

Snapshots 2003

May 30

Colorado

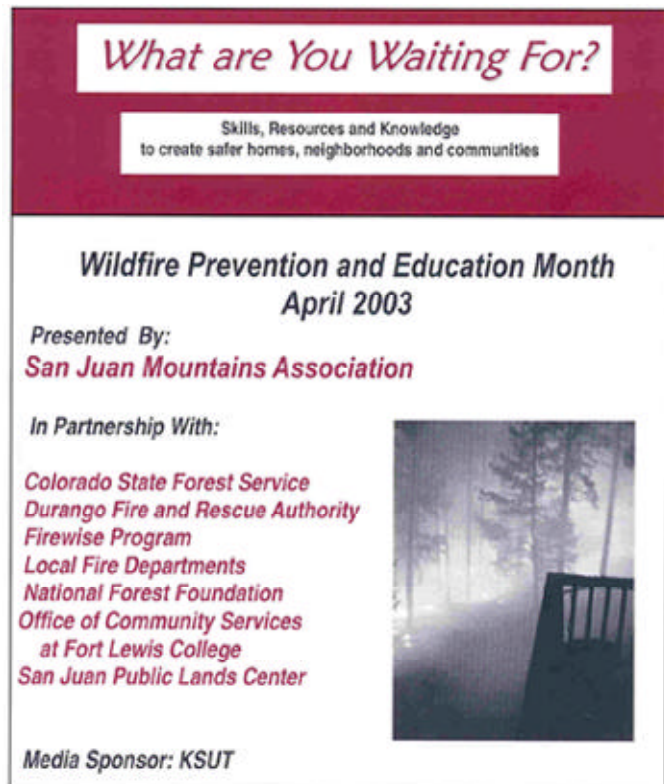
Web Site Offers One-Stop Shopping

Check it out! Learn about current efforts to prevent unwanted damage from wildfire on private and public lands in southwest Colorado by going to just one Web site – the Southwest Colorado Fire Information Clearinghouse. The San Juan Public Lands Center at Fort Lewis College is a joint facility sponsored by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, and the Office of Community Services. The site was initially designed to inform local residents and agencies of the many rehabilitation and recovery efforts going on in the aftermath of the Missionary Ridge and Valley Fires. The need for the center sparked cooperation among the partners to provide easy access to all the resource, social, and economic information that residents might need. The center idea was initiated and it became operational last fall.

Over time, the site has expanded to include information on current fires, defensible space,



Southwest Colorado Fire Information Clearinghouse home page.



Materials were developed to help build public interest.

mitigation contractors, and more. The site also contains reports like the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation Report, the Missionary Ridge Timber Salvage Environmental Impact Statement, and the Community Fire Plans.

There are many cooperative efforts between the partners, and this site has proved to be the perfect repository for products such as community fire plans and community wildfire series.

The community fire plans were a collaborative effort between partners, local fire departments, and counties. These were completed in May 2002, and then added to the web site.

The community wildfire series are informative articles written by Office of Community Services staff featuring defensible space success stories and issues such as pinyon pine die off.



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A mailing list option, offering subscribers updates about current happenings, was added this spring, and has been set up so that any of the partners can send out the updates.

Funding for the webmaster's time is provided by the federal agencies with Office of Community Services and Colorado State Forest Service offering in-kind services.

The address is www.southwestcoloradofires.org.

Contact: Pam Wilson, Fire Information Officer, 970-385-1230

Southwest Colorado Hosts Wildfire Prevention and Education Month

"What Are You Waiting For?" was the theme for Wildfire Prevention and Education Month in southwest Colorado in April. Local, state, federal and non-profit partners joined together to present activities and workshops to make people aware of wildfire hazards and mitigation efforts on both public and private land.

One of the main activities were tours to demonstration sites showing mitigation treatments completed by hydro mower, hand thinning, and horse-drawn teams. Mesa Verde National Park shared the success of their recent fuels-reduction work, which saved many of their employee's residences and historic structures last summer. And a tour to private property that went undamaged during the Valley Fire last summer showed that defensible space does work. Another tour took participants into an area burned in the Missionary Ridge Fire to view new growth and rehabilitation efforts.

