

Snapshots

April 1, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

Arizona

Fire Science Students Join Rio Salado Crew

In the year 2002, the BLM Phoenix Kingman Zone began its first emergency firefighter program with the goal of developing a 20-person, Type 2 crew to supplement its initial attack forces. It was hoped that the crew would serve to increase diversity in the workforce by recruiting from the ranks of graduating seniors in the fire science curriculum from the many vocational technical high schools in the Phoenix metropolitan area. A hurdle to overcome was the lack of high school staffing to provide the wildland fire teaching for students.

The Phoenix BLM Fire program joined Metro Tech, a vocational high school in central Phoenix, to establish a wildland fire curriculum during their 2003 winter-spring term. Crew

coordinator Dean Fernandez and other fire staff taught several basic courses to students during the term. Included were the I-100 Introduction to the Incident Command System, S-130 Basic Firefighting Skills and S-190 Introduction to Fire Behavior.

They helped institute basic physical training as part of the class. Overall, about 40 students participated in first session, with six of the graduating students joining the Phoenix BLM Rio Salado Emergency Fire Fighting crew. This partnership is important to both BLM and Metro Tech High School under the Phoenix Union High School District. For BLM, it provides a good group of entry level recruits who are already in a fire science curriculum at the high school level. Although age restrictions kept some students from meeting employment eligibility, all other students successfully



The Rio Salado crew at work on a fire in the Angeles National Forest in Southern California in 2004.

completing the course were able to apply for seasonal or emergency firefighter positions. In addition, all students are now familiar with the federal employment application process.

Metro Tech increased diversity of their curriculum and increased success rate of students completing courses and obtaining employment as a result of the fire science program. The number of students graduating and achieving job placement are the measurement of success for vocational programs.

Before this partnership was established, it had been difficult task for Metro Tech and other vocational schools to achieve employment for high school graduates with no experience in firefighting and emergency medical services. Since the partnership was established, Metro Tech has seen a dramatic increase in student job placement. In 2002 Metro Tech only had one individual in the fire science program successfully obtain employment after

graduation. After the curriculum was changed, sixteen students obtained employment in BLM's fire program as part of the Rio Salado crew. During 2003 and 2004 the Rio Salado fire crew assisted fire efforts for BLM and supported other agencies during large fire activity in Arizona, California and Montana.

The partnership with Metro Tech has gained media interest and was featured in the Arizona Republic newspaper in the February 28, 2005 edition with an article titled, "Teens get a chance at firefighting," and television coverage on News Channel 5, KPHO Phoenix, in early February.



Group shot of Rio Salado fire crew in front of their crew buggy after working a fire in northern California in 2004.



The new curriculum requires students to learn how to care for their fire gear. Nedd Anderson demonstrates the proper way to fold shirts.

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The BLM Phoenix Field Office plans to continue this successful effort and expand the program to reach more students in other schools and with the Phoenix Job Corps.



During a progressive hose lay drill, students made sure all of their equipment is ready to go. About 50 percent of the students enrolled in the Metro Tech fire program are female.

including internet access, simulated training opportunities, fire behavior calculations, word processing, and a means for establishing inventory data bases.

Wyoming BLM State Fire Management Officer John Glenn said, "In many cases our rural fire department partners are the first responders to wildland fire situations in Wyoming; it's very important for us to support and work closely with them. In cooperation with Wyoming State Forestry, we've built a strong partnership with them and we want to continue to build on that. Offering equipment they may need is one way that we can assist them. This is all part of the National Fire Plan and a goal to work collaboratively to reduce the severity of fires, and their impacts to Wyoming communities and wildlands."



Nedd Anderson and Eric Branch, members of the Rio Salado crew and former students, assist Dean Fernandez (center), BLM Fire crew coordinator, in providing classroom instruction – February 2005.

Wyoming

Computers to Rural Fire Partners

Wyoming's Bureau of Land Management and department of state forestry recently offered rural fire departments excess laptop computers as part of a continued effort toward collaboration. It is the second year that the BLM has made equipment available.

