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Utah

Interdisciplinary and Interagency Approach Works in Northern Utah

Since the fall of 2000, building up the fuels and wildland-urban interface program has been a main focus of the Salt Lake Field Office. Beginning with no fuels staff or technicians three years ago, direction and funding from the National Fire Plan over the has allowed the field office to build a successful program that is increasing its capacity to reduce fuel hazards.

Year	Acres Completed
2001	866
2002	2,450
2003	*11,729

*Exceeded target by 859 acres.

Most projects have been mechanical treatments with at least two-thirds contracted to private industry. About 80 percent of the project acres are within the wildland-urban interface. BLM is currently working with six local wildfire councils in the communities near the project areas.

One key to the success of this program has been weekly meetings over the past 14 months between the fuels staff and resource specialists to plan projects as an interdisciplinary team called the Salt Lake Field Office Fuels Committee. This approach has benefited the program through a more timely completion of environmental documentation and fostering a mutual understanding of each specialist's goals. New to the field office are a fuels specialist, lead fuels technician and crew, education and mitigation specialist and technician, program archaeologist, wildland-urban interface coordinator, environmental specialist, and rehabilitation coordinator.

Northern Utah, like much of the Rocky Mountain west, faces increasing residential and commercial development in wildland areas. In a recent estimate from the Utah Office of Planning and Budget, about 86 percent of Utah's 2.3 million



Members of the field office fuels committee plan projects targeted for 2004. (l to r) Gary Kidd, fire rehabilitation coordinator, Ambur Mathews, environmental specialist, Dan Washington, wildland-urban coordinator, and Cindy Ledbetter, range specialist.

residents live within the boundaries of the Salt Lake Field Office and its cooperators. Annexations and new subdivisions can be difficult to track but the interagency Northern Utah Fuels Committee has defined the focus areas and set priorities that help all agencies to work together for maximum effect.

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Projects in the Beaver River Watershed

The Cedar City, Utah BLM fuels program has been working on two projects identified in the Beaver River Watershed Coordinated Resource Management Plan and Watershed Restoration Action Strategy. The 1,000-acre South Creek Tree Cutting Project and the 40,000-acre Greenville Bench Enhancement Project lie within the top two areas identified as degraded rangeland and forest ecosystems within the watershed, by a technical advisory committee. Both of these projects have excessive erosion and surface run-off as well as degraded wildlife habitat.



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South Creek Tree Cutting Project

This past September a contract crew cut 400 acres of the South Creek Tree Cutting Project located five miles southeast of Beaver, Utah. This project has been coordinated between the BLM and the Southern Region Utah Division of Wildlife Resources to thin and seed selected closed canopy pinyon and juniper stands. The pinyon-juniper woodland has increased its range and expanded into areas historically dominated by sagebrush and other brush species.

The project area is currently classified as critical winter range by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and falls within the high profile Beaver Front mule deer emphasis area. The project objectives are to reduce existing tree density and increase shrub, forb, and grass component, increase forage available to wintering big game herds and decrease big game forage pressure on limited winter range on neighboring private lands. So far partners have contributed over \$20,000 to buy seed and tublings for the project and share contract labor costs. Partners include Utah

Division of Wildlife Resources, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Local volunteers and school groups will plant shrub tublings in the project area as part of the Beaver River Watershed Days this coming spring.

Greenville Bench Enhancement Project

Implementation of the Greenville Bench Enhancement Project began May 2003. It is a 40,000-acre landscape project located southwest of Beaver, Utah and directly south of the community of Greenville. The project will continue over the next 5 years.

A combination of manual, mechanical, and prescribed fire treatments will be used to establish fuel breaks protecting the project area and neighboring private lands from wildfire. Other objectives are to decrease hazardous fuel loads of pinyon and juniper on mid and upper slopes, reestablish sagebrush corridors for wildlife dispersal and movement, decrease pinyon-juniper encroachment into areas once dominated by sagebrush, increase plant diversity with native and nonnative shrubs, forbs, and grasses, and increase plant biological and age class diversity.



