

Snapshots

March 4, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

Montana

Oklahoma State University Forestry Students Study Fire Effects on Missoula Field Office Ecosystem Restoration Prescribed Burn

Oklahoma State University conducted a seven-week forestry field session in western Montana in 2004 to allow students the opportunity to study forest measurements, silviculture, multiple use, hydrology, fire ecology and fire management. Professor Steve Hallgren led the session on fire ecology and fire management, focusing study on fuel consumption and fire effects on prescribed burns. BLM Missoula field office fuels management specialists Katie Albritton and Shelagh Fox presented technical sessions

illustrating use of prescribed fire in natural resource management on the Lower Blackfoot River Corridor. They covered BLM's approach to landscape assessment planning including evaluation and analysis of historical stand structure, ecology, and development, implementation and monitoring of fire prescriptions and objectives for burn units.

Before entering the Dunnigan prescribed burn units, class members took a hike through an unburned area of similar vegetation to help students understand ecology and vegetation of the area and view what the burned stands looked like prior to implementation. On the burn units, students were able to see how fire had changed the landscape vegetation. The ensuing discussion included the topics of public perception, logistics

of prescribed burning in today's environment, implementation details, why and how the objectives of the burns were met, long-term objectives of burning in the Lower Blackfoot Corridor and the different fire effects of burns conducted during the spring and fall.

The class returned to the burn units two more days to learn how to study and monitor fire effects of prescribed burning.

BLM's Missoula Field Office has been implementing fuels projects within the Lower Blackfoot River Corridor since 2001. A landscape assessment conducted for the area identified wildfire, disease and insect infestation threats, and variation of vegetation from historical structure and condition class density as management priorities. BLM prepared an environmental assessment to evaluate proposed projects designed to reduce or mitigate threats in key areas and restore ecosystem health. The resulting land management decision

included the implementation of hazardous fuel reduction projects in strategic locations between public and private land. These projects were designed to act as fuel breaks to reduce the rate of wildfire spread and assist in the containment of wildfires.

Spring 2004 marked the completion of the first landscape prescribed fire burn conducted on BLM land within this watershed. The specific goals of the burn were hazardous fuel reduction, ecosystem restoration on lower elevation ponderosa pine



Landscape view of a portion of the Dunnigan Burn Spring 2004.



Missoula Field Office Fuels Specialist and Professor Hallgren involved in a discussion with students on prescribed burning by BLM.



Dunnigan spring 2004 burn implementation.

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sites, and improvement of wildlife habitat and big game winter range through shrub stimulation.

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Oklahoma State students study vegetation on a unit burned in the spring of 2004.

South Dakota Fuels Program Continues Efforts on Grizzly Gulch Fire Area

Clean up efforts continue on the Grizzly Gulch fire that burned an estimated 12,000 acres adjacent to Lead and Deadwood, South Dakota in 2002. Of the 12,000 acres of federal, state and private land burned, 1,982 acres was BLM. A decision was made to reduce fuel created by the fire on 937 acres of those 1,982 BLM acres.



An area showing just how many piles there are to burn, and how much fuels reduction work there was to be done.



Landscape view of a portion of the Dunnigan Burn Spring 2004.

The Fort Meade Fuels Module has been very busy with this 937 acre project including boundary identification and layout, installing monitoring plots and serving as project inspectors for contract crews. Two separate crews from Oregon were contracted to help

with the efforts. In September of 2002 the rehabilitation crew completed work for contour felling and check dams to help prevent erosion. Another crew came in the spring of 2004 to cut and pile the dead standing trees to reduce the hazardous fuel buildup created by the fire.

An estimated 15,000 hand piles resulted from the cut and pile project. The goal is to burn at least half of the area this year and the remainder next year. To help achieve this goal, the Fort Meade Fuels Module is getting crews from the State



A monitoring plot within the Grizzly Gulch burned area, before treatment.



The same monitoring plot after treatment has been done one month later.

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of South Dakota Division of Wildland Fire Suppression and City of Lead. Between eight and 12 people work daily with a goal of two to three acres each per day.

The piles are a grim reminder of what happened in June of 2002. Newspaper and radio releases remind the two communities that pile burning season is here. By keeping the door of communication open between the public and BLM, people are able to better understand project goals. To date, 190 acres and approximately 3,000 hand piles have been burned. The only thing holding back the project now is the warm weather and the lack of snow.

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Cost Share Program Gives Montana Landowners Reason to Clean Up

Montana landowners in Fergus County are making good use of programs that help them take fire prevention measures around their homes.

The Fergus County Conservation District, in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, offers up to a 90 percent cost-share for fuel removal, and up to 75 percent for commercial removal on private land that qualify for the program.

The district has been awarded \$240,000 in National Fire Plan Community Assistance funding. Work began in 2003 and continues today. Forty-six applications have been processed thus far, and more than 350 acres have been treated, said District Administrator Shonny Nordlund. The majority of the work has been done by the landowners on non-commercial land.

"We're very pleased with the work that's been done," said Nordlund. "The cost-share has helped the landowners a lot."

Shannon Downey, Montana BLM fire mitigation specialist, has also been encouraged by the results. "We have the flexibility to ask, 'Where are the needs and what are the initiatives and ideas?'" said Downey. "I find that conservation districts work very well one-on-one with the individual landowners. They're very comfortable with and familiar with the idea of having a cost-share program that works with individual landowners to perform particular practices on the land."

The district hired a forester to assess each property and to develop a defensible space plan so that the landowner knows which trees to remove. That decision has been a key to the program's success, said Downey.

Nordlund has shared the program's success with others in Montana. In November, she delivered a Power Point presentation at the annual convention for the Montana Association of Conservation Districts. Another successful aspect of the program, according to Nordlund, has been the district's willingness to sign up landowners for a second contract after an initial contract is complete. Several landowners have already taken advantage of a second contract.

"The way we look at hazardous fuels reduction projects, like this one, is that if there is a wildland fire and some of these rural residences have defensible space around them and are surrounded by a parcel that has been thinned, we can fight that fire with much greater safety and much more cheaply," said Downey.

Potential for biomass utilization has been studied. The district and BLM have partnered with

Snowy Mountain Development Corporation, a non-profit group that serves as the economic development arm for the six counties included in the Central Montana Resource Conservation & Development area.

Snowy Mountain searched for area institutions that might be candidates to install a heating system that relies on biomass incineration. Feasibility studies were done on a nearby high school, hospital, and mental health facility and those institutions showed interest in the program.

Snowy Mountain Executive Director Kathie Bailey said now it's a matter of finding a guaranteed supply of biomass materials to those institutions. "The initial discussion has been that those are all feasible projects," said Bailey. "So now we're trying to hitch the horses together in the yoke and make them pull at the same time."



Through National Fire Plan Community Assistance funds, Fergus County Conservation District has helped treat more than 350 acres.

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Courtesy of Forestry Notes,
National Association of
Conservation Districts

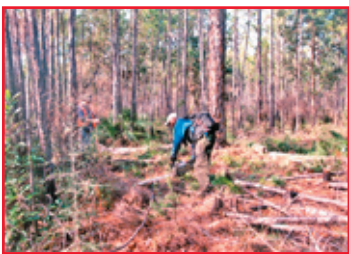
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Eastern States

Manual Fuel Reduction at Lathrop Bayou

A draft management plan has been developed for the Lathrop Bayou tract in Florida. Part of that 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.

The BLM-administered land is already closed to mining, is a rights-of-way avoidance area, and is closed to motorized vehicle use as a result of earlier planning decisions made in a state-wide planning effort completed in 1994 which identified habitat protection as the primary resource objective. The first prescribed burn was



Hotshots reducing fuel load around older pine on Round Island at Lathrop Bayou.



Members of the Jackson Hotshot Crew with Jim Moyers (r) of St. Joe Timberlands, a partner in management efforts at Lathrop Bayou.

successfully completed in January 2004 and a second burn is now scheduled for March 2005. During the interim, the Jackson Hotshots have been assisting in pre-burn work.

During the week of January 17, 2005, the Jackson Hotshots returned to Lathrop Bayou. During this week the crew focused on fuel reduction around older pines on "Round Island." A total of 24 potential artificial cavity trees were located. Heavy brush, hardwoods and young slash pine were cleared from around the larger trees identified as potential artificial cavity trees. The island's second prescribed burn is scheduled for March 2005.

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Jackson Hotshots Making a Difference

During the off-season members of the Jackson Hotshots took time to conduct some community outreach. First they spent an afternoon with children at the Blair E. Batson Children's Hospital located in Jackson, Mississippi. They spent the day talking to the children about life



Teachers and students were able to tour equipment during community outreach activities.

as a firefighter, firefighting experiences and just spent time interacting with children. They played video games, watched TV and talked. Children's smiles made this day worthwhile.

Next, they spent a day with students at the Triumph Village Christian Academy, also located in Jackson. Crew members spent time with each grade, K-4 through sixth, conducting fire safety and environmental education presentations. Participating in local community outreach has become an important part of the Jackson Hotshots off-season. It has become a tradition they plan to continue from year to year.



Fred Ashford spends time playing basketball with a young patient at the local children's hospital.

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