

Snapshots 2003

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Utah

Fuels and Friends

At the edge of desert near Moab, Utah is a Scenic Byway called the La Sal Loop Road. Pack Creek Ranch at the base of the La Sal Mountains is a site that contains 12 striking homes and a historic ranch with guest cabins. These nestle into the small canyon where the Pack Creek slips out of the La Sal Mountains to find the desert.

The ranch is surrounded by an encroaching piñon-juniper forest. If left unchecked, eventually, the native sage and grasses will be taken over completely. The creek area is exceedingly overgrown. Several invasive species, such as salt cedar and Russian-olive and old decadent growth are slowly overtaking the riparian areas. The native willows and cottonwoods are struggling to survive. Combine these factors with a few years of drought, and the potential for a disastrous wildfire is imminent.

Residents understand all too well how they can be affected by fire. Homeowners have acquired a water tender and are trained in how to use it. They meet regularly to discuss community concerns and fire is a common topic.

Manti La Sal National Forest and Bureau of Land Management Lands encircle the community making for an ideal interagency approach to fuels mitigation. In March 2003, the State of Utah, Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands joined the Bureau of Land Management and



Progress being made near Moab, Utah.

Forest Service to mitigate hazardous fuels in and around the ranch.

The state's goal is to reduce the fuel load in the riparian zone of the ranch and decrease the number of the invasive trees in the common green belts. The state leads a crew called the "Flame-in-goes," (also known as "Flamingo's") which is made up of 22 men under the jurisdiction of the Utah Department of Corrections. The crew is well trained in fire and fuels removal. The

Flamingos spent over two weeks thinning the overgrowth out of the riparian area and cutting tree limbs in the green belts.

To date, the Moab District BLM fuel team has completed the archeological survey for the ranch area. The goal is to mechanically create a 300 foot shaded fuel break around the western perimeter.



Work near the creek area.



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Concurrently, they will be mechanically treating 300 acres of the pinion-juniper forest to the west of the ranch. BLM hopes to reduce the hazardous fuels and lessen the potential of wildfire impact to the community. Additional benefits will include improved critical deer winter range and a reduction of the invasive species.

The remaining perimeter treatment will be conducted by the U.S. Forest Service. Their plans include heavy mechanical reductions of invasive species in the riparian areas, a shaded fuel break around the perimeter of the community and mechanized thinning and cutting limbs in the pinion-juniper forest beyond the fuel break to the east.

Residents are happy with the help and the results. Due to the close proximity of homes to the creek bed, the residents intend to deal with the remaining slash with their own chipper rather than burning the slash piles.

The Bureau of Land Management will have their portion of the project completed by the summer of 2003. The Forest Service expects completion of the project by winter 2003-2004.

Pack Creek has proven to be an ideal interagency project with full support from the residents.



Crew members doing thinning work.



The "Flame-in-Goes" team in action.

Cedar City

Parowan Front Work Will Aid Wildlife Winter Range

More than 20 people on contract crew will be cutting trees southeast of Paragonah, Utah for the next few months. The Cedar City, Bureau of Land Management awarded a contract to C&R Forestry Inc. from Idaho to treat a section of the Parowan Front Big Game Winter Range Improvement and Fuels Reduction Project. The project area encompasses narrow strips of land, 50-400 acres in size, located east of Interstate 15 and west of the steep slopes of Cedar Mountains.

This work will be enhanced with a local contract crew by June, to treat about 200 acres, located north of Cedar City.

In addition, starting last October, federal crews have thinned 650 acres of the Parowan Front. Over the next few years contract and federal crews will treat numerous parcels of land scattered from Highway 20 to the Black Ridge.

Depending on vegetation density different treatment techniques will be used. These treatments range from cutting and piling, lop and



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scatter or use of a mobile mechanical chipper-shredder.

Goals for this project are to decrease the risk of catastrophic wildfire events impacting neighboring communities and private lands, and increase the forage necessary to sustain wintering big game herds within designated critical mule deer winter range.

Many of the treatment areas are located near communities identified as at-risk under an assessment conducted through the National Fire Plan. As these treatment areas continue to become overgrown with pinyon and juniper trees the risk increases for catastrophic wildfire event to impact communities and private land.

Much of the area has received vegetative treatments from 30 to 40 years ago. This was done to provide critical forage necessary to sustain mule deer herd during the harsh winter months. At present these treatment areas are becoming overgrown with dense stands of pinyon and juniper trees. As the forage available on public lands decreases, the foraging pressure on neighboring private lands increase.



A contract crew will be treating this wildland-urban interface area to remove encroached pinyon and juniper.