Almost 100 people attended a National Firewise Workshop mid-month that was hosted by the Durango Fire and Rescue Authority. The San Juan Public Lands Center granted scholarships to volunteer

fire department personnel, emergency service personnel, and local residents who could not otherwise have attended. Local residents attending the session expressed an interest in establishing a community-driven fire education and prevention council, and will be holding a kick-off meeting in May.

Screenings of the "After the Fire" video were held in Pagosa Springs, Bayfield, Durango, Ignacio, and Cortez. The educational video, released this spring, was developed to alert residents to the dangers still facing them in the aftermath of the Missionary Ridge and Valley Fires last summer. The video also promotes the benefits of defensible space. State Representative Mark Larson and State Senator Jim Isgar hosted a special Town Hall meeting in Pagosa Springs to show the video and talk about how to reduce wildfire fire hazards. At one point last summer, there were large wildfires burning to both the east and west of Pagosa Springs.

Following last summer's Missionary Ridge Fire, the Durango Fire and Rescue Authority developed an outstanding PowerPoint presentation, complete with music, documenting the fire's history, and they have been taking their show "on the road."



Forest Service hydrologist Kay Zillich talks to 20 Durango residents about rehabilitation efforts at Lemon Reservoir during April Fire Prevention and Education month.



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During April, their presentation was shown in several southwest Colorado communities.

The San Juan Public Lands Center and the San Juan Mountains Association teamed up and had fire prevention booths at an agricultural exposition in Cortez and a home show in Pagosa Springs. Mitigation specialists will be busy for the next couple of months responding to requests from homeowners for wildfire mitigation assessments.

Additional informational meetings were held in Montezuma County to explain a mapping process that the county and Office of Community Services has been working on for the past year to identify areas of high wildfire risk.

The month's activities were funded by the San Juan Public Lands Center and a grant that the San Juan Mountains Association received from the National Forest Foundation. Other partners include the Colorado State Forest Service, Durango Fire and Rescue Authority, local fire departments, Office of Community Services, and media sponsor KSUT public radio. In addition to announcing event information, KSUT hosted a week-long series of interviews with mitigation contractors, fire department personnel, and others about the benefits of wildfire hazard mitigation.

Partners hosting the events were encouraged by the public's response and are planning to host a similar event next spring.

Contact: Allen Farnsworth, Mitigation Specialist, 970-385-1207



Students, teachers and administrators listen as the peer-teachers explain basics of fire science.

Fire Education Projects in the Montrose Interagency Management Area

The end of the school year is swiftly approaching, which means that teachers and students are ready for a change of pace - a great time for educational programs and field trips! Many schools within the Montrose Interagency Fire Management area have requested programs about fire for their environmental education days. So, on April 14, approximately 250 students from the Cottonwood Elementary School in Montrose, Colorado took part in a presentation on fire and reforestation. Around 95 fifth-graders from the Norwood, Telluride, Ridgway, and Ouray schools visited a learning station on fire and forestry during their environmental education field day on May 13. And on May 15 - 17, seven students from the Centennial Junior High School in Montrose, two students from the Ouray High School, and one student from Norwood High School took part in filming a video on fire mitigation.

The program at Cottonwood Elementary School started with a two-hour presentation on the basics of fire behavior, fire effects, and regeneration to the combined fifth grade classes. (Actually, it was a 1-hour presentation that stretched to two at the students' request for more smokejumper and engine crew stories.)

From the combined classes, seven students volunteered to help develop displays and teach other students about the relationship between fire and forests. The BLM fire education specialist, with help from Montrose Interagency Fire engine crew personnel and the silviculturist and forester from the Grand Mesa, Gunnison, Uncompahgre National Forest, prepared the seven volunteers. They helped the students develop posters and pictures on fire and succession as well as showing them how to take fire weather and fuel moisture readings, explained succession, demonstrated tree planting, and matching a variety of wildlife species to their habitats. On April 14, the students set up their displays in the school cafeteria. Throughout the morning, each of the five grade levels rotated through the three



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Keeton Ellis demonstrates the fundamentals of gathering fire weather information.

stations for fire behavior, fire effects, and regeneration, where the students taught and demonstrated what they had learned. The students will bring their displays and knowledge to the Montrose Public Lands Center next week to share what they learned with generalist and specialists alike.

