

Snapshots 2003

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Arizona

President Bush Talks with Incident Commanders During Recent Tucson Visit

Last week, President Bush took a helicopter flight over the devastated community of Summerhaven, Arizona. The President saw the impact of the Aspen Fire outside Tucson, and then used the site of the fire as a backdrop during his speech to encourage forest thinning as part of the Healthy Forests Initiative.

After receiving a briefing overview about the fire from Santa Catalina District Ranger Ron Senn, President Bush spent a few minutes alone talking with all four Incident Commanders assigned to the Aspen Fire. Dan Oltrogge, Incident Commander for one of the two Southwest Area National Incident Management Teams had the opportunity to fly aboard Marine One with the President. The President also talked to Bill Hart, Initial Attack Incident Commander, Larry Humphrey, Incident Commander for the second Southwest Area Incident Management Team, Rich Kvale, Incident Commander for the Southern Arizona Zone Type II team, and Pete Schwab, Air Operations. "It was a pleasure to meet the President" Schwab said. "The President is genuinely interested in our safety, and wants to use the Healthy Forest Initiative to reduce the risk of fighting fires."

As part of President Bush's Healthy Forest Initiative, BLM Arizona's Weaver Mountain Fuels Reduction Project is one of 15 pilot projects in the nation to be chosen, and the only one in Arizona. The Healthy Forests Initiative is designed to implement core components of the National Fire Plan's 10-year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan. These projects are also implementing new guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality on streamlining the environmental assessment process.

The Weaver Mountain Fuels Treatment Project,

located 17 miles north of Wickenburg, and three miles southeast of Yarnell, consists of approximately 14,000 acres, including BLM, Arizona State Trust land, and private land. Burns will be conducted over a five- to ten-year period, treating approximately 1,000 to 3,000 acres annually, creating a diverse mixed-age stand of interior chaparral. The project will manage fuel loads, reduce hazardous fuels, and restore fire to this interior chaparral dependent ecosystem.

Contact: Dave Mueller, Fuels (602) 417-9359



After visiting with firefighters, President Bush talks about his Healthy Forest Initiative. (l to r) Dan Oltrogge, Incident Commander; Ron Senn, Santa Catalina District Ranger; President Bush; Ann Veneman, Secretary of Agriculture; Dale Bosworth, Forest Service Chief.

Parade of Homes gets Firewise

For the second year running, the Color Country Fire Information, Mitigation and Education Committee staffed a Firewise booth at the annual Parade of Homes Show in the St. George, Utah, area. This popular event attracts thousands of people from throughout the West, many of whom are looking to build homes in the near future. Committee members spoke to property owners



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The Color Country Fire Information, Mitigation and Education Committee staffed a booth in this home during the St. George are Parade of Homes. The most common question was, "Would this home survive a wildfire."

Booth space at this event is typically expensive, but Committee members persuaded the Parade of Homes organizers to waive the booth space charge. "They were very accommodating since we weren't there for any monetary or personal gain," said Tom Lund, committee member and Fire Mitigation Specialist for the Arizona Strip BLM.

The booth was set up in a \$595,000, 3,400-square-foot home in the Pinion Hills Subdivision in Dammeron Valley north of St. George, a community at risk for catastrophic wildfire. Visitors touring the home could view the booth, pick up Firewise materials, and ask questions of Committee members. "It was an ideal setting for encouraging dialogue about Firewise principles," Lund said. "People could see for themselves some things that put this house at a higher risk for fire."

from throughout the West, including northern Utah, southern Arizona, Nevada and California. This year's event drew nearly 27,000 people.

Interest from the participants clearly made this booth a success, and Lund said the committee will likely make the Parade of Homes booth an annual affair. "I feel like it reaches a lot of people," he said, "and not just those from our local area."

Contact: Tom Lund, (435) 688-3259



The Color Country Fire Information, Mitigation and Education Committee staffed this booth during the 10-day Parade Of Homes in the St. George, Utah area. Nearly 27,000 visitors attended the event.

Phoenix Field Office Community Fuels Reduction Projects in 2003

The Arizona communities of Mayer, Cordes Lakes, Yarnell, Peeples Valley and Black Canyon City were identified as communities at risk from wildfire. Risk assessments were done in these communities, and numerous presentations on defensible space were offered to educate community members in Yavapai County. Free brush disposal opportunities have been offered in these communities to create defensible space around homes in the area. The joint efforts of the respective local fire departments, Yavapai County, and the BLM have proven to be successful helping homeowners.



