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California

Getting a Jump on the Wildfire Season: San Jose Neighborhood Association Partners with Fire Safe Councils

Homeowners in Almaden Valley's Montego Neighborhood realized that they needed to implement an aggressive fuel reduction plan if they were to keep their neighborhood safe from dangerous wildfires. The perimeter of this residential area, which borders several wildland-urban interface areas including Quicksilver Park, was overgrown with poison oak, coyote bush and other "ladder fuels," posing a significant wildfire threat to homes and other property.

The California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) and the BLM have partnered to respond to this need by granting \$10,000 to the Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council (SCCFSC) to help cover a portion of the costs of this multi-acre clearing project. The Montego Homeowners Association also paid for part of this project so they could exceed the area that was planned using the grant funding.

After reviewing the bids, the group decided to use the San Jose Conservation Corps and Charter School – a local organization that provides youth with a quality high school education and teaches valuable work and life skills. "Using the Conservation Corps was a win-win for us," said Joan Pereyra, MHOA vice president. "We felt good about helping this organization and they provided us with the work we needed at a price we could afford."

This project, which began in March, could not have been completed at a better time. Area firefighters are predicting the worst fire season in years, due in part to higher than normal rainfall and the subsequent growth of trees, shrubs and grasses. Captain Juan Diaz, the San Jose Fire Department's wildland officer, urges homeowners living in rural or unincorporated areas of San Jose or Santa Clara County to think "fire safety" now before hot summer weather and the fire season arrives.

"This fuel reduction project is exactly what the San Jose Fire Department has been asking our residents to organize," stated Captain Diaz. "The Montego residents and the Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council have raised the bar on community fire prevention, preparedness and team work."

For more information: California Fire Safe Council Coast Region Grants Manager, Amber Gardner 1-800-372-2350.



Before (above) and after (below) treatment photographs of Area 4.



No Secret about Fire Safety

Hidden Valley Lake Association Partners with California Fire Safe Council to meet defensible space requirements and save lives

The Hidden Valley Lake Association's hard work on wildfire safety projects in their community is no secret and they are working hard to keep it that way. The California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) and BLM are partnering to fund a project in Hidden Valley Lake Association to continue their active weed abatement program and protect homes from wildfire.

Nestled in the scenic Coyote Valley in the lee of Mt. St. Helena just 20 miles north of the Napa Valley in Lake County, Hidden Valley Lake Association (HVLA) is a 3,300-lot gated community at an altitude of 1,100 feet. The scenic and natural beauty of the area attracts approximately 7,000 year-round residents.

Since 1997 HVLA has enforced mandatory weed abatement standards that require homeowners to abate 100% of each lot

on July 1 of each year. And their efforts have paid off. Some of the initial successes made possible by this grant include:

- On July 6, 2005, a wildfire was stopped a few feet away from HVLA homes thanks to the recent weed abatement efforts.
- Four years ago, the HVLA had 1,500 properties in non-compliance with the weed abatement standard. This year there were fewer than 10 homes.
- HVLA has voted to increase their annual budget for abating the common areas. This grant proved to the organization how important wildfire safety is and they intend to keep up the momentum.
- HVLA participated in the creation of the South Lake Fire Plan and evacuation map that was mailed to all residents in South Lake County.

For more information: California Fire Safe Council Coast Region Grants Manager, Amber Gardner 800/372-2350.



Wildfire in Hidden Valley on July 6, 2005, was stopped by the fuel reduction efforts of the HVLA. The area in yellow is the two acres that was burned and the red squares are houses.



Wildland site 1 before (above) and after (below) fuel reduction.



The C.O.R.E of Fire Safe Communities

The BLM, through the California Fire Safe Council, was able to help employ high school-age students from the surrounding communities of Eastern Madera County through a grant award of \$63,420. The Eastern Madera Fire Safe Council in cooperation with the Coarsegold Resource Conservation District and C.O.R.E. (Conservation Occupation Resource and Education) started their program in 2003.

The Eastern Madera FSC hired the students at minimum wage with a work day from 7 am – 12 noon. The crews consisted of at-risk youths from local high schools and youths from the Mono Rancheria, with school teachers as supervisors. There were a total of four crews. The projects consisted of trail maintenance, North Fork Town clean-up, North Recreation Center clean-up, brush clearing (which was done on the property of handicapped and senior citizens), fire hazard reduction, campground maintenance, and stream and wildlife habitat restoration. The program features educational activities, training exercises, and guest speaker presentations as well as recreational activities. The response from the community and the youths' parents was extremely positive. The C.O.R.E. accomplished 86 acres of fire safe fuel reduction.



Members of the C.O.R.E. working on park trail cleanup.



One area after the C.O.R.E. worked to clear brush.



The C.O.R.E. worked on park trails and larger brush clearing projects accomplishing 86 acres with this grant.

Eastern Madera FSC received an additional \$25,000 from BLM which allowed the program to continue for an additional quarter in the grant term after support from the local tribes to continue the success of the program.

For more information: California Fire Safe Council Sierra Region Grants Manager, Brenda Rightmyer 1- 800-257-7066.

