

Snapshots

July 22, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

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*Dave Vickery, editor
Sheri Ascherfeld, layout and design*

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Colorado

A Little Off the Top, Forest Thinned to Battle Threat of Major Fires

By Tracy Harmon, the Pueblo
Chieftain

SALIDA - A hummingbird whistles by and the aroma of pine sap is strong in the forest of scenic Methodist Mountain south of here.

Hard to believe that just a few months ago a huge hydro-mulcher machine was barreling through snow banks and reducing trees to chips as part of a plan to prevent forest fires from spreading from public lands to nearby subdivisions. The only evidence that the voracious tree reducer was even here are the

few scattered branches and the mulch it left behind - organic material that will enrich the soil and slow down erosion.

Although many of the pinon and juniper trees along a three-mile, 500-acre swath of public land just west of County Road 108 are gone, there are still plenty of young trees, a few old ones, grasses, wildflowers and cactus. The young pinon trees will take about 30 years to grow to the size of a person.

The aesthetic beauty of the area remains, yet residents of the subdivisions that live just north of the fire break can breathe a little easier knowing the "defensible space" will slow down the advance of a wildfire.

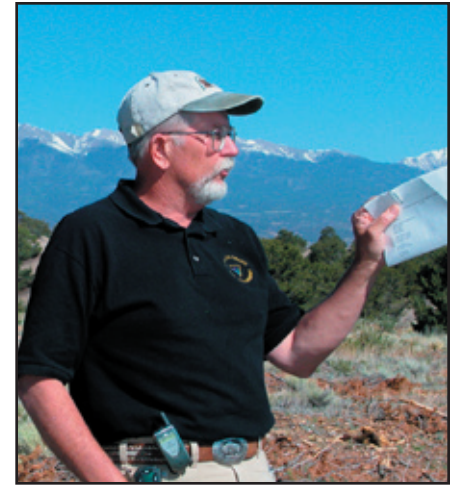
"We've had some particularly catastrophic wildfires in the last

10 years, and every year we see the loss of homes," said Mike Gaylord, a U.S. Bureau of Land Management fire mitigation manager who oversaw the forest thinning project in the Cherokee Heights area. "We have an obvious problem with fuels (overcrowded forests) which we are working on more aggressively."

Gaylord led a recent tour of the project area so state, county and local officials could see what is being done on federal land to provide a buffer to protect homes on private property. He also encouraged local officials to participate in the planning process and suggest other areas that need similar treatment so the BLM can budget for them in its fire-year plan.

"If we do this by ourselves, it does not benefit anyone. We need to get you guys involved to help us initiate a county-wide fire plan," said Roy Masinton, BLM Royal Gorge Region manager.

The thinning of the forest allows more grasses and shrubs to grow, which will provide forage for mule deer, elk and other wildlife. Trees that are left are at least 50 feet apart so they don't have to compete for water. It also makes them more resistant to disease.



BLM Fire Mitigation Manager Mike Gaylord points out changes in the landscape at the Cherokee Heights project south of Salida. Chieftain photo by Tracy Harmon

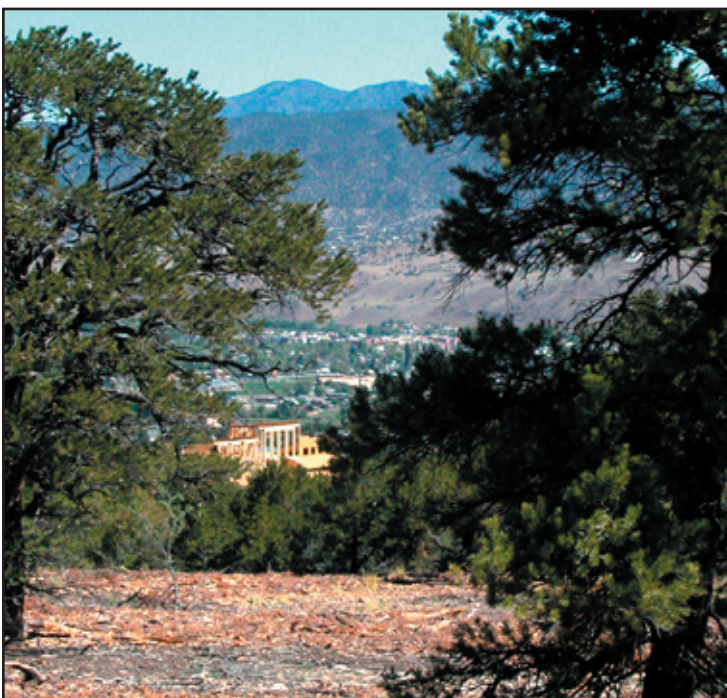
The goal is not to completely discourage fire, Masinton said.

