

Montana

BLM Approves Horsethief Project

The town of Roundup lies in the Bull Mountains of central Montana, about 50 miles north of Billings. High intensity wind driven fires are common to this area at any time of year due to the dry climate. In 1984, the Hawk Fire burned 170,000 acres south of Roundup in six days, destroyed about 50 structures, and took a life. Even after nearly ten years, the area still shows the stark devastation from the fire. In the spring of 2002, the area was hit once again as the Horsethief Fire burned 27 acres a few miles west of Roundup.

Most of the Bull Mountains are privately-owned, but parcels of BLM and state lands are scattered among them. During the Horsethief Fire suppression activities, BLM fire officials learned of the existence of scores of homes and other structures hidden among ponderosa pine and juniper in the heavily-forested Horsethief Creek drainage. Subsequent investigation revealed that the Horsethief subdivision is comprised of over 100 tracts of private land plus some larger ranch holdings containing several dwellings and other structures. The BLM promptly added the Horsethief area to its "to-do" list of wildland urban interface projects because the high hazards and risks to life, safety, and private property.

The project was moved to the top of Montana's list in January when Interior Secretary Norton named it as one of 15 Healthy Forest pilot projects planned for this year. According to Norton, "We need to take action and leave a legacy of healthier lands and thriving communities."

BLM's Billings Field Office and Eastern Montana Fire Zone began gathering data on resources such as timber stands, fuels, wildlife, visual, and cultural in order to prepare an environmental assessment of the proposed Horsethief Hazard Fuels Reduction Project.

The project area has about 10,300 acres of public land, of which, about 3,000 are forested. The project will involve several phases and combinations of treatments. Initial treatment will consist of thinning the timber stands, including merchantable material, if present, and burning and/or chipping the slash. Follow-up treatments may include the use of prescribed burning.

BLM hosted a public meeting in February in Roundup to explain the proposal to residents and obtain their feedback. Major concerns were the potential for escaped prescribed fires and the visual impacts of treatments. BLM also encouraged participants to perform fuel reduction projects on private lands and provided information on grants available for such projects.

After weeks of surveying and data gathering, the project team formulated three proposed alternatives for analysis in the environmental assessment. Before finalizing the alternatives, BLM went back to the public for more feedback,

hosting a tour of the project area and another public meeting in Roundup in May.

The final alternatives were identified as no action, modified forest health, and forest health. The modified forest health alternative provides for intensive fuel reduction in areas closest to



View of part of the Horsethief project area.



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private lands and lower levels of treatment elsewhere to address visual and wildlife concerns. The forest health alternative would remove more fuel and would restore the forest to a healthier state with more biodiversity, more vigorous trees, and greater protection to private lands from wildland fires.

BLM released the environmental assessment for public review and comment on July 18 and received nine comments. Comments ranged from concerns over wildlife and soil erosion to recommendation of contractors to do the fuel reduction work. Billings Field Office Manager Sandy Brooks signed the decision approving Alternative B, the Proposed Action, on August 27. Fuel reduction treatment projects could begin this fall.

The Montana Department of Natural Resource Conservation and Musselshell County are cooperators in the proposed project. Smokejumpers from both the National Interagency Fire Center and the West Yellowstone Interagency Fire Center assisted in the data gathering phase of the project.



A view showing an example of fuels in the project area.



Exposed coal seams in the project area present a challenge in planning prescribed burns.

North Moccasin Blowdown Prescribed Burn

Whether it is wind, ice, rain, floods, or rapid temperature changes, central Montana gets them all. In the space of half an hour the weather can change from a balmy 65 degrees and sunny to 20 degrees and snowing. These quick swings in weather are routine, but in July of 2002 local residents weren't expecting what came... a tornado! Wind in the central part of the state is normal...but tornados are not!

According to local people the tornado came from the northwest and funneled over the North Moccasin Mountains, raising havoc in the town of Moulton. It destroyed the grain elevator, ripped a roof off an abandoned house, destroyed a

trailer home, and a few outbuildings. This particular tornado's wind speed ranged from 120-130 mph.

It caused resource damage in the North Moccasin Mountains, affecting about 340 acres of timber, including about 200 acres on BLM lands. BLM's central Montana fuels group and the Lewistown Field Office forester came up with a plan to salvage 120 acres and conduct a hazardous fuels prescribed burn on 80 acres.