The fifth grade students from Norwood, Telluride, Ridgway, and Ouray also learned about fire and forestation. The day-long program was hosted by the San Miguel Colorado State University Extension Service and featured learning stations on soils and water, weeds, wilderness and survival, range management, and fire and forestry. The BLM fire education specialist and Norwood Zone Interagency Fire engine crew coordinated with the Montrose Colorado State Forest Service forester to present basics on fire behavior, regeneration, and forestry. The students used the natural environment to discuss how weather, topography, and fuels influence fire behavior. They also learned to count trees per acre, as well as measure and core trees to calculate the board feet and growth per year.

Then on May 15 – 17, seven students from the Centennial Junior High School in Montrose, two students from the Ouray High School, and one student from Norwood High School helped the BLM fire education specialist conduct interviews for a video being produced locally about fire

mitigation in west central Colorado. The purpose of the video is to teach people in this area about mitigation planning in wildland urban interface areas and illustrate the importance of cooperation to reduce the risks from wildfire to lives, homes, and the environment. The students interviewed federal, state, county, and city fire and emergency managers from Ouray, Ridgway, and Log Hill, as well as homeowners in the Log Hill and Norwood areas. The students also interviewed federal and state fire managers and partners to learn how they work together to develop plans for wildland urban interface treatments on federal lands to be compatible with landscape-level objectives to restore or maintain the integrity and functioning of the Uncompahgre Plateau ecosystem.

The video is being co-sponsored and produced by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, American Red Cross, Ouray County and Log Hill Village, Uncompahgre Plateau Project, and Painted Sky Resource Conservation and Development. Additional funding and support has been contributed by the Log Hill Fire Department and GreenWorks!, an environmental education and community action program of the American Forest Foundations' Project Learning Tree.

Contact: Maggie McCaffrey, Fire Education Specialist (970) 240-5396.



Two students get advice from home owners who did mitigation only when a 30,000 acre fire burned toward their homes.



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Arizona

Arizona's First Wildfire Academy Opens with Governor's Forest Health Summit

Nearly 400 firefighters attended the first Arizona Wildfire Academy, which opened March 10 at the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott. The academy was inaugurated along with a Forest Health and Safety Conference convened by Governor Janet Napolitano. The day-long Forest Health Summit set the stage for the academy by providing a forum to unite public land management agencies, governmental officials, local fire departments, community organizations, concerned citizens and others in discussing past, present and future forest health and safety issues.

Grants were received from the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service through the National Fire Plan. Other sources of seed money included donations from the Arizona Office of Emergency Management, Prescott Area Wildland-Urban Interface Community, Fire Chiefs and Fire District's Association, and even one personal donation. There was also great interagency support to prepare for the Academy as well as providing instructors from the Forest Service, Rural Fire Departments, Arizona State Land Department, and Municipal Fire Departments.

The week-long wildfire academy is the first of its kind in Arizona, reported Don Howard, the Incident Commander for the academy. Howard is also a member of the Arizona State Fire Training Committee and a Fire Chief with the Summit Fire District in the Flagstaff

area. By the time the academy ended, nearly 400 attendees had completed training courses including basic and advanced firefighting, wildland fire behavior, fire operations in the wildland/urban interface, safe chainsaw use, incident business management, the incident command system and other training courses. Employees from the Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, rural volunteer fire departments, contractors, and individuals looking to become employed in firefighting, all benefited from the courses offered. Individuals came from all over the United States to attend this academy. Substantial classroom instruction was provided to trainees. Field operations gave the students an opportunity to demonstrate the skills learned.

"Similar academies have been very successful in Utah, Colorado, Texas and other states, but their earliest sessions begin in May or June," Howard explained. "By then, our firefighters and instructors are usually well into our fire season," he added. Cadre members and coordinators from the Utah and Colorado academies were actively involved in helping the Arizona academy get off to



*Trainees take to the field to test safe and effective chainsaw techniques learned in the classroom at the inaugural Arizona Wildfire Academy in Prescott, Arizona.
(photo by Tom Story)*



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a good start. As Vi Hillman, Utah Academy Administrator, expressed, “It’s pointless to reinvent the wheel. If Arizona can learn from our hard-earned lessons and benefit from our successes, it’s to everybody’s advantage. We’re all in this together.”

