allard addressing the audience at the dedication of the new Larry R. Gebhart Building*

### Wildfire Prevention and Education Month

"What Are You Waiting For?" was once again the theme for Southwest Colorado's annual Wildfire Prevention and Education Month during April. The program, which is in its fourth year, aims to heighten awareness of the need for defensible space, provide homeowners with useful resources to help them in their mitigation efforts, and keep residents informed of current research and efforts on public lands.

"Every year we have more partners hosting events and helping to spread the word about the need for mitigation," said Allen Farnsworth, BLM's mitigation and education specialist. "We couldn't pull it off without the support of our partners."



*The new Larry R. Gebhart Building, a new facility located at the Grand Junction Interagency Air Center.*



*Smokey and friends offer defensible space information at Home Depot.*

The month-long series of activities is a cooperative effort between state and federal agencies, local fire departments, FireWise Council of Southwest Colorado, San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA), and local media outlets.

SJMA developed a newspaper insert focusing on defensible space and controlled burning considerations, and this insert went to almost 30,000 households throughout the region.

Local public radio station KSUT ran a week-long series of interviews regarding the upcoming fire season, prescribed burning, and the subdivision ambassador program.

The Fire Council teamed up once again with Home Depot to talk about defensible space and chainsaw safety. Smokey Bear and Durango Fire & Rescue Authority's new mobile Command Center also made an appearance.

Dr. Lisa Floyd-Hanna, who has done extensive research on pinyon-juniper woodlands and fire since the 1980's, presented two talks on drought and fire impacts on pinyon-juniper woodlands – one at Mesa Verde National Park and one at Ft. Lewis College.



*Fire Management Officer Ron Klatt describes a proposed fuels-reduction project to Forest Lakes homeowners.*

Several of the Fire Council's Subdivision Ambassadors hosted events in their subdivisions. Events included talks on defensible space, evacuation plans, and mitigation projects on adjacent federal lands. Locally produced videos on defensible space and the after-effects of fire were shown on Durango Community Access Television throughout the month.

"The benefits of an effort like this are sometimes hard to measure," said Farnsworth, "but we feel it's really been worth it. Our residents here are pretty in tune with the beneficial and negatives aspects of fire."

## BLM and the Colorado Wood Utilization and Marketing Program Encourages Opportunities for Commercial Use of Pinyon and Juniper

Beyond Firewood and Fence Posts, initiated in October 2005, is a venture between the Bureau of Land Management in Colorado and the Colorado Wood Utilization and Marketing Program (COWOOD). The overarching goal of the project is to encourage commercial opportunities for pinyon and juniper. Historically, the commercial potential for pinyon-juniper woodlands has been limited to firewood, fence posts, small carvings, and novelty gift items.

In the early 2000s, these woodlands began declining after several years of drought and a subsequent Ips beetle outbreak, forcing land managers into these low-lying areas to remove dead trees to reduce the fire hazard. Colorado has over 2.5 million acres of pinyon-juniper woodlands of which BLM has identified 650,000 acres needing restoration. Costs to simply masticate or remove trees without value are often high. A desire to lower management costs and utilize this resource led to this project and partnership.

Phase I of the project includes documenting Colorado pinyon working properties, collecting and organizing previous research, and partnership with a small manufacturer to complete the product and market research for a line of value-added pinyon products.

Phase II of the project will focus on commercialization options for pinyon and opportunities to utilize pinyon as a biomass energy source.

In 2002 at the height of the pinyon die-off in southwestern Colorado, John Kennedy, a lifelong wood worker and



maker of custom cabinetry and furniture, began experimenting with the cutting and tooling of dead pinyon. He spent the next three years researching the use of pinyon in various products. Kennedy's goal was to identify products that could be made with short pieces, less raw material, and low cost.



*John Kennedy experimenting with the cutting and tooling of dead pinyon.*

Woodsmen have historically not considered pinyon a desirable commercial species. It is relatively short, produces many limbs, contains a great deal of pitch, and possesses a thin but multi-layered bark. The initial focus for product development is with dead standing pinyon. Future steps will involve selecting live pinyon.

Through the joint BLM and COWOOD Project aimed at marketing pinyon and juniper, Kennedy has developed a line of products and will soon embark on a marketing campaign. His High Desert Pinyon line includes strip and parquet flooring, wainscoting, molding products, and novelty items. Through the Project he has received technical and financial assistance with setting up the milling components, procurement relationships, and initial marketing strategy.

See the full report at <http://www.colostate.edu/programs/cowood/> or email [charper@co.montezuma.co.us](mailto:charper@co.montezuma.co.us) for a PDF version.

## Montana

### Little Rockies Windthrow: Beaver Creek Road Cleanup

Central Montana is no stranger to heavy winds, or to slushy spring blizzards, or combinations of both. The Little Rocky Mountains were hit by a severe spring blizzard last spring which created pockets of wind-thrown trees throughout the range. Beaver Creek Road, which is a major public access road above the town of Zortman, was blocked by wind-throw and became a safety and fuels hazard.

Local landowners cleared portions of Beaver Creek Road for immediate access and the BLM fire crew continued the effort by clearing the upper portions of the road. Work on a two-mile stretch of lower road was contracted to expand the width of the area cleared and to further treat for hazard trees and fuel loadings. The contract provided an opportunity to target local minority contractors from Fort Belknap Reservation and was awarded to a contractor from Hays using HUB-Zone Preference.

Wind damaged trees within 100 feet of the road were cut, lopped, and scattered. The smaller diameter slash was piled. As seen in the photo below, there is multiple-aged slash downed. Many trees were weakened by the original storm and fresh blow-down continually occurred from the time the contract was awarded to the time of project clean-up completion. A contract modification was done to include some of the more recent damage as additional trees weakened by the spring blizzard continued to fall.

*Contact: Jennifer Walker, Central Montana Zone BLM, 406-538-1982*



*Windthrow damage.*



*Post-treated wind-throw damage.*