Before and after photos of the South Creek Project. South Creek Project has been done with a contract crew to lop and scatter the Pinyon and juniper in this area to improve wildlife habitat.



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To date, approximately 1,200 acres of pinyon-juniper removal have been accomplished with contract and BLM crews, 1,000 acres of pinyon and juniper removal have been treated with a mobile chipper shredder, and 1,800 acres of sagebrush have been treated by chaining and harrowing. Of the land treated 3,000 acres have so far been seeded.

BLM partners for this project are The Mule Deer Foundation, Sportsman for Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and others. This year approximately \$17,000 has been used for cost share contracts and to buy seed.

For further information on these projects and other BLM projects that are taking place in Southwest, Utah please visit the website at www.ut.blm.gov/ccifc.

Joel Spring Highway Fence and Hazardous Fuels Treatment

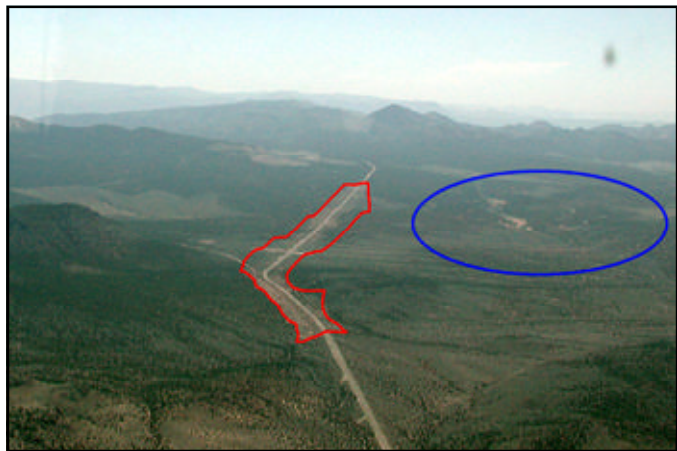
Earlier this year, the Cedar City, BLM fuels crew finished work on the Joel Spring Highway Fence and Hazardous Fuels Treatment. This project is located 20 miles west of Cedar City and 5 miles east of Newcastle, Utah.

The two main objectives are to create a shaded fuel break along the highway where fire fighters could safely and successfully take a stand against a wildland fire in the area, and install a fence on both sides of the right-of-way to reduce motor vehicle collisions involving livestock, wild horses and wildlife. The fuel break is expected to provide additional protection to homes being developed adjacent to the project area. In the photo, the red line indicates the shaded fuel break. Inside the blue circle is a new subdivision currently being developed.

Thinning work began in late October 2002 and took three and one half months to



Before and after photos of the eastern anchor point of the 40,000 acre Greenville Bench project. This area was treated with an environmental brush cutter.



Aerial picture taken May 30, 2003. The red line shows where the project is located. The blue line shows where a community is located.



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The environmental brush cutter working on the Joel Spring Project during the winter months.

complete. The project was used as an operator training site for personnel operating Utah BLM's "Bullhog" brush cutter. For more information visit www.ut.blm.gov/ccifc/bullhogwebsite/.

The project area stretches for five miles along Highway SR-56. Both sides of the highway were thinned 400 feet from center line to create an 800-foot wide fuel break. The greatest thinning took place next to the road, and was diminished to 25 foot canopy spacing at the outer-edge of the break.

Both sides of the highway will be fenced 200 feet from the roads centerline by the Southwest Utah Grazing board and the allotment permittees.



The 800-foot shaded fuel break created to reduce fire threat of jumping Highway SR-56.

The Joel Springs Project is considered to be the western anchor point for expanding the fuel break east toward Cedar City to the community of Quichapah and the Bumblebee Road. This 12 mile stretch of closed canopy pinyon-juniper dominated landscape is a popular area for residential development and is growing quickly. Scattered land ownership along this road includes BLM, Forest Service and private lands. Three of seven communities along this road are currently developing and implementing community fire plans to improve defensible space and fire safety within and adjacent to their communities.

Contact: Paul Briggs or Esther Benson (435) 586-2401

New Mexico

Prescribed Fire near Historic Lincoln, New Mexico

Roswell Fire Management Officer Jim Desmond asked, "How many people would get real nervous if BLM proposed using prescribed fire on BLM lands around Lincoln?" Every hand in the room was raised.

Desmond asked this question on a chilly January evening in 2001, during a public meeting in historic Lincoln, New Mexico, only eight months after the Cerro Grande fire swept through parts of the Los Alamos area. The Roswell Field Office Planning Team organized the meeting to discuss potential options for managing BLM public lands in the Lincoln Valley. The 1,120 acres were all in the wildland urban interface surrounding Lincoln.

Despite the fact that most residents initially didn't want to hear about fires being lit in their communities, the planning team overcame the community's initial skepticism by explaining that no project of any kind would take place until a fuels reduction treatment plan was approved and in place. Further the team explained that prescribed



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fire would not be used until mechanical fuels reduction treatments were completed.

Once the plan was approved, BLM went to work conducted mechanical juniper removal from BLM lands adjacent to Lincoln. After two years of thinning, it was decided that time was ripe to conduct some small burns in several areas. The main goals were to start small, meet fuel reduction objectives, and increase the comfort level of local residents.

The first opportunity to burn came in June of 2003. Two burn units were identified that were fairly small and would be good places to initiate prescribed fire to reduce the fire hazard from around Lincoln. As described in the fuels treatment plan, neighbors were notified, notices were posted throughout Lincoln and local media outlets were given notice.

On June 11, 2003, Roswell Field Office gathered the personnel and equipment needed to conduct the burns including three fire engines, water tender, and a trained fuels crew from the field office and an additional fuels crew from BLM's Farmington Field Office. Smoke was a major concern during the burn. The last thing BLM wanted to do was send smoke into the museums and tourist shops in Lincoln! Fortunately, the spot weather forecast and on-site weather was nearly perfect with the wind dissipating the test-burn smoke harmlessly into an uninhabited area. On burn day, in an effort to keep the public informed, staff was positioned along local roadways to provide information and answer questions about the project.

The prescribed burn was a complete success. Treatment objectives were met and by that evening the last fire was extinguished. Plans call for future prescribed fires in the area and Roswell Field Office staff looks forward to continued community support as they reduce the risk of wildfire in the area.

Contact: Jim Desmond, Fire Management Officer,
Roswell Field Office, (505) 627-0310



BLM fuels crew checks the test fire.



Prescribed fire reduces the risk of wildfire in the historic Lincoln area.



Site Immediately after the burn was completed.



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Youth Challenge Program Helping With BLM Wildland Urban Interface Project

Recently, the New Mexico National Guard's Youth Challenge Program assisted the Roswell Field Office in a wildland urban interface project near Ruidoso, New Mexico. Sixty young people, ages 16 to 18, were bused to the thinning site on BLM's Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern. What they found there was approximately 35 acres of downed pinon-juniper slash, all of which needed to be piled prior to burning.



BLM staff members provide project and safety orientation to Youth Challenge participants dressed in orange.

The slash had been created by the BLM as part of a wildland-urban project on the of the BLM boundary with the Sonterra subdivision. The trees had been cut during the summer by the BLM fuels crew. When the Youth Challenge Program Coordinator approached Fire Management Officer Jim Desmond about doing a conservation project, Desmond immediately saw an opportunity to utilize these young people on this important project.



Burn piles begin to take shape.

After a short project orientation and safety presentation by ten BLM firefighters, the cadets broke down into squads with a firefighter as squad leader. The cadets energetically moved and piled slash. At the end of a long day, all 35 acres were piled and made ready to burn. Based on this success, future workdays are being planned for the cadets to assist BLM in the wildland-urban interface.

The New Mexico National Guard began the Youth Challenge program in 2000 for "at risk" young people. Youth Challenge enrolls both young men and women in a training and mentoring program. During this 18-month program, cadets

spend 32 weeks in residential training at the Youth Challenge Academy in Roswell, New Mexico. During this period the leadership cadre provides education, discipline and structure to the cadets. As part of the educational curriculum, employees from the New Mexico State Forestry and the Roswell Field Office provided Basic Fire Fighter training to the cadets. During the latest session, over 100 cadets took the class and all passed.