Grants and other contributed funds and services have been acquired for this project from partners such as Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Utah Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

For further information on this or other projects please visit the web site at www.ut.blm.gov/ccifc/ or call Paul Briggs or Esther Benson at (435) 586-2401.



Because of thick stands of pinyon and juniper, cut and piling techniques were used on this 130 acre project.



BLM fuels crew member stacking debris to be burning in the winter of 2004.



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MURPHY RIDGE PROJECT A Concert of Cooperation

The Murphy Ridge area is a location dispersed between public and private land along the Utah-Wyoming border with a continuous stand of sagebrush with limited diversity of other vegetation.

Recognizing a need to take action, a number of people with different interests met to bring their expertise, issues and concerns forward. The proposal that came out of the meetings was to apply prescribed burning to over 400 acres of decadent sagebrush.

Representatives from private and agency interests agreed upon and worked toward the common goals of improving wildlife habitat while increasing the health of the watershed by stimulating new growth. The project also achieved the benefit of reducing the threat of wildfire burning unchecked along the ridge.

Effective interagency cooperation was the key to the success of this work. The Desert Land and Livestock Ranch worked closely with BLM to combine resources in the form of equipment, knowledge and labor. For example, ranch biologists were able to team up with BLM wildlife staff to provide site specific knowledge of the Murphy Ridge area. BLM was also able



Murphy Ridge success included improving habitat for the Greater sage grouse.



New vegetation appears only ten days following the prescribed burn.



Objectives for Murphy Ridge included removing 30 to 60 percent of decadent sage brush on 411 acres. This was achieved.

to anchor into existing fuel breaks made possible by the ranch for their prescribed burn. Interaction from using shared resources motivated participants and helped achieve a broader respect and perspective of local issues and concerns.

Informing the public prior to and during the burn treatment proved beneficial. A news release was issued two days prior to the burn date, and a door-to-door information campaign was initiated the day of the burn to inform homeowners of the possibility of smoke in the area and to share fire mitigation concepts with them.

Contact: Teresa Rigby or Erin Darboven, (801) 977-4344.



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Richfield and Fillmore Field Office

Reclaiming Fuel Breaks in Central Utah

Thousands of acres of pinyon-juniper stands in valleys and gentle slopes throughout lands administered by the BLM Richfield and Fillmore Field Offices were mechanically treated in the 1960's and 1970's. Past treatments used an extremely large and heavy anchor chain and two crawler tractors. The chain was dragged through the pinyon-juniper stands pulling the mature trees out of the ground and piling them.



This chained area is losing effectiveness as a fuel break because of encroaching pinyon and juniper.

This practice resulted in the treated areas becoming more productive for wildlife species and livestock. It has become apparent that these areas are also valuable fuel breaks. Without these areas being properly maintained since initial treatment, pinyon-juniper has begun to reestablish, reducing productivity and fuel break efficiency.



Suppression resources were able to contain a portion of the eastern flank of the 8 Mile Fire in an old chained area.

Fire and fuel staff, resource staff, and line officers from the Richfield and Fillmore Field Office have realized the importance of these areas and want to maintain them to meet a variety of management objectives, primarily the fuel break.

Interdisciplinary teams have been formed to analyze each project area and determine the best method to utilize to reclaim the areas that were treated decades ago. Plans are developed that will better protect communities from the risks of wildfire and break up the continuity of hazardous fuels occurring throughout the Central Utah Fire Management Area.

Resource and ecosystem values are addressed along with fire mitigation for each fuel reduction project that is implemented. A majority of the areas are critical big game winter range. Numerous islands and travel corridors are left untreated for wildlife and visual resource management values. Feathering of the project area boundaries maximizes the edge effect. The islands and feathered edges give the



The southern flank of the Flat Fire was easily contained in an old chained area.



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treatments a natural look and satisfy visual resource concerns.

Since fiscal year 2001, 8,672 acres of mechanical thinning contracts have been awarded and implemented. An additional 4,834 acres are scheduled for fiscal year 2003.

Prescribed fire has been used on 850 acres, and an additional 4,300 acres are planned for fiscal year 2003. As a result of National Fire Plan funding, thousands of acres of valuable fuel breaks that were established decades ago will be reclaimed.

“We can’t prevent all wildfires, but we can influence their impacts with fuel treatments.”
-Unknown

Contact: Russ Ivie, (435) 896-1551 or Justin Johnson, (435) 743-3137



An old chained area reclaimed by contract crews.



Heavy concentrations of dead and down pinyon-juniper are removed by burning.



