

Snapshots

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Successful BLM Projects
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Office of Fire and Aviation

BLM Supports Tsunami Relief Efforts

On December 26, 2004 an immense 9.0 earthquake off the northwest coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra caused a tsunami that killed more than 150,000 people. More than 140,000 are still missing. The eight countries in the Indian Ocean region that were affected by this disaster are dealing with more than one million displaced persons.

Nations hit hardest were Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, and Indonesia. The United States immediately began planning to assist these and several other countries affected by the tsunami. The U.S. Agency for International Development's

Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, which has the responsibility to coordinate U.S. Government response to international disasters, took the lead. Within hours of the news reaching Washington, D.C., the agency began to assemble relief commodities and teams to go the affected countries.

The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance has arrangements with other federal agencies to support its mission. The Bureau of Land Management's Office of Fire and Aviation provides equipment and personnel support through a reimbursable agreement with the Forest Service.

On the morning of the December 26, BLM's Office of Fire and Aviation received a call requesting Scott Hocklander, a Alaska Fire Service smokejumper, who happened to be on another disaster assignment in Kenya, to go to Sri Lanka to assist with the relief efforts. By the evening of December 28, BLM



Incredible tsunami destruction at Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

had a presence on the ground in Sri Lanka providing support to the disaster relief efforts. Hocklander spent the next two weeks carrying out a significant role to coordinate the distribution of U.S. Government relief supplies to the tens of thousands of people of Sri Lanka affected by the tsunami.

Other requests followed. Bill Laspina, from the Great Basin Fire Cache in Boise, Idaho, replaced Hocklander in Sri Lanka for about three and one-half weeks, continuing to provide logistical coordination for the distribution of critically needed relief supplies.

Tom Frey, BLM's Office of Fire and Aviation International Program Coordinator was requested on December 29 to go Thailand as a military liaison and advisor. Frey left Boise, Idaho on December 31. He stopped at the U.S.

military's Pacific Command headquarters in Honolulu. He spent New Years Eve receiving detailed briefings on the current situation and on the military's plans for the relief operation. By the morning of January 3 he was in the middle of the most widespread disaster relief operation the U.S. military has ever undertaken.

The U.S. military established its Joint Task Force headquarters for the entire tsunami relief effort in Utapao, Thailand. Tom's mission was to ensure that U.S. military's operations were coordinated with the efforts of U.S. Agency for International Development-Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, United Nations organizations, and with non-governmental relief organizations. The goal of the U.S. military was to supply relief commodities until the Indonesian Government, United Nations, and relief



Indonesian boys look through rubble that used to be homes.

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Teamwork was vital to the relief work. Left to right, Gerard Putnam-Cramer of the United Nations, U.S. military Joint Task Force Commander Lt. General Blackman, and Tom Frey from BLM's Office of Fire and Aviation.

In Sri Lanka, Hocklander and Laspina also worked closely with the U.S. military coordinating the movement of relief supplies aboard U.S. military aircraft.

BLM provided support in Washington, D.C. Mark Rooney, from the Boise, Idaho district arrived at headquarters in Washington on a previously planned detail just in time to become involved in the start up of the relief effort.

organizations could get infrastructure in place to carry on the immediate relief activities after the military left, as well as prepare for long term reconstruction and redevelopment activities. Frey worked with the military for about a month.

Hocklander, Laspina, Frey, and Rooney were all involved in an important international relief effort. They applied the skills and experience they gained as members of the wildland fire fighting community to a international all-risk incident. They take pride in what they

have done. And BLM can be proud of its willingness to share it employees with other U.S. agencies for important international humanitarian missions.

Contact: Tom Frey, OF&A International Program Coordinator, 208-387-5167



Indonesian girls with smiles and salutes for American help.



Villagers anxiously await delivery of relief supplies.



U.S. Navy helicopter delivers relief supplies to victims.

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Colorado

Rapid Growth in Small Town Colorado

Dawson Ranch Subdivision on the southwest edge of Canon City, Colorado is in the most rapidly growing section of town and consists of residential homes with a density of five to seven homes per acre. Hundreds of homes have been constructed in this subdivision, located in the midst of mature piñon-juniper woodland that has been stressed by several years of drought and is suffering high mortality from beetle infestation, as is much of the southwest.

Two years ago BLM initiated a small project on public land adjacent to the subdivision utilizing inmate crews and a horse logger to reduce fire hazard and remove dying piñon (Snapshots, Dec.. 19, 2003).

Access to BLM land was difficult and by permission



Mature individual trees and small groups of trees were left to retain a natural appearance. Pikes Peak is visible in the background.



Ponderosa pine is common at higher elevations. Some debris was left in place to provide soil wood, small animal habitat and seedling microclimates.



High density development of five to seven homes per acre. Multiple egress routes are available but the sprawling nature of the development will result in confusion during an emergency.

only through private land. One of the subdivision developers subsequently donated a six acre piece of private land to BLM that now provides permanent administrative access. Upon receipt of the donation, BLM fenced the boundary between federal and private land and improved an existing two-track road to provide access to the entire 5,000 acre federal parcel.

A fuel reduction project was completed on the edge of the developing subdivision in early 2004. A piece of equipment called a hydroaxe was used to treat 104 acres by removing heavy and drought stressed fuels near the boundary. Another nearby private parcel containing particularly operable ground was located within the proposed project area. Eight private acres were included in the project after

negotiation with the owner, a local citizen not associated with the developing subdivision.

The project was designed to maintain the appearance of a natural opening, common in the pigmy woodland. Some mature trees and small groups of trees were maintained for visual reasons, seed source and wildlife habitat. A volume of large debris was left on site to provide soil wood, small animal habitat and seedling microclimates. The site contained substantial numbers of ponderosa pine at higher elevations and these were generally reserved to maintain species diversity.

The summer of 2004 was rainy and cool, like it was over much of the Front Range. The higher than normal moisture and cool days resulted in excellent growth of residual grasses and forbs. The site now appears to be a natural opening, even upon close inspection. Additionally,

it provides a very much needed fuel break between the private homes and the federal lands threatened by wildfire.

Contact: Dave Toelle, Fire Ecologist, (719) 269- 8508

Hydromowing Project Protects Indian Camp Subdivision

During the development of the Montezuma County Community Fire Plan in 2002, local residents identified an area of BLM land adjacent to the Indian Camp Ranch subdivision in southwest Colorado as an area of high concern for wildfire danger. In November 2004, BLM completed a thinning project that will lessen the fire threat to the subdivision. The project was not designed to stop a fire, but rather to alter its behavior so that it can be safely suppressed by fire crews.

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The project area is located approximately two miles west of Cortez in the Canyons of the Ancients National Monument which was designated in 2000. Though a management plan for monument has not yet been completed, manager Lou Ann Jacobson felt the fuels reduction was an important project. "The subdivision had received a cost-share grant from the government to mitigate fuels on their property, so we wanted to be good neighbors and make sure that 'our side of the fence' was also treated," said Jacobson.

Fuels managers had three big challenges facing them in designing the project. First, about 75 percent of the area had been chained in the early 1960s, leaving a lot of downed wood, including large dried juniper trees that were hard as iron. Secondly, six years of drought and the recent *Ips* beetle infestation had taken a toll on vegetation in the area, leaving large amounts of dead piñon pine and juniper trees, as well as decadent sagebrush and other shrubs. And finally, the area contains many cultural sites which would need to be protected from ground disturbance associated with the mowing.

Priorities for treatment included areas within 1,000 feet of private land along a two mile interface. The fence line was mowed to create a 20-30 foot wide undulating break adjacent to the federal-private property

line to reinforce an existing fuel break on private land.

A hydromower was used to create a mosaic pattern over 240 acres of land. Due to the numerous archeological sites, archeologist Kristie Arrington created "stringers" or clusters of sites to avoid, instead of having lots of individual sites to mitigate. These leave islands also provide big game hiding cover and travel corridors. Areas outside the islands were mowed, targeting dead piñon and decadent brush, along with old chaining. Cut areas between one-half and three acres were mowed, with isolated trees or clumps of trees and sagebrush left to reseed the area and add to visual quality.

Archie Hanson, owner of the 1,200-acre Indian Camp Ranch development, and other neighbors are very happy with the results of the BLM's thinning project.

Fire Prevention Program Success in Montezuma County

Over the past several years, fire departments, governments, and citizens of Cortez, Colorado have been especially concerned about the possibility of a devastating wildland fire due to the massive piñon die-off from the *Ips* beetle and the continuing drought conditions, and 2004 was no different, except in the way they dealt with their concerns.

Recognizing the problems facing their communities, the Montezuma County Fire Chiefs' Association, comprised of five volunteer fire departments and one paid fire marshal, banded together, reviewed recommendations in the Montezuma County Community Fire Plan developed in 2002, and are implementing several of the recommendations. The result is a county that is more aware of potential fire danger and has more defensible space than ever.

One recommendation was to hire a fire prevention officer to help educate the public about fire-safe practices including defensible space and controlled burning. The association designed a fire prevention program and hired a seasonal fire prevention officer, Dave Cluff, to serve all five fire districts in the county. They coordinated with other partners in Montezuma County, including Mesa Verde National Park, U.S. Forest Service, BLM, Colorado State Forest Service, City of Cortez, and Montezuma County Sheriff, to secure funding and equipment for the position. The City of Cortez supplied a car and the Dolores Volunteer Fire Department agreed to host the position, cover insurance, and provide office space.

Officer Cluff started in April 2004 and played a key role in promoting and coordinating the annual regional April

"Wildland Fire Prevention Month" activities in the county.

He produced a news column for three local newspapers which reached 10,000 homes weekly, and prepared numerous public service announcements and radio interviews on prevention related topics. He took responsibility for explaining the Montezuma County fire ban in effect for much of the summer of 2004. Once the ban was lifted, he was in charge of issuing burning permits.

Another element of the community fire plan that Officer Cluff implemented was spending time making personal contact with homeowners in the 14 high fire hazard areas of the county identified in the fire plan. He provided information on why the area was considered high risk, how homeowners could mitigate that risk, and shared information on fire danger.

City of Cortez Fire Marshal Frank Cavaliere stated, "I feel the main reason this program was a huge success is the fact that this position benefited more than one organization and cemented working relations with numerous agencies. This position brought the county fire chiefs closer together by their requirements to supervise him and also fostered a better working relationship between our county and the three organizations that funded it."

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It is often difficult to measure the success of a fire prevention program, but even though the fire danger was high to extreme for most of the summer of 2004, no large fires occurred in Montezuma County or on adjacent federal lands. The Cortez Fire Protection District reported four less controlled burns that needed their assistance in 2004 than in 2003. Citizens continued to complete defensible space projects across the county. These successes are a direct result of the hard work and leadership of the fire chiefs, Fire Marshal Frank Cavaliere, and Fire Prevention Officer David Cluff.

In December 2004, the Montezuma County Fire Chiefs Association, Fire Marshal Frank Cavaliere, and Fire Prevention Officer Dave Cluff received an award from the Rocky Mountain Regional Forester for their commitment to community education and awareness.

New Mexico

The Buzz of Economic Opportunity

The buzz of chain saws may be annoying to some, but for members of the Alamo Band of the Navajo Nation located about 57 miles northwest of Socorro, New Mexico, it's the sound of economic opportunity.

According to 2000 census data, the Alamo Band of the Navajo has a labor force of about 300

and an unemployment rate of approximately 36 percent. There are efforts under way to establish an infrastructure that can support job creating enterprises, while increasing services and benefits to the Navajo.

In support of these efforts, the Bureau of Land Management office in Socorro, New Mexico is working with the Alamo Navajo Tribal school board to increase skills and provide for local employment with various federal and state agencies through fuels contracts.

The 100 hour class began with Employability Skills Training provided by the Continuing Education department. Students then received instruction from BLM and forest service instructors in chain saw safety, basic forestry terminology, and field work. On the final day of classroom training, instructors from BLM and State of New Mexico provided training and information on becoming small business contractors.

Students were put to a field test in a simulated forestry contracting environment where qualified instructors guided and monitored their work. Contract stipulations included removal of wood usable for firewood and scattering of slash. The students passed with flying



Firewood was donated to tribal elders for traditional purposes.



The project area is looking more like the objective--grassland.



Students pose for a class field photo.



Students are taught safety principles in a classroom setting.



Students prepare to set up for a lesson in the field.

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colors! Over a four day period, the class completed approximately 16 acres and removed the bucked wood suitable for firewood. Firewood from the training project was donated to tribal elders.

The ultimate objective for the fuels project is to maintain the area as native grassland. After completion of the mechanical contracting and removal of usable wood, the area will be treated with prescribed fire to remove slash.