This is another example of cooperation, coordination, and the fire community all working together to utilize National Fire Plan funds to make communities in Arizona safer, and make the fire community more efficient and effective.

Contact: Wendell G. Peacock, (602) 417-9305

Crews Aid NASA in Search for Columbia Space Shuttle

Interagency cooperation has taken on a whole new meaning in all risk assignments. Fire crews from the Color Country Fire Zone in southern Utah and northern Arizona recently helped NASA and America through a tough time. Between February and April, three Color Country crews traveled to east Texas to search for shuttle parts from the space shuttle Columbia.

Firefighters who participated in the 12- to 14-hour days of hiking through east Texas thickets and swamps frequently describe the search as grueling and miserable. But they knew they had been called on because they are used to difficult conditions, and they rose to the challenge. “It was really incredible to be part of history, to be part of something so important,” said firefighter Jodi Fowler.

NASA representatives helped keep firefighter morale up

by regularly bringing in astronauts and showing films in the evenings. “They really helped us see why our search effort was so important,”

Fowler said. The disciplined search and recovery for shuttle parts was a key aspect in NASA’s investigation of the Columbia disaster.

“I met a man who had been working for NASA for 23 years,” said firefighter Tyler Brown. “It really hit home for me when he told me that this search was the most important thing he had ever done for NASA.”

Fire crews searched designated areas using a grid pattern, similar to techniques used to find hot spots after a fire’s burned through an area. “It was like cold-trailing – only longer,” said Brown, whose crew found 316 shuttle parts in two weeks. “Firefighters were the perfect choice for this assignment,” said Fowler. “We’re in the best shape and we know how to search terrain.”

The crews were exposed to heavy rain, east Texas humidity, snakes, chiggers, fleas, mosquitoes, ticks, fire ants, briar patches and even a tornado. “It was unlike anything else I had ever done,” said Brown of the search, which was his first trip east of Lake Powell.

Color Country crews also helped out closer to home. In early May, under the coordinated management of Tom Suwyn’s Type II Incident Management Team and NASA, Color Country sent three crews, including



Graphic showing the flight path and Columbia debris area in Texas.



“Fire camp” at the Columbia Shuttle recovery effort in east Texas.



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two Native American crews, to a shuttle-part search in southern Utah. No shuttle parts were found during that search, but that information is important to NASA as well. “I thought that search would be easier than the Texas search,” Fowler said. “But it was over extremely rugged terrain in snow and rain.”

“I think these shuttle-part searches will open the door for firefighters to be used on other (non-fire) projects in the future,” Fowler said. “Everyone there was really impressed with the work incident teams and fire crews can do.”

Contact: Tom Lund, (435) 688-3259



Fire crews work a grid pattern looking for shuttle parts.

Boquillas Ranch Fuels Treatment

A hazardous fuels reduction project is being completed by BLM fire and maintenance crews on the Boquillas Ranch, which is located in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area in southeastern Arizona. The Boquillas Ranch is located approximately two miles south of State Highway 82 along the San Pedro River. The purpose of the project is to protect this historic ranch site, and consists of thinning mesquite trees and brush, and mowing large stands of grass, which surround this historic compound. Approximately 16 acres will be treated around the compound.

Crews are reducing years of accumulated hazardous fuels growth, to create survivable space. The risk of structural damage, caused by wildfires that frequently burn in the

conservation area, is being reduced. As of early May, the BLM fire suppression crew based in Sierra Vista, Arizona, has completed two weeks of fuel reduction work. The woody material is



A firefighter clears brush around the historic Boquillas Ranch on the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.



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being cut down and chipped. The chipped material is used to cover archeological sites as a protective measure against relic hunters. Firewood generated from this project will be donated to the federal prison in Douglas for use in Native American sweat lodges. After the fire crew completes the brush and tree thinning process, they will mow the remaining areas of grass located within the project site. Larger, more open stands of grass will also be mowed by maintenance staff to further reduce fuel loads.