Fuels module crew members collecting moisture samples near Fort Meade, South Dakota.

South Dakota Field Office

Live Fuel Moisture

The Fort Meade Fuels Module team began collecting live fuel moisture data in August of 2002 to use in creating burn plans for different areas. The live fuel moisture information will help establish prescribed fire management guidelines.

Fuel moisture information is being collected at two sites, one near Fort Meade and the other in the exemption area near the Hearst development at Lead, South Dakota. Both are located in eventual prescribed fire treatment units.



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Samples are weighed and data recorded.

Random samples of ponderosa pine needles are collected in each area then clipped into one-inch pieces and put in drying cans. Ten filled cans are gathered from each area, weighed, and put into a lab oven at 90 degrees centigrade for 24 hours. After drying they are taken out and weighed again, which provides an accurate measurement of the moisture level. All of the data collected is recorded on forms and transferred to tables and graphs. The data is collected every two weeks if possible.

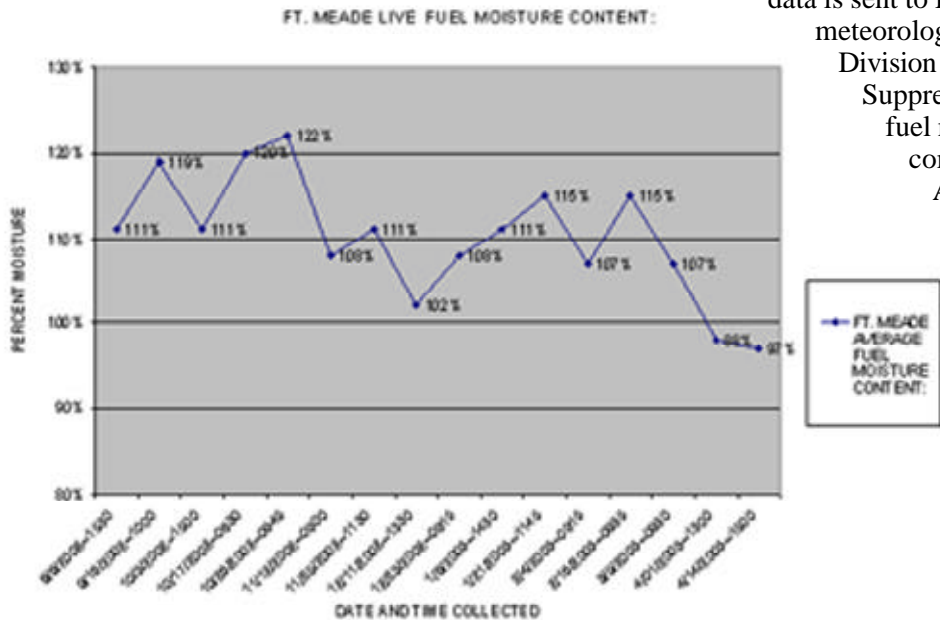


The fuel moisture project under discussion by specialists.

The fuels module and Lead Fire Department are cooperating to meet the National Fire Plan goals for the exemption area. In February the fuels module trained Lead department personnel in the proper steps to collect fuel moisture data, and they also provided equipment necessary for collecting fuel moisture samples. The department is now collecting the data for the exemption area.

Once a month, the updated live fuel moisture data is sent to Randall Benson, a fire meteorologist for the South Dakota Division of Wildland Fire Suppression. He monitors live fuel moisture data and compares it to fire activity.

As more data is obtained, he is hoping to use it in statistical correlations with the number of fires or number of acres burned as part of his PhD program. During the summer months, he will provide fire weather forecasting support and monitoring fire weather conditions from remote automated weather stations and assist prescribed burn projects.



Recorded data is converted to graphs for analysis.



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Montana

Four Dances-South Hills Fuels Reduction

The Four Dances-South Hills areas are located on the southern edge of Billings, Montana on the rimrocks overlooking the Yellowstone River. Managed by the BLM Billings Field Office, the two areas' proximity to the city makes them popular recreation sites. Several homes are also close to them.

Wanting to reduce the wildland fire risk to homes, the BLM field office completed a wildland urban interface fuels reduction project on about 40 acres in the two areas in March this year. Fuels crews

concentrated the reduction treatments along the BLM-private property lines to reduce the potential fire intensity near the structures. Smokejumpers from West Yellowstone, Montana and Boise, Idaho helped Eastern Montana Fire Zone crews cut trees limbs up to seven feet off the ground and remove trees less than seven feet tall to reduce ladder fuels. Vegetation in the treatment areas included ponderosa pine, Rocky Mountain juniper, limber pine, big sagebrush, and short grasses. The crews piled the vegetation by hand for proposed burning in the fall or winter of 2003-2004.