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In the communities of the Mayer Fire District, which includes Mayer, Cordes Lakes, and Spring Valley, residents brought hazardous fuels to sites at the Mayer Fire Stations 1 and 3. The material was then processed using a Yavapai County chipper into two forty-yard rolloff dumpsters and removed from the community. Local residents, Mayer firefighters and BLM firefighters provided the labor.



Yavapai County employees help chip brush left at the fire department.

materials to the brush drop-off site. Residents were encouraged to take mulch or firewood from the processed material, and a few took advantage of the free materials for their gardens or fireplaces. A 40-yard dumpster was completely filled greatly increasing the defensible space around many homes in the area.

The community fuels reduction project at the Yarnell Fire Department was accomplished through the Yarnell and Peoples Valley volunteer fire departments. BLM provided a rolloff dumpster and labor for this project. Yavapai County provided the chipper used to process the brush brought to the site by the many community residents who participated. Yarnell Fire advertised the project and helped elderly, retired, and handicapped residents remove and transport

For the second year, Black Canyon City held a community fuels reduction free dump day. This project provides the Black Canyon City residents an opportunity to reduce hazardous fuels around their homes. Yavapai County provided the chipper, BLM



BLM employees help gather material to be chipped at the Black Canyon City Project.



BLM and Mayer Fire Department employees chipping material provided by area residents.

fire crews provided the labor. The homeowners provided the most labor by trimming and loading the material taken to the drop-off site provided by the Black Canyon City Water Improvement District. BLM and Black Canyon City firefighters cleared the vacant lot used as the drop-off site, and filled a 40-yard dumpster with chipped material.

Contact: Ken Shaver, (623) 580-5578



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Restoration in Progress

A major step in the restoration of Arizona's desert grasslands occurred in June with the completion of three prescribed burns by the Safford-Tucson Fire Management Zone. The burns, PZ, Javelina, and

improve the health of the watershed. Reduction of brush and increases in grasses will provide cleaner runoff water into the Aravaipa watershed and reduce soil erosion. Aravaipa Canyon is home to a number of protected species, including several native fish that inhabit Aravaipa Creek.



Fire burning out forbs under mesquite trees.

Turkey Creek, were done in the rugged tablelands surrounding Aravaipa Canyon in Pinal County, near the San Carlos Apache Nation boundary.

Perimeter control lines were burned from June 3-7 and on June 10, all three interior areas were aerially ignited, burning nearly 12,000 acres. The goal of the project was to reduce brushy species that have increased and invaded the Aravaipa tablelands area over the last 100 years. "Historically, the area burned at frequent intervals and kept shrubs to a minimum," said Dave Hall, Safford Field Office Fire Management Officer. "These burns will help mimic nature and return the area to a more grassy appearance."

Besides changing the appearance of the landscape, the burns will enhance habitat for wildlife, including desert bighorn sheep, and

"The completion of these three prescribed fires will finish the first cycle of a series of prescribed burns planned for the Aravaipa Canyon tablelands," added Hall. "This area will be burned about every five years to help reduce brush and increase grass cover to improve the ecosystem."

Safford's on-call youth firefighting crew, the Sapotistas, helped with the Turkey Creek burn. The Nature Conservancy also



Rocky Bernal, Helitack Foreman taking off in a helicopter to aerially ignite the burn.



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assisted, providing firefighters and equipment. The Nature Conservancy and BLM have cooperated in the past to burn more than 20,000 acres of the Muleshoe Ranch north of Benson in southeastern Arizona.

Contact: Dave Hall, (928) 348-4501

Fire Danger Signs Placed in Safford-Tucson Zone

Recently engine and hand crew members purchased, painted, and installed dual-sided fire danger signs. Two signs, indicating the current fire danger, were placed on the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, and two on the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area. One additional fire danger sign will be placed near Safford. Tucson Electric Power donated and installed one of these signs along a county highway on the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. The Safford-Tucson Fire Management Zone now has eight fire danger signs to keep the public informed about potential risk of wildfires.

Contact: David Peters, (520) 258-7207



BLM crews install a fire danger sign in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

Firewise Campaign

As part of the Arizona Firewise campaign, and to promote the upcoming Arizona Firewise Communities 2003 Workshop being held in Tucson October 16, BLM has placed billboard ads in Tucson, Sierra Vista, Safford and Nogales. The ads will run for three months in three of the four towns, promoting the Firewise Communities Workshop and encouraging people to attend. After the conference workshop, the billboards will be exchanged for ads emphasizing the Arizona Firewise Communities program, without workshop details.

Contact: David Peters, (520) 258-7207



Arizona Firewise Communities Workshop billboard.