Idaho

Fuels Strategy Aimed at Improving Endangered Bull Trout Habitat in Southern Idaho Desert

In the remote desert south of Twin Falls, one of Idaho's threatened species has found a unique, but safe home. The Jarbidge River system is the southernmost spot in Idaho where the threatened bull trout can be found. These fish are part of the Columbia River Basin Distinct Population Segment, where they are isolated and particularly vulnerable. Given the sensitivity of these bull trout, the Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation Fuels Program and Jarbidge Field

Office have planned to implement a project and a strategy to protect their rare habitat for years to come.

This spring the Idaho BLM Twin Falls District Fuels Program conducted mechanical thinning near Dave Creek, south of Murphy Hot Springs, in this critical bull trout habitat area. Bull trout live in eight different headwater streams within the Jarbidge River system. Although Jarbidge Field Office specialists previously developed a strategy for improving the bull trout habitat, it was only after the reorganization of the Idaho's BLM District that their vision could become a reality. Through the reorganization, Jarbidge was combined with the Burley and Shoshone Field Offices to form the Twin Falls District which provided Jarbidge with access to Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation's extensive Fuels Program. This spring's recent treatment was conducted on approximately one quarter of the total area planned for improvement over the next ten years. Small project areas are being implemented over a series of several years so as to minimize impacts to the threatened bull trout.

During the summer months, bull trout are generally not present in the project area and instead travel to higher elevations with colder water temperatures. The bull trout begin spawning in early September and will live in the



Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation Fuels and Suppression crews worked to minimize juniper along the Dave Creek streambed, improving threatened bull trout habitat and protecting the area from the threat of wildfire.

entire river stretch during spring, fall and winter. Through cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as the Idaho and Nevada Department's of Fish and Game, the first project phases were ready to begin. The strategy specifically meets various goals identified by the USFWS.

One goal of the treatment is to restore aspen and minimize juniper in the area along the streambed. "Over time, the junipers overtake the aspen," BLM Twin Falls District Fuels Specialist Brandon Brown said. "Our goal isn't to eliminate juniper, but reduce it to allow the aspen to come back naturally."

The project will improve aspen growth and create stream shade. Logs will also be lodged into the stream to create better pools and increase the amount of large woody debris cover for the bull trout. "By reducing fuel loading and minimizing juniper in the river bottom, fire intensity is being reduced," BLM Twin Falls District Fisheries Biologist Kate Forster said. "If a fire was to burn through the drainage, the likelihood of it being catastrophic to bull trout is now considerably less."

Years ago, wildfire did threaten the small, remote town of Murphy Hot Springs, located just upstream from Dave Creek. This project and efforts to come will minimize those risks and help protect wildlife and the lives and property within the wildland urban interface community. Through the good efforts on the part of the Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation Fuels Program, along with Jarbidge Field Office specialists, the bull trout in the remote desert of southern Idaho will be able to consider the Jarbidge River system a safe home for many years to come.



Juniper trees have begun to overtake the aspen along the Jarbidge River.

Elk City, Idaho – At the End of the Road

The remote community of Elk City Idaho, located at the southern end of the Idaho Panhandle in north central Idaho, is at the end of the road, literally. Situated at the end of Highway 14, Elk City is surrounded by three large roadless areas and the rugged South Fork Clearwater River canyon. The natural beauty and remoteness of the area has been the primary draw for many of its residents.

In recent years, stands of lodgepole pine surrounding the community have matured and 40 – 90 percent mortality has occurred due to an epidemic mountain pine beetle outbreak. With only one access route in and out of the community and the potential for stand-replacing fire increasing with each season, many of the residents are concerned about their safety. Primary travel routes to their houses and out of the community are limited and located across BLM managed lands.

The BLM has worked closely with the residents and, through the Idaho County Wildland Fire Protection Plan, have identified the Transportation Corridors Project as a high-priority fuels reduction project. Idaho County was awarded a BLM Partnership Grant in 2005 to coordinate and implement similar treatments on private land adjoining the BLM project. Framing Our Community, a non-profit organization in Elk City, is implementing these activities.

The project is designed to create shaded fuel breaks along BLM roads that access subdivisions and



The area behind the treatment boundary, as marked by the trees, shows the condition of the untreated area containing dense stands of lodgepole pine including some dying and dead as well as ladder fuels.

residential areas and are strategically located to aid in fire suppression. The fuel breaks will reduce ground, surface, ladder, and aerial fuels for up to 200 feet on each side of the road. The project involves understory thinning, pruning, and overstory thinning to sufficiently reduce a crown fire (approximately 15 feet between crowns). The project also includes removal of “hazard trees” that may fall and block or restrict vehicle passage on the road.

The project is being implemented in several phases. The first two sections, including about two miles, are nearing completion. Pineda Post and Pole of Whitebird, Idaho, is completing one section through the IDIQ fuels reduction contract with the stewardship option. The second section is being implemented through an Assistance Agreement with stewardship provisions with Framing Our Community. This Assistance Agreement was the BLM’s first to include stewardship provisions.

A variety of products are available to offset the cost of the service work. The products being produced include posts, poles, firewood, and saw timber. Revenues generated will be sufficient to cover the cost of all

service work which includes thinning, pruning, and hand piling on both segments. Work on additional road sections will be implemented later in FY06 and in FY07.

Contact Mark Craig (208)962-3593 for more information.



In the foreground, posts and poles have been removed to reduce tree density and remove fuel ladders. The background area, lying outside of the treatment area, is visibly denser with ladder fuels.



Post-treatment view of a stand where sawlogs, posts and poles were removed.