Contact: Dan Quintana, (520) 439-6407



Mower creating firebreak along two tracks to create a buffer.

San Pedro Firebreaks Protect the Public and Fire Crews

A tractor with a rotary mower attachment was rented this spring to construct firebreaks for public and firefighter safety. Field staff and fire crews from the project office in Sierra Vista, Arizona, treated over 900 acres of fallow agricultural fields within the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. The fields, which are partially converted back to a grassland vegetation type, were mowed using two techniques. Small fields adjacent to urban interface areas were completely mowed, while larger fields not immediately adjoining urban interface zones had firebreaks constructed around their perimeters. Firebreaks bordering the riparian zone ranged in width from 45-65 feet. Firebreaks bordering the riparian zone ranged in width from 45-60 feet. Field boundaries not adjacent to the riparian zone had 15-30 foot wide firebreaks constructed. These firebreaks were located in conjunction with access roads whenever possible.

The San Pedro House, a BLM administrative site, had additional firebreaks installed since this is a high use area for international birders. A 120 acre field was divided into four parts by mowing firebreaks. Adjacent to State Highway 90, where fire crews annually fight wildfires, a 200 foot wide firebreak was mowed. Large firebreaks were also mowed to protect a bed and breakfast establishment surrounded by public land.

Firebreaks are being strategically placed within the conservation area to allow for safer access and egress in the event of a wildfire. The firebreaks are also used in preparing fields for prescribed fires. Buffering grasslands from the San Pedro riparian corridor, allows fire managers more flexibility in their prescribed fire planning, and in carrying out suppression tactics during a wildfire. The firebreaks make it possible to manage either the upland or riparian habitat with much greater control.

Contact: Jack Whetstone, (520) 439-6410



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New Mexico

Carlsbad Interagency Fire Organization

The U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have joined forces to educate the youth of Carlsbad, New Mexico and surrounding areas. The fire prevention and environmental protection approach began with the Environmental Science Education Week. Conducted at the Sitting Bull Falls recreation site, located on the Guadalupe Ranger District of the Lincoln National Forest provides an excellent setting for many young people who visit each summer.

During Education Week, BLM provides two to four educators from the fire, archeology, oil spill hazards, wildlife and geology programs. The event takes four days and educates up to 700 to 800 students. It has proved to be as a great opportunity to teach the students about working in natural resources fields and how the environment is affected from various problems. The students learn and have frequent opportunities to ask questions about the environment.



BLM and Forest Service fire specialists helped out during a parade during the Environmental Science Education week.



Young people get an on site training experience.



Teamwork among agencies and partners was the key to success.



Students work with fire staff as part of their education process.



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Dark Canyon Fuels Reduction

During June of 2001, the Guadalupe Ranger District of the Lincoln National Forest and the Carlsbad Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management entered into a cooperative agreement for fire management. This agreement allows for the sharing of personnel, equipment, and other resources in the areas of suppression, prescribed fire, and fire prevention.

As a result of the agreement, BLM and Guadalupe Ranger District plan completed a prescribed burn in the Lincoln National Forest in late fall and early spring. BLM provided specialists to serve as burn boss, ignition specialist, and holding boss. The objectives were to decrease the fuel loading and alligator juniper regeneration in Dark Canyon. The prescribed burn was a follow up from a treatment to Dark Canyon thinning project completed earlier which cut juniper trees less than fifteen inches diameter.

The goal is to use prescribed fire as a natural ecological process to improve ponderosa pine habitat and watershed conditions. The slash obtained from the overpopulated or diseased trees was scattered on the surface to stabilize the soil and provide cover and protection to facilitate the reestablishment of perennial grasses.

The prescribed burn decreased heavier fuels and created fuel breaks within the thinned canyons. The fuel breaks were placed to provide safe anchor points for suppression forces in the event of a wildland fire. The fuel breaks are located within the thinning project where the slash provided cover for perennial grasses. The slash in this portion of the thinning project has reached its effectiveness as a protective cover.