Alaska

Fire Safety Project Conducted on Military Land

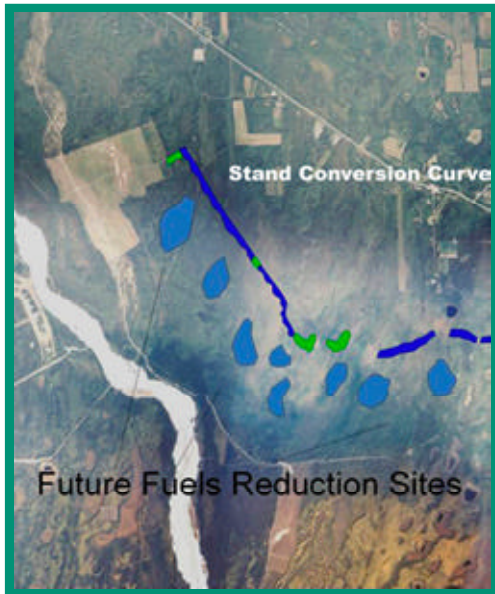
Prevention, preparedness, planning and hazard fuel reduction are all components of a strategy to reduce the risk of wildland fires occurring on military lands in Alaska. The BLM Alaska Fire Service and U.S. Army, Alaska are using the four-step mitigation strategy in a proactive approach to protect



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Overview of the area of the North Jarvis Stand Conversion Project.

communities near military property. The North Jarvis Stand Conversion Project at the Donnelly Training Area, southeast of Delta Junction, is a good example of the partnership between the Army and Alaska Fire Service.

Located in the Tanana Valley, the Delta Junction area has experienced many close calls from fires. BLM and U.S. Army personnel decided two years ago to implement a fuel break between the town and sea of highly-flammable black spruce.

The fuels reduction project involves mechanically implementing a stand conversion from black spruce to hardwoods, which are less flammable and create a point from which to begin attack on a fire. The area undergoing the conversion is about five miles long, 75-150 yards wide and has been designed as a lazy curve to better blend with the landscape.

A three-phase process was designed for the area and includes community involvement along with ecosystem manipulation. Phase

One includes hand-thinning by Alaska Fire Service and Army crews to remove the spruce component from existing hardwood stands and to thin out spruce in pure spruce stands. Crews completed that stage of the project this summer, thinning 37 acres and building more than 630 piles to be burned in winter 2003 or 2004. Different mechanical treatments are being applied in other areas to determine which is the most effective and cost efficient. The one that meets the criteria will dictate what happens along the rest of the curve.

Phase Two involves community participation. Alaska Fire Service and Army specialists will work with Alaska Division of Forestry and private homeowners to determine how this phase should be conducted. The goal is to encourage community fire preparedness by stressing homeowner's responsibility in taking the initiative to prepare their houses and property for fire.

Phase Three will involve clearing black spruce stands in a series of polygons that will be used to break up the continuity of the fuels and reduce likelihood of high-intensity crown fires. A detailed assessment will be conducted of wildland fire fuels south of the project.



The Denali Hot Shot Crew thinned spruce stands and piled up the slash to be burned later.



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Once the three phases are completed the project will require occasional maintenance. Hardwood regeneration is expected within first two years. Any spruce growth will be removed every five years to maintain the hardwood component.

The North Jarvis Stand Conversion Project is one of several joint initiatives that underway to prepare military lands for fire. As the urban-wildland interface continues to grow and as the Army expands its mission, managers face the challenge of thinking ahead for fire-readiness. The BLM Alaska Fire Service and U.S. Army partnership provides a sound cooperative base to accomplish joint goals.

Contact: Maggie Rogers (907) 356-5511



Spruce stands were thinned and the piles are ready to be burned.

Prescribed Fire Designed to Improve Wildlife Habitat

The Chena Lakes Flood Control Project protects Alaska's Fairbanks-North Pole area from a repeat of the disastrous 1967 flood, when the Chena River overflowed its banks and drenched the communities.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built a long spillway to divert floodwaters from the Chena River to the much larger Tanana River. Grass

growth is encouraged on the spillway to help floodwaters flow easily. Every year or two, the BLM Alaska Fire Service conducts a prescribed fire to keep willows and underbrush from taking over from the grass and reducing the carrying capacity of the spillway.

This year the Corps of Engineers added another project to the Alaska Fire Service menu of prescribed fires at the Flood Control Project. It is a 165-acre burn in an area called the F Unit, adjacent to the floodplain that was forested primarily in black spruce.

On June 24, about 50 firefighters gathered at the burn site near Moose Creek, 16 miles southeast of Fairbanks. After clearing and plumbing the perimeter of the site, they hand-fired the vegetation along the edges. A helicopter equipped with an aerial firing device ignited the interior. The fire burned actively for two days, consuming more than 90 percent of the targeted area. Crews monitored the fire and mopped up along the perimeter for several days as it continued to smolder.



Firefighters ignite a grassy area near the edge of the F-Unit burn.



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The Army Corps of Engineers termed the fire a success. The fire was designed to improve habitat for moose and other wildlife by promoting the growth of willows, hardwoods and blueberries and by reducing the spruce overstory. It also broke up the continuity of fuels to reduce the risk of a large wildfire.

Three research agencies studied effects of the burn. Scientists from the U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research station measured pre-fire fuel moisture and duff consumption to relate ground moisture to fire effects and smoke production. A team from the U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station studied compounds released in the smoke. The U.S. Geological Survey measured compounds in the soil to determine which ones were consumed in the fire.



A helicopter equipped with an aerial ignition device lit the interior of the burn.

More than 90 percent of the targeted area in the prescribed fire was consumed.

Contact: Andy Williams (907) 356-5511.

Eastern States

Prescribed Burn is Planned

BLM's Eastern States Jackson Field Office is developing a management plan for the public domain land at Lathrop Bayou on Florida's Gulf Coast. As part of that effort, the St. Joe Company and others are working with BLM in a public and private partnership to address habitat improvement on over 1,500 acres of the best remaining longleaf pine flatwoods in Bay and Gulf counties. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on December 20, 2002 to outline the



Longleaf pine flatwoods on the Florida gulf coast.



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collective goals and framework of that partnership.

The draft management plan addresses habitat improvement through the use of prescribed fire, monitoring of special status species, control of exotic species and regional coordination in support of federally listed species management. A prescribed fire consisting of about 539 acres will occur later this year to improve habitat.

Virtually an island, the Lathrop Bayou tract has retained much of the natural wet flatwoods character that has been lost throughout most of the surrounding area due to conversion to slash pine plantations. The abundance of special status plants, the presence of Bay County's only red-cockaded woodpecker colony, and the uninterrupted nesting of bald eagles at the site since at least the early 1990's illustrate the high quality of the habitat

Contact: Bruce Dawson, (601) 977-5400

Idaho

FlowCheck—Checks the Flow of Erosion and Jobs out of Cascade

Innovative technology, partners, and the National Fire Plan were the key elements in creating the successful biomass breakthrough announced recently in Cascade, Idaho.

This new wood product provides jobs in rural areas and creates important value-added utilization of small diameter timber collected from forests thinned under the National Fire Plan.

Taking what was previously left in the woods, and getting forest industry, local and state officials together has resulted in the creation of FlowCheck structures from

ELWd Systems (pronounced "el-wood"). This provides land managers with a new tool to decrease erosion and increase infiltration on disturbed lands, including slopes, gullies and roadside ditches.

FlowCheck structures are manufactured by using small three to five inch diameter poles, assembled in three pieces to form an interlocking bioengineering tool. These form a highly effective erosion control barrier with two or more upslope poles capturing sediment and fine debris, while water is allowed to pass through. The triangular shape allows these structures to stay in place regardless of the slope. All poles and connectors are completely organic and provide an all-wood alternative to straw products and other overland flow control methods.

U.S. Senator Mike Crapo, Cascade Mayor Larry Walters, Valley County commissioners, and BLM Fire and Aviation Director Larry Hamilton were all present for the announcement of a government contract to utilize these structures for rehabilitation and erosion control after wildland fires.



Fire and Aviation Director Larry Hamilton praises the public-private partnership that is using wood products formerly only seen as debris. Left to right are BLM Idaho Associate State Director Mike Ferguson, Boise National Forest Supervisor Dick Smith, Larry Hamilton, Cascade, Idaho Mayor Larry Walters, Senator Mike Crapo and unidentified participants during the ceremony.



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Federal Fire Plan funds were granted to the City of Cascade to purchase a manufacturing facility now rented by Forest Concepts, LLC, creators of FlowCheck structures. Employees of Forest Concepts are creating a new market for small-diameter wood by producing habitat improvement structures out of the small roundwood, which was previously left in the forest because it was not economically feasible to remove or process.

After being introduced in 2001, the products have been utilized in Washington, Idaho, Arizona and Colorado. Currently the structures are made in Cascade as a public/private partnership between Forest Concepts, the City of Cascade, Department of Commerce, the US Forest Service's State and Private program, and the Bureau of Land Management.



One of the flow check structures installed on a burned over slope.



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