On completion of the class, students received a Stihl 390 chain saw, safety equipment, and a two week stipend for their participation. A second class is planned for spring 2005.

Oregon

Medford Employees Receive National BLM Fire Awards

BLM's Medford District has earned a national reputation for cooperating with state and private landowners in order to increase the number of acres treated for hazardous fuel reduction. Early frequent communication and close cooperation is a necessity in southern Oregon because of the intermingled land ownership patterns. President Bush's tour of the Squires Fire in 2002, which burned on federal and private lands, included a first hand look at burned areas that had been treated

with hazardous fuel reduction projects compared with untreated areas.

The efforts of Tom Murphy, district fire management officer and Tim Gonzales, fire mitigation and education specialist for the Grants Pass Resource

Area are two reasons why the Medford District is known for its hazardous fuels program and collaborative fuel treatment projects. Their hard work was recognized nationally by the BLM at the National Fire and Aviation Conference on December 7th in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Murphy was recognized by BLM with an Excellence in Ecosystem Management through Fuels Treatment award. Over the last eight years with the added complexity of intermingled land ownership patterns and smoke management issues, the 860,000 acre Medford District has treated more than 100,000 acres.

During Murphy's 17 years working in fuels management in the Medford District, he developed and implemented an Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantities contract for



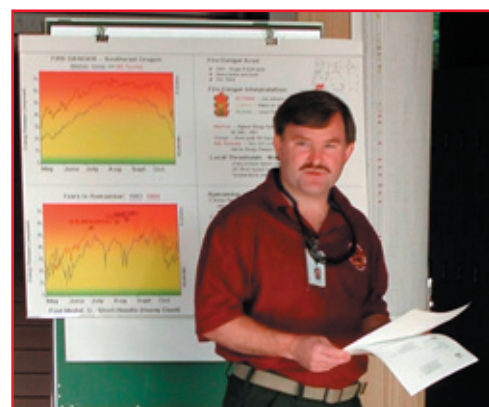
Tim Gonzales, BLM Grants Pass Area Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist.

treating hazardous fuels. By implementing these contracts, Murphy was able to treat fuels across the landscape. Murphy's contract prototype is being used successfully throughout the Medford District and by other BLM districts. As district fire management officer, Murphy has had over 98 percent of the hazardous fuels reduction treatments in the Medford District completed under contract providing direct support to local communities and economies.

A key part of Tim Gonzales's job is fostering trust and partnerships with homeowners who live in the shadow of 2002's half-million acre Biscuit Fire in southwestern Oregon. Gonzales was

recognized with BLM's National Wildland Urban Interface Mitigation award.

In order for BLM to treat hazardous fuels, Gonzales has worked with several community planning efforts, including serving as a subcommittee member for the Josephine County Fire Plan. Gonzales was a team member on the Biscuit Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan, as well as the Biscuit Fire



Tom Murphy, BLM Medford District Fire Management Officer.

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Recovery Final Environmental Impact Statement. As the Grants Pass Resource Area's National Fire Plan grant and project inspector, Gonzales has helped applicants develop and successfully implement hazardous fuel reduction projects.

A good example of a wildland urban interface project that benefits from Murphy's and Gonzales's expertise is the Cathedral Hills fuels reduction project located south of Grants Pass, Oregon.

The Cathedral Hills area is a priority for the BLM, Josephine County, and the Oregon Department of Forestry because it is at high risk to wildfire due to dense vegetation, caused by a century of fire exclusion and

the area's mix of public and private land.

In the event of a wildfire, reducing fuels in the Cathedral Hills area could help protect more than 1,000 homes. Fuel reduction projects are planned for 540 acres of BLM land, approximately 40 acres of Josephine County land, and could include approximately 100 acres of private property.

When completed, the project will reduce the threat of wildfire to the public, help ensure firefighter safety, and protect property and resources.

BLM lands will be treated with money allocated for wildland urban interface hazardous fuel reduction from the National Fire Plan and other

appropriated dollars. Josephine County is tentatively slated to receive National Fire Plan funding to support private land fuels reduction work in Cathedral Hills.

This project is supported by the Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan which addresses risk assessment, education and outreach, fuels reduction, and emergency management. The Cathedral Hills project is just one of many planned projects in southwestern Oregon's Josephine County.

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Underburning on a hazardous fuels reduction project on the BLM Medford District.

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