Home adjacent to the South Hills project.



Four Dances project before cutting the understory of Rocky Mountain juniper.



Four Dances area after cutting.



The Four Dances area along the BLM-private property boundary.



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National Interagency Fire Center

Fire Program Analysis System—Coming Soon

A group of interagency specialists working out the National Interagency Fire Center with offices at BLM's Idaho State Office are pulling together to build a common planning and budgeting analysis system for the nation's fire management program. Called the Fire Program Analysis System, it will replace systems that are currently in use by the nation's five federal wildland fire agencies. The first module being developed will be used for preparedness planning and budgeting.

Over a number of years many people involved in wildland fire have recognized the potential and advantages of a single common analysis system that could use many of the new technologies available today. The vision of the Fire Program Analysis System now being built was a report issued in December, 2001 titled, "*Developing an Interagency Landscape Scale Fire Planning Analysis and Budget Tools as a Task of the National Fire Plan.*" Referred to as the "Hubbard Report", the document found receptive audiences on Capitol Hill, the Office of Management and Budget, and throughout wildland fire agencies.

With the fiscal year 2003 budget, Congress directed the federal wildland fire agencies to "...design and implement an automated system for preparedness to replace the analysis currently in use by Fiscal Year 2004." This was quickly followed by a mandate from the Office of Management and Budget in the Executive Office of the President to develop such a system.

Agencies quickly developed a memorandum of agreement and project charter to initiate work, and established an interagency core team of specialists to start the development process.



This new approach to plan and analyze budgets will replace systems such as IIAA (used by BLM, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs), FirePro (used by the National Park Service), and FireBase (used by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

As part of the development phase of building software that will accomplish the goals for the new system, the agencies awarded a contract in May 2003 to IBM. Part of the contract requirements entail developing software that can be put in place by September 30, 2004 for the first module of the system, which will be for preparedness budgets.

As the system is built and implemented over several years, it will include new modules for extended attack, large fires and national resources, hazardous fuel reduction, wildland fire use and prevention.

With full implementation, fire managers, agency executives, external partners and stakeholders, OMB and Congress will all have a single, common tool that will provide consistent information in making wildland fire planning and budget decisions based on accurate data derived from land and resource management goals.

All federal land management agencies will be directly affected by this new system. It will be a valuable tool for wildland fire management for the future.

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Information about the Fire Program Analysis System is available at a new web site located at: <http://www.fpa.nifc.gov>



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Alaska

Emergency Firefighter Training

Springtime is training time for firefighters in Alaska. Throughout the region they're getting ready for the season.

For about 2,000 emergency firefighters in the state, that means passing the pack test — carrying a 45-pound pack over three miles in 45 minutes or less — and earning a red card.

For many it also involves squad boss and crew boss training. Initial training is also offered for first-time firefighters. By the start of the season, the BLM and Alaska Division of Forestry suppression agencies will be ready to go with close to 70 crews organized and ready to respond to a fire if needed.

Testing started in the Galena Zone in April and will continue through the third week of May. The other zones have also scheduled testing in each village with a designated crew.

Emergency firefighter crews from Alaska have already been employed this year on the space shuttle recovery mission. Ten crews spent two weeks in Texas in March, bringing back about half a million dollars in salaries. Firefighter wages are a significant source of income to the Alaska Native villages where residents are crew members.



Passing the pack test is a critical element in meeting qualification requirements.



Alaska Emergency Fire Fighters from Native villages.

Last year, every one of the 66 available crews in the state was dispatched to fires, with about half of them going to more than one fire. Wages totaled \$7.5 million which provided a major benefit to the rural and Native economies.

First-time firefighters work through the crew boss or Native council offices to get signed up for training. The training is required of everyone entering the Emergency Fire Fighter program. In addition to passing the pack test, firefighters need a fire line safety refresher course before being sent out.

Squad boss training is offered in villages on a rotating basis. Each crew has three squads, with five people. The people who take squad boss training get a task book to complete and a training assignment on a fire before they are qualified.

This year, 24 students will attend crew boss training. The class is scheduled for May 12-24 at the Alaska Fire Service facilities on Fort Wainwright. Students are nominated by their villages.

The crew boss trainees have shown that hard work and motivation can lead to success in the program. Especially in Alaska, it is important that the Emergency Fire Fighter tradition continues since emergency firefighters provide a key defense against wildfires and other emergencies.

For information contact: Andy Williams, Alaska Fire Service, (907) 356-5511