The Youth Challenge program provides both the cadets and BLM a "win-win" situation. BLM provides training and an introduction to fire fighting as a job or career. The cadets provide BLM with a good source of labor to help BLM meet fuel reduction targets and reduce the fire hazard in the urban interface near Ruidoso. The BLM estimated that the Youth Challenge cadets provided approximately 500 hours of volunteer work on this WUI project

Contact: Fire Management Officer Jim Desmond, Roswell Field Office, (505) 627-0310



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Montana

Clancy Boundary Fuels Treatment

The Clancy Boundary wildland-urban interface fuels treatment is the first for the Butte Field Office in the Helena Valley Wildland Urban Interface Area. Located near the community of Clancy, Montana 15 miles southwest of Helena, approximately 410 homes are situated near BLM administered lands.



Thinned areas will help minimize the threat of catastrophic wildfire near adjacent private land.

In coordination with the Tri-Country Fire Working Group, representing Jefferson, Lewis & Clark and Broadwater Counties, wildland fire mitigation work on adjacent private ground is also being completed. The BLM-Butte Field Office is currently helping to fund such mitigation projects through a Community Assistance Agreement which totaled \$155,000 in 2003.

Removed trees are piled for burning as weather permits. A contract to complete the work was awarded in September 2002. To date, 144 acres have been cut and piled and fifteen acres of piles have been burned. Plans to treat an additional 100 acres are currently under way.

The Clancy Boundary wildland-urban interface fuels treatment is a 300 foot-wide shaded fuel break, stretching along eight miles of ownership boundaries and roads. The treatment is designed to reduce the fuels hazards on BLM administered lands adjacent to private property. Treatment strategies concentrate on removing the ladder fuels and trees less than seven inches in diameter.

The Butte Field Office is currently developing a Wildland Urban Interface Risk Assessment and Mitigation Plan for the Helena Valley that will identify additional areas of concern and recommend possible future fuels treatments. A contract has been issued for the work.

Drip Torch Award



Brush and small trees are piled near a Clancy subdivision in preparation for burning.

The Silver Drip Torch award recognizes excellence in fuels management that includes both fuels implementation and community assistance work. This year's recipients of the traveling award are Mary Clark, Lori Mading and Jan Jessen, all of the Montana State Office Support Services staff.

In 2003, Mary and Lori worked many hours to assist the fuels program in implementing an Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity fuels implementation contract. They facilitated and attended 13 public meetings stretching from South Dakota to western Montana to help inform local contractors of the contract and how to bid on it.



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One of the goals that Congress set in the National Fire Plan is to develop local contractors to treat fuels. Accomplishing this goal was a significant workload and involved close coordination with local contractors, the Big Sky Economic Development Authority, and all the other federal agencies involved in fuels contracting. Once the contract was awarded, there was additional pressure to ensure that any available fuels funding be expended in the short time from August 1 until the closing of the books the last week of September. Again, Mary and Lori worked closely with the fuels and contract people in field offices to make sure that \$1.6 million dollars were put into mechanical fuels treatments projects within the Montana-Dakotas.



Mary Clark (l), and Lori Madding (r), and Jan Jessen (not pictured) were winners of this year's Montana Silver Drip Torch Award.

Community Assistance is a new program to assist private homeowners in reducing wildland fuels on their property. Jan Jessen has provided untold assistance to the field mitigation and education specialists in writing and processing assistance agreements with counties to accomplish this work. Jan went above and beyond at the end of the fiscal year when she worked to encumber \$1.2 million dollars of unspent funding from Community Assistance and Fuels. These funds had not been expended earlier in the year due to weather and the severity of the fire season. This took a lot of coordination and the willingness on Jan's part to get the assistance agreements and task orders through the system at the last possible minute.

The efforts of these ladies is outstanding, and very much appreciated, and very deserving of the Silver Drip Torch award representing the greatest contribution to the program this year.

Contact: Jim Gray, Montana State Office, (406) 896-2911



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