Eighteen Dell and Gateway computers were offered for a nominal cost to the rural fire departments, almost twice

as many computers as were available last year. Each computer came with software, batteries, and operating systems. The computers are also equipped with many applications,



Washakie County Assistant Fire Warden Jerry Walters receives a laptop computer from Fire Management Officer Chuck Russell of BLM's North Zone in Worland, Wyoming. Walters is also Ten Sleep Volunteer Fire Department Fire Chief.

BLM Computers Donated to Tucson Grade School

The Tucson Field Office donated 39 computers to Steel Elementary grade school after updating to office laptops. A half dozen staff members from the field office delivered processing units, monitors, keyboards to the local grade school. The school's principal showed an interest in the donation after an offer was made by the agency. The Pentium II and III computers will be a major improvement from the dated computers the school had been using, and will allow teachers to have computers in their classrooms and new

ones for the computer lab. Microsoft will supply the school with free technical service to get the computers set up throughout the school. The project was coordinated by computer staff and two interns. The physical work was completed by intern biological technician Brad Cooper.

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Montana

South Fork Flat Willow Stewardship

The Lewistown Field Office is preparing a categorical exclusion under the Healthy Forest Initiative for hazardous fuel reduction, forest health and meadow restoration on 619 acres in the South Fork of the Flat Willow Creek drainage, north of the Little Snowy Mountains. This project will be a stewardship project in which some of the timber value is traded for service work in restoring meadows, reducing hazardous fuels, and other forest restoration activities that could not be accomplished under a normal timber sale.

The current condition is remnant old growth ponderosa pine with dense regeneration and meadow encroachment. The objective is to modify fire

behavior and restore a multi-storied open ponderosa pine stand, retaining large trees and snags. In current condition the old growth trees are in danger of being killed by wildfire, due to the dense ladder fuels. They are also susceptible to mortality from pine bark beetles because of intense competition from overstocking.

Reducing density will increase survivability of the larger trees in the face of both wildfire and insect infestation. Opening up the forest canopy is expected to increase the amount and diversity of deciduous shrubs and herbaceous species, thus providing forage for game species and nesting habitat for Neotropical birds. In addition, small areas of “dog-hair” thickets will be retained to preserve hiding cover for wildlife. Much of the slash material will be

piled and either burned or chipped.

A biomass incinerator scheduled for installation this year at the hospital in nearby Lewistown may provide a market for otherwise unmerchantable material. After mechanical treatment, much of the area will be under burned to rejuvenate sprouting shrubs, increase herbaceous production and further reduce tree seedling that constitute a future fire hazard. Fire behavior, wildlife habitat and forest health will be improved as a result of the treatment.

The project is unique in two ways. First, it will be implemented as a “negotiated stewardship” contract – a combination of the old negotiated timber permit with stewardship principles and authority. Public land to be treated is in four parcels, all land-locked by private land and requiring access from the private landowners. One of the

landowners, Curlew Land and Cattle, has retained Northwest Management, Inc., a private consulting firm, to implement forest restoration on their land. Restoration has already begun on the private land, as shown in the accompanying photos. Lewistown field office staff expects to negotiate a stewardship contract with Northwest Management. With the help of the Montana State Office, the existing timber sale contract form is being redesigned to fit the needs of a negotiated stewardship contract.

Second, the project has an unusual number of collaborators. Montana Land Reliance holds a conservation easement on the Curlew property, and has been involved in designing the restoration plan on the private land. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation will be participating with volunteers to clean up old run down fences on the



The two photos show forest condition prior to treatment. Note remnant pines and dense ladder fuels.

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public land. The foundation is also planning to do an article in *Bugle Magazine* regarding the greatly improved wildlife habitat.

Researchers from the University of Montana are looking to set up long-term plots to increase their knowledge of how old growth trees respond to thinning treatments. Fergus County has identified this area as part of its interface area of concern in a recently completed community wildfire protection plan, and the project has been endorsed by the county fire warden and county commissioners. Finally, N-Bar Ranch, the adjacent property owner has endorsed the project as well.

The project is being prepared through the combined efforts of the forestry and fuels staff at the Lewistown Field Office.

Contact: Bruce Reid, Central Montana Zone forester at 406-538-1960 or Shannon Downey, Central Montana Zone fire mitigation specialist at 406-538-1089

Photos show forest condition after mechanical restoration treatments on adjacent private land.



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