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The 80 acres of hazardous fuels are in steep, rocky terrain. Deciding how to treat in this area was tough. Safety was the priority consideration in determining the method of ignition. Hand lighting this unit would have meant people would be climbing over half broken trees and spring poles. This would just be too dangerous. Therefore the heli-torch was chosen to safely and effectively meet the prescribed burn objectives.

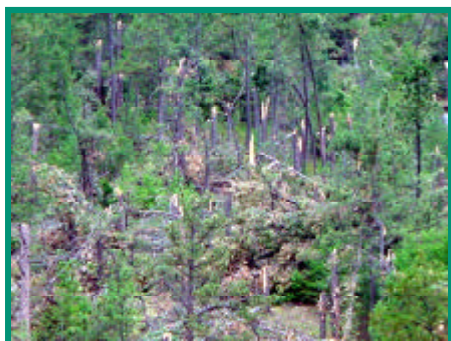
A good size fuel break was needed on the north and south sides of the unit due to the continuous stand of timber and the expected fire behavior. Preparation of this unit took close collaboration between the fuels and fire suppression groups. It was decided to establish a break about a chain in width, which is approximately 66 feet. Over the summer when the fire crew was not chasing fires in central Montana, they were up in the North Moccasins cutting the fuel break. The next step is for the recently cut slash to cure before burning it.



Jere Long, Engine Boss, and Cindy Wilson, Fuels Specialist, working on the N. Moccasin fuels break.



Looking south into an aspen patch.



This is another example of the tree damage.

Because of the high visibility of the planned burn from Highway 191, public meetings will be held in the local communities of Hilger, Lewistown, and Roy. Close coordination and cooperation between the local landowners and rural fire departments will be key to completing this project.

Contact: Cindy Wilson, Fuels Specialist, (406) 538-1971



Cutting the N. Moccasin Fuel break is not an easy task. Jere Long, Engine Boss.



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California

Interagency Efforts Provide Services for Shasta Homeowners

The first interagency hosted Student Conservation Association Fire Education Team in California has just completed their first summer in Shasta County.

This region of California can claim several of the state's most severe fires in terms of structures lost. The Fountain Fire in 1992 and the Jones Fire in 1999 collectively consumed close to 1,600 structures. Tragic losses like these have motivated BLM's Redding Field Office and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to work together as co-hosts to the team that has been based in Redding since June 1.

The two agencies agreed to focus the team's efforts on the west Redding neighborhoods of Keswick, Victoria Dr., Swasey, Lower Springs, and Middletown Park. These neighborhoods have not seen a major fire since 1972 when the Swasey Fire consumed 3,214 acres of undeveloped land. Since then hundreds of new homes have been built in the area with little attention given to reducing



Smokey Bear, a.k.a. Daisy Patterson - SCA Team Leader, greets children at the Fire Prevention Day at Shasta Mall, Redding, CA.

the fuels and fire hazards. The fuels have continued to build, and if a similar fire were to run through that area now, the resulting number of homes destroyed could be catastrophic.

A major focus of the team's efforts this summer was interacting with homeowners on an individual basis to promote defensible space through home inspections. As they distributed information about fire safe landscaping, the fire education team also gathered data that will aid in future fire suppression, including mapping fire hydrants and identifying fuel loads. The team also participated in various public events on behalf of or with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Volunteers in Prevention program.

Another project the team worked on was in support of an effort to manage BLM lands that abut private parcels in wildland urban interface areas. To help determine which of the many scattered BLM parcels are the highest priorities for future fuel reduction treatments, the students collected information on vegetative types and available access to public lands while conducting home inspections. With the data now compiled into a database, and additional data being collected, BLM will be



Brian Murphy assesses potential access issues and takes a GPS reading at the edge of a private parcel overlooking BLM lands.



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better able to plan the locations of, and methods for, future federal fuel reduction projects.

The success of the summer Student Conservation Association team has led the BLM Redding office and the California Department of Forestry to sponsor a fall team to continue the work already begun and to pursue other projects to help reduce the risk of wildfire in the area.

Contact: Daisy Patterson, SCA Team Leader, (530) 221-1743; Walter Herzog, Redding Fire Management Officer, (530) 224-2124



Homeowner learns about ways to prevent wildland fire from consuming her home.



Patricia King, SCA team member, provides information to the public during the District Fair in Anderson, CA.



Team Redding radios in a fire while patrolling Mule Mountain

Fire Prevention Takes Center Stage at Summer Events

The National Fire Plan has been instrumental in mobilizing communities at risk throughout California to become more fire safe. Complimenting the many new projects and programs that originated with this effort are traditional wildfire prevention activities that provide an opportunity to keep wildfire awareness at the forefront of public attention. BLM offices

throughout California have used various summer events to remind adults and children to be especially careful with fire as they go about their summer activities.

For example, the Surprise Field Office fire staff recently worked at a fire prevention booth at the Modoc County Fair alongside colleagues from the



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U.S. Forest Service and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. This event, one of the best attended annual events in the rural northeast section of California, provides an excellent opportunity to remind the public of their responsibilities to be fire safe. The BLM staff answered questions at the booth, escorted Smokey Bear throughout the fairgrounds, rode a BLM fire truck in the parade, and contributed to a radio interview that focused on local fire prevention activities. Collectively these efforts provided a consistent wildfire safety and prevention message to local residents.



Smokey attracts the attention of some young fairgoers.

Another successful fire prevention event just completed was BLM's participation at the 150th California State Fair. The Camp Smokey interagency exhibit there consists of five fire education houses, Woodsy Owl's tree house, a forested nature trail, a fire-resistant garden, and visits with both Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl. Children of all ages are guaranteed a hands-on learning experience focused on reducing California's unwanted wildfires. Children received "Passports to Fire Prevention" upon arrival at the exhibit and then spend the next thirty or so minutes visiting each activity while learning about fire safety and prevention.



California BLM hosted members and leaders from the Student Conservation Association's Fire

Staffing the fire prevention booth at the Modoc County Fair.



Education Corps who assisted in staffing the exhibit. In addition, the Folsom BLM office developed the exhibit's well received fire-resistant demonstration garden.

Fire resistant plants were on display at Camp Smokey.

All told, over the 18 days of the fair, over 10,000 children completed their passports and received their fire prevention reward – a special edition Smokey Bear bandana. In a world of corn dogs, fried Twinkies, roller



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coasters, and other distractions, Camp Smokey and its wildfire prevention activities continues to be a very popular part of the California State Fair.

Contact: Jorge Cervantes, Surprise Field Office, (530) 279-2737; Donna Hummel, California State Office, (916) 978-4436

Juniper Removal Benefits the Environment and Needy Seniors

BLM's Alturas Field Office fuels crew has recently been working on an on-going hazardous fuels reduction project near the town of Madeline, California. Located in northeastern corner of the state, the Tule project has thus far treated over 65 acres of juniper woodland and provided multiple benefits including reducing the risk of catastrophic fire and improving public land health.

The Tule project is being implemented to create a fuel break along a road that will give firefighters an area of defensible space in case of a wildfire. It also protects the Tule Wilderness Study Area from any encroaching wildfire from the east.

A large number of junipers have been removed to create the fuel break and to also halt juniper encroachment in the area. This thinned vegetation isn't going to waste – instead it is being utilized for firewood for local senior citizens. The BLM crew is bucking up the Juniper, cutting it into rounds and then transporting the wood into Alturas.

The wood is then split and stacked by inmate crews from California Department of Correction's Devils Garden Conservation Camp. The firewood will be delivered during the fall and winter by BLM to needy seniors to heat their homes. The result is a community assisted and protected by a hazardous fuels reduction project.

Contact: Albert Savage, Alturas BLM Fuels Specialist, (530) 233-7933

Colorado

Colorado Hosts Another Project Learning Tree Summer Fire Ecology Institute

During the week of July 21 through 25, the Montrose Interagency Fire Management program combined efforts with the Colorado State Forest Service, and the National Park Service to host this year's Fire Ecology Institute at Western State College in Gunnison, Colorado. The Fire Ecology Institute is a week-long Project Learning Tree course designed by Shawna Crocker, Colorado Project Learning Tree coordinator, to instruct educators and interpreters how to teach the basics of fire ecology, fire behavior, and fire effects.

Through a combination of classroom sessions and fire site visits, participants learned to integrate Project Learning Tree lessons, such as "Nothing Succeeds Like Succession," with field activities. Specialists, ranging from fire ecologists and fire education specialists to dendrochronologists, gave lectures and led field trips to study fire, fuels, wildlife, water, weeds, and bugs.

For example, on a field trip to the site of the 2002 Wiley Ridge Fire, students spent the morning learning about fire behavior and fire regimes in sagebrush and Ponderosa pine from Merrill



Shawna Crocker explains the afternoon field trip activities.



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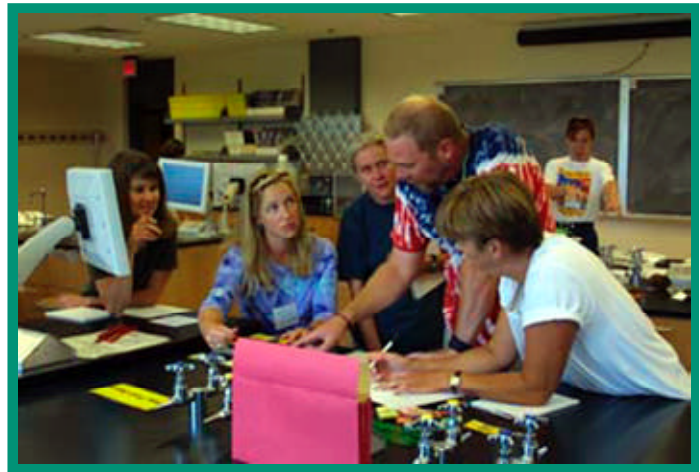
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Kauffman, USFS fire ecologist, and fire effects on the Gunnison sage grouse from Paul Jones, Colorado Division of Wildlife district wildlife manager. The group lunched near a riparian area and discussed the impact of fire on water and riparian systems and listened to a presentation by Adena Green, weed specialist for Gunnison County on managing invasive species after a fire. Then they spent the afternoon learning about tree growth and mortality from USFS dendrochronologist Linda Huckaby and beetle activity in the burned area from Dave Leatherman of the Colorado State Forest Service.

Later in the week, field activities included students building fire line and eating MREs (meals ready to eat) as well as conducting mitigation assessments and then performing the mitigation – cutting trees, clearing brush - in a wildland-urban interface area.

Throughout the week, participants watched fire videos, such as the NOVA special, “Fire Wars,” examined fire educational materials, such as the Burning Issues CD and the Fireworks activities and fire box. They learned how to use and integrate geographic information system mapping, and browsed internet fire-related websites. They were given time to develop lesson plans and interpretative materials, which they shared with the group on the last day. More than one participant concluded in their final comments that fire was much



Workshop participants discuss Project Learning Tree lessons and activities on fire behavior.

more complex than they had ever imagined, and fire fighting was harder than they ever wanted to work.

This year’s Colorado Fire Ecology Institute is the third in a series of week-long summer Project Learning Tree course offerings. The institute was again made possible through funding from the BLM and a national agreement between the BLM and Project Learning Tree that enabled nine western state coordinators to facilitate local educator workshops.

Shawna Crocker was assisted by Christine Stallings, Oklahoma Project Learning Tree coordinator, Mike Johnson, National Park Service Fire Education and Information Specialist from the Midwest Regional Office, B.J. Johnson, Education Specialist from the Curecanti National Recreation Area, Bob Sturdevant and Joel Stewart, Colorado State Forest Service District Foresters, and Maggie McCaffrey, Fire Education Specialist with Montrose Interagency Fire. Participants came from throughout the state of Colorado, and ranged from K-12 school teachers to park interpreters and county administrators.

Contacts: Shawna Crocker, Colorado State Forest Service, (303) 275-5358; Mike Johnson, National Park Service, Omaha Nebraska (402) 221-3478; Maggie McCaffrey, Montrose Interagency Fire Management, Montrose, Colorado (970) 240-5396



Tanna Babiak, Interagency Fire Education Coordinator for Rocky Mountain National Park, US Forest Service, and Larimer County, suits up in nomex for some line construction work.



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