"This will provide a break and give the fire a chance to drop to the ground where firefighters will be able to fight it more easily," before it reaches nearby homes, Gaylord explained.

At a bargain cost of \$150-\$200 an acre, the area was easily thinned because of the accessible terrain and lack of rocks.

Forest managers encourage those who live close to public lands to do their part to prevent the amount of trees that are growing next to their homes. The Fire Wise program provides practical tips for fire prevention.

For example, homeowners should clear an area of at least 30 feet around homes, prune tree limbs to between six and 10



A new home is being built just beyond the thinned forest on Methodist Mountain in Salida. Chieftain photo by Tracy Harmon

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feet above the ground and store firewood away from their homes.

For more information, log onto www.firewise.org

Uncompahgre Project Sponsors Conference

In May 2005, the Uncompahgre Plateau Project sponsored a four day conference in Montrose, Colorado entitled "Ecology and Management of Pinyon-Juniper and Sagebrush Communities." Over 300 scientists, resource managers, and public gathered in southwestern Colorado to participate in the conference. Presenters came from federal and

state agencies and universities across the nation.

The conference provided a forum for addressing some pressing issues concerning Uncompahgre Plateau Project partners, as well as managers throughout the Western United States. The project was formed as a coalition with six formal partners about four years ago to coordinate planning and management on roughly 1.5 million acres on the Uncompahgre Plateau, with a goal of doing ecosystem restoration at a landscape scale.



Six formal partners include Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Western Area Power Administration, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc., and the Public Lands Partnership.

In the last two years, project partners have completed an interagency management plan for two watersheds totaling roughly 220,000 acres, and treated approximately 1,950 acres of nearly 20,000 acres identified as needing treatment. A majority of recent treatments have been in pinyon-juniper and sagebrush communities.

Major themes for the conference were ecology, management, and restoration of pinyon-juniper and sagebrush communities and collaboration. Forty scientific papers were presented during the first three days of the conference, and during an evening session 85 posters detailed projects on the same themes. The conference concluded on Thursday, May 19, with a field trip to Uncompahgre Plateau, where participants discussed collaborative restoration treatments accomplished by member partners.

While the conference goal was to provide a forum to discuss scientific work, a clear focus was on Uncompahgre Plateau resources that support the community. In opening



Uncompahgre Plateau Project technical coordinator Rick Sherman opens the conference.

remarks, Technical Coordinator Rick Sherman noted that one goal has been to integrate science and public input and to maintain a focus on local social, cultural, and economic values of the plateau, as well as its ecological values.

Clifford Duncan, Northern Ute elder, opened the conference with a traditional blessing to underscore the importance of Utes as first stewards of the land, and to bring attention to the importance of stewardship in land management. Ten days before the conference, Clifford traveled to the plateau with a fourth grade class from Pomona Elementary School and taught them all about wickiups, temporary dwellings made of arched poles covered by brush, bark, rushes, or mats used by nomadic Native North Americans. Students learned about how resources on the plateau have supported human communities through time.



Northern Ute elder Clifford Duncan.

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Wickiups constructed by students were featured on the conference stage and in the lobby. In addition, students built wickiups on site to demonstrate what they had learned for conference attendees. Local artists presented artwork inspired by pinyon-juniper and sagebrush landscapes. Local logging and mitigation industries featured a range of equipment available for mechanical treatments in these fuel types and gave presentations. Two local artisans, the “Musser Brothers,” displayed samples of furniture they make from local wood products.

On Wednesday, May 18, over lunch hour, Ute dancers performed traditional dances for students and attendees. Wednesday evening, attendees were served local range-fed beef at a T-bone steak barbeque served by the Colorado Cattlewomen’s Association. Following dinner, attendees were entertained by a local author and story teller, Craig Childs.

In an effort to promote public participation and foster local stewardship, scholarships were made available to public members from Delta, Montrose, Ouray, Mesa, and San Miguel Counties, all which are within the jurisdiction of Uncompahgre Plateau. Daniela Howell, project education and outreach



A wickiup built by Pomona fourth grade class was displayed on the conference stage.

coordinator, said, “It is very important for our communities to be involved, and use the best available science to make public land management decisions.”

Contributions for scholarships came from the Public Lands Partnership, a citizen group representing diverse interest groups from the five plateau counties and from the Healthy Landscape Partnership, a consortium of eight southwestern Colorado counties and state and federal land management agencies. Residents could apply for scholarships for a single session, a day, or entire conference.

There were 44 conference sponsors and contributors, ranging from local community groups to federal and state agencies. As a portion of their contribution, the U.S.

Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station offered to publish conference proceedings in conjunction with proceedings from the Utah and Arizona Society of American Foresters Conference. Proceedings will be available in 2006.

The conference itself was quite a success, and Uncompahgre Plateau partners hope its proceedings will raise further questions and spur additional research and dialogue. The desire of conference organizers was to promote and support collaborative landscape-level planning. “We hope

our participants will promote new partnerships, communication and collaboration among the many agencies, organizations, learning institutions and communities that will lead to better, healthier landscapes throughout the West,” Sherman said.

*Carol McDermott photos
Contact: Daniela Howell, (970) 249-0353 or visit the UP website at www.upproject.org*

Montana

“Our Changing Landscape” Fire Trailer Continues Along Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Trail

BLM’s Montana-Dakotas traveling fire education trailer is putting on miles as it continues

its trek along the Lewis and Clark Trail. So far, BLM staff has taken the interpretive mobile display to Lewis and Clark National Signature Events in Bismarck, North Dakota, and in Fort Benton and Great Falls, Montana.

The trailer is also making educational stops along the trail between signature event dates. Its main goal is to describe how America’s western landscape has changed Lewis and Clark days, and how various social impacts have led to that change.

Titled “Our Changing Landscape,” the unit consists of static educational displays and two educational video loops. BLM people are on hand to give presentations on a myriad of fire topics—fire ecology, fire behavior, changing landscape, using fire as a tool, role of fire in nature, historical use of fire and wildland-urban interface issues.

A major highlight at Fort Benton’s Signature Event was a burn demonstration for approximately 250 Girl Scouts and their leaders. Mike



The house and corral in the “Demo Forest” survived the fire, thanks to a strategically placed fuel break and creation of defensible space.

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Several Girls Scouts and their leaders look on as the "demo forest" burns during the burn demonstration.

Dannenberg, assisted by Terina Mullen and Al Murphy, used camp matches and a fire-proof burn table to demonstrate the importance of creating fuel breaks and defensible space around homes and other structures. The demonstration was a huge success!



Mike Dannenberg and Al Murphy talk to people during the Signature Event activities in Fort Benton, Montana in June.

Contact: Mike Dannenberg, (406) 896-2913. Photos by Terrina Mullen.

Fuels Reduction Takes On Historical Flair

Recently several Butte Field Office employees gathered for a special fuels hazard reduction outing. Usual fuel reduction tools such as chainsaws, loppers, and axes were present, but the structure to be protected was a historic wooden bridge dating back to the mid-to-late 1800s.

The wooden bridge, measuring over 70 feet long and 20 feet high, was built using "cribbing," a same construction style as log cabins. In this style logs were peeled and notched then stacked perpendicular to each other to create a very solid base for the road surface. There were very few logs left that made up the "deck"

or surface of the bridge.

Originally built in three segments, the bridge spans a small drainage, incorporating two granite outcrops. One cast iron drill steel from a hydraulic mine drill anchors the easternmost segment with the other two. Drill steel was placed into the outcrop to lend support to the bridge sometime after it was built.

The project was a cooperative effort among BLM Butte Field



The end result.

Office, National Park Service, and Lewis and Clark County Historical Society. David Beaver, National Park Service Historic Preservation Specialist worked with Butte Field Office Archaeologist Carrie Kiely to develop a plan that would reduce a threat of wildland fire to the bridge. Other Butte Field Office employees helping included Chris Yochum, Jen Godwin, John Thompson, Vickie Satterlee, Terina Mullen, Sarah Lamarr, