

Colorado

Routt County Receives BLM Engine

Routt County, Colorado's newest addition to its fleet of fire engines was put to the test Thursday, July 17. The 1990 Navistar engine responded to smoke reports along the Seed House Corridor after lightning peppered the area. "This engine will improve the urban interface protection capabilities in Routt County," said Chuck Vale, Routt County Emergency Manager.

The engine has a 500-gallon water tank and seats three people. It's equipped to handle wildland and structural fires and has the flexibility to maneuver most driveways.

A second fire station was built in anticipation of acquiring an additional engine to help answer the fire calls in the North Routt Fire Protection District.

The North Routt Fire Protection District in north-central Colorado was able to purchase a Bureau of Land Management fire engine with a grant through the BLM Rural Fire Assistance program. This program was implemented under the National Fire Plan to assist communities and rural volunteer fire departments meet safety, training and equipment needs. "This is a great example of partnership between county and federal agencies," said Vale. "The public is the real beneficiary of this program."

BLM releases engines for resale after 80,000 miles or eight years of service. For more information on the Rural Fire Assistance program and the application process please visit: <http://www.fireplan.gov> under community assistance.

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North Routt Fire Protection District officials receive the keys to the fire engine obtained through BLM's Rural Fire Assistance program. In the photo (l to r) are Scott Andre, Assistant Chief of North Routt Fire Protection District, Chuck Vale, county emergency manager, Marilyn Weber, North Routt Fire Protection District, Mike Rieser and Cliff Hutton of the Northwest Colorado Fire Management Center.

Local Counties and Volunteer Fire Departments Receive BLM Funding

When the National Fire Plan was implemented one of the key elements was community assistance. Many rural volunteer fire departments struggle to supply their departments with the necessary equipment and training required to provide the highest level of fire protection possible for the public. Local fire departments are first responders to fires that involve sagebrush and wooded areas as well as structures in many instances. They routinely assist federal wildland firefighters on or near Department of Interior public lands administered by Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs, and United States Forest Service public lands under the Department of Agriculture.



Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.

Snapshots 2003

August 8

Safety to firefighters and the public is always the top priority in any wildland fire. To support that effort The Rural Fire Assistance program was developed under the National Fire Plan with money allocated by Congress divided among the four agencies for distribution. This program awards grants to enable volunteer fire departments to enhance their fire protection capabilities. Eligible departments can use the grants for training, equipment, and prevention work. Gear related to wildland fire such as fire shelters, nomex fire resistant clothing and hose fittings, are items often seen on grant proposals. The U.S. Forest Service also has a longstanding program to assist fire departments. In Colorado both programs are administered through the Colorado State Forest Service to provide a single point of contact for the application and award process.

One example of 2003 Rural Fire Assistance awards are laptop computers provided to the Moffat County Sheriff's Department. The laptops will enable the Sheriff's Department to implement the "Moffat County Fire Plan" upon its completion. The department is a cooperator with the Craig Interagency Fire Dispatch Center and maintains fire engines available to respond to fire calls. Deputies will be able to access site specific data while in the field. This is the information gathered from land owners over the past two years who wish to participate in the Moffat County Fire Plan.

Fire and Fuels in Southwest Colorado

In an effort to increase the understanding of different fuels-reduction treatments and why they are necessary, the San Juan Public Lands Center published a 12-page newspaper insert titled "Fire and Fuels in Southwest Colorado." The insert was put into local papers in Durango, Cortez, and Pagosa Springs, reaching over 26,000 people.

The insert focused on the fuels-reduction program on the San Juan Public Lands discussing treatment methods, fire ecology, defensible space, and partnership accomplishments. It also spoke to current issues like the pine beetle epidemic, new fire restriction zones, and rehabilitation efforts after the Missionary Ridge Fire of 2002.

The insert was a cooperative effort of the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College, and the Colorado State Forest Service.

The insert can be viewed on the web at: www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/bulletin_board/FIRE_files/fire-insert.pdf

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Graphic image of the front page of the special insert distributed in local newspapers throughout southwestern Colorado.



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Snapshots 2003

August 8

BLM Teams Up with Colorado Division of Wildlife

BLM specialists wanted to reduce fuels on land in the wildland-urban interface near Durango, but some terrain was too steep, so to lessen potential fire intensity they evaluated treating adjacent land, which happened to belong to the Colorado Division of Wildlife. When project manager Randy Lewis explained the potential benefits to wildlife to state officials, a partnership was struck.

This month the BLM and Colorado Division of Wildlife started a thinning project that will reduce hazardous fuels and improve wildlife habitat on about 400 acres in the Perins Peak Wildlife Area, which borders the city of Durango. The project is designed to both protect surrounding areas from catastrophic wildfire and stimulate the growth of palatable vegetation for wildlife.

The project area is home to deer, elk, and other herbivores as well as being a popular hiking area for local residents. Several dozen homes are less than one-quarter mile from the wildlife area. “We’ve thinned within 150 feet



Perins Peak area illustrating BLM lands that have received thinning treatment.

of homes, but I haven’t heard one negative comment from a homeowner,” said Lewis.

The project will take place in areas of flat terrain and small drainages on BLM and State Division of Wildlife lands west of Durango between the Rock Ridge Subdivision and Dry Fork drainage. A hydroaxe will create openings in dense areas of shrubs by thinning scrub oak and smaller juniper trees. It will also remove thick areas of brush choking out natural meadows.

The contractor is using existing trails in the Perins Peak Wildlife Area between Rock Ridge and Dry Fork to access project areas. The area will remain open to use, but the public has been cautioned not to get too close to the machine, which can throw material 300 feet.

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The hydroaxe mower at work in the project area.



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Wyoming

Salt Cedar Under Attack

An invasion is taking place in the Bighorn Basin of Wyoming. A foreign predator is crowding out native species. The culprit? Salt cedar, also known as Tamarisk.

The ornamental shrub doesn't look like your typical invasive plant. Growing up to 20 feet tall with feathery green branches and hundreds of small pink flowers, salt cedar has been an ornamental favorite for years. The plants grow incredibly thick and literally prevent anything else from growing.

Salt cedar consumes huge amounts of water, and that's a problem in the arid west. One large plant can use 200 gallons of water per day. One study in the southwest estimated that salt cedar could consume 46 million gallons of water per acre per year. The roots of the plant go very deep, so they can reach the water table.

Not only does salt cedar use a lot of water, it actually changes the soil composition.

"Salt cedar accumulates large quantities of salt from the soil and brings it to the foliage and then deposits it on the soil," said Alex Ogg, research scientist with the University of Wyoming Extension Service. "This gives it a competitive advantage, the ability to tolerate salt which most other plants can't."

It's this one-two punch of water consumption plus salt tolerance that is causing salt cedar to push out the native river-dwellers such as cottonwoods and willows.

"Salt cedar literally sucks all of the water out of the soil, depriving the cottonwoods,"



Using prescribed fire is one tool helping to eliminate the weed. Fire alone can't solve the problem and must be used in conjunction with other methods.

said BLM's Steve Christy. "Soon salt cedar will take over leaving only old cottonwood snags."

The Bighorn River is suffering this fate. As salt cedar grows and prospers, native grasses, shrubs and trees are dying. This affects the health of the entire ecosystem. Animals and birds which once thrived in the area are forced to look elsewhere for food and shelter. Salt cedar offers almost no food value.

The cost to landowners is also high. Cattle and horses don't graze on salt cedar and the plant prevents growth of other edible vegetation. A landowner can spend thousands of dollars trying to clear the fields.

In an effort to battle this predator, Christy began working with a local landowner, the University of Wyoming, and Washakie and Bighorn counties, along with other partners. From this, the Goose Island Riparian Restoration Project was established. Its goal is to protect and restore native



Salt Cedar (Tamarisk parviflora) is an invasive plant that originated in Eurasia.



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Snapshots 2003

August 8

riparian vegetation on tracts along the Bighorn River.

“There are about 170 acres of public land and 400 to 500 acres of private land involved,” Christy said.

The primary goals include protecting existing stands of cottonwood trees from wildfire hazards, reducing the density and frequency of weed invasion, increasing native vegetation on the site, and providing a demonstration and interpretive site for the future.

“Our goal is to restore the native cottonwood galleries,” said Christy. “It’s also a fuels management issue. If a fire gets started in the area, it goes crazy.”

Salt cedar burns very well. Unfortunately, fire doesn’t kill the entire plant. It actually stimulates the underground buds. Mowing has the same effect. The plants can also be winter killed, but the roots live on.

Ogg said to effectively eliminate salt cedar, a combination of treatments is needed. “No one treatment will kill salt cedar. And if you don’t replace it with a desirable species, it will come back pretty fast.”

The project also has different goals for the partners. University of Wyoming scientists are interested in the research aspect. What combination of methods will eradicate salt cedar? What grasses can be reestablished? BLM is looking for a way to battle salt cedar on a larger scale by finding the most cost effective way to eliminate salt cedar, not only in the Bighorn Basin, but on all public lands.

In July 2000, the work began. A backhoe with a bucket and blade began clearing a 60-acre area. At the same time, university researchers established test plots.

“We’re doing study plots with different sprays. A spray may kill a plant, but the shoots come back from underground buds. We’ll need to treat it more than one year,” Ogg said.

“We’re trying to find a desirable species to compete against salt cedar. We have planted seeds of seven different grasses to test how well they will compete against salt cedar.” He explained that they’re also using different kinds of fertilizer to stimulate the grasses and forbs.



Cedar infestation along a stream.

“On another test plot, a helicopter sprayed one of the salt cedar plots with Arsenal herbicide. It killed the salt cedar but it killed everything else as well,” Ogg said.

Using a web-blade mower is another technique that’s being tested. The salt cedar is mowed down and the stumps are treated with chemicals at the same time.



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In March 2001, the area was burned and a brush cutter cut down the burned skeletons. More test plots were seeded in April. About 60 cottonwoods were planted.

Things were looking good for the new plants and bad for the salt cedar when Mother Nature stepped in. By mid-July drought had hit the area hard. Only one third of the cottonwoods survived, but the salt cedar thrived and came back in droves. In the fall of 2001 willow, chokecherry, silver and buffalo berry were planted.

Christy said, "We've probably spent \$36,000 with in-kind contributions and \$50,000 total for 300 acres. Only 60 acres have actually been worked on and the problem isn't solved."

But despite the drought and resiliency of salt cedar, the work continues. Other groups are joining the battle. Boy Scouts put up protective wire fences around the cottonwoods to prevent beaver damage and the Audubon Society surveyed bird populations.

Biological control could be an option in the future. But finding bugs that will eat salt cedar and not desirable plants can take 1-15 years for approval. Currently, the Chinese Leaf Beetle looks promising. Beetles were released at a test site near Lovell, Wyoming. Biological control may be the answer in the long run.

The salt cedar problem is not one that can be solved alone. Only by working together can the Bighorn Basin be restored to its former glory.

Utah

Moving Forward with Community Fire Plans

In the summer of 2002, the Salt Lake Field Office conducted informal community firehouse meetings at the stations of Saratoga Springs, Cedar Fort and Eagle Mountain. The presentations were made to inform residents of wildland urban interface and hazardous fuels reduction projects surrounding their neighborhoods. Project descriptions involved cutting and thinning juniper trees in an effort to reduce the threat of wildfire. Cut trees were then offered to the public as fuelwood and posts via permit.

Fast forward 365 days. Recently the same staff sat down with representatives from the same communities at a wildfire preparation workshop. The workshop, offered through Community Solutions of Midway, Utah provided key information to help organize, activate and sustain a local wildfire council. On hand to answer any questions were folks from volunteer fire departments, county, state and federal agencies, including the Salt Lake Field Office.

What a difference a year can make! Agency specialists were amazed at the amount of knowledge acquired by the homeowners. Homework had obviously been done during winter break. For example, last year during the firehouse meetings BLM staff did most of the talking. This year concerned residents came to the table full of questions and information site specific to their locale.

Through this process, a goal was set to establish a fire plan and fire council by 2004 the several communities. The BLM field office has been busy this summer with fires, local events and patrols near communities. An increased presence has improved communication and accessibility with the public. Partnerships will be strengthened throughout the years to come.

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Snapshots 2003

August 8

National Interagency Fire Center

Fire season 2003 has been a time of intense activity in several sections of the country. After operating at National Preparedness Level (PL) 5 for several days, the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group dropped back to PL 4 on August 4. As normal during fire season, the movement of equipment and material through the warehouse at NIFC was a major task. Thousands of tons were transported through the cache and distributed to fire complexes around the country.



The warehouse ramp at the National Interagency Fire Center is filled with thousands of pounds of equipment on the way to fire lines throughout the nation.

As of early August, the Great Basin Cache had issued more than \$31 million of supplies, with about \$14.6 million of supplies returned to refurbish.

ITEM	QTY ISSUED YTD	QTY RETURNED YTD
Hose	20,658	7,358
Battery	49,932	2,074
Shirt	13,008	5,196
Jean	13,664	5,72
Helmet	1,345	306
Canteen	21,794	1727
Pulaski	3,398	1894
Shovel	3,061	1,695
Sleeping Bag	12,742	4,306
Chain Saw	412	159
Pump	564	119
Drink/Food Containers	8,440	1,514
Cot	1,493	584
Rations	61,968 meals	8,136 meals
Gloves	12,506	4,056
Back Pack Pumps	3,383	964



Office parking areas serve as overflow temporary storage for equipment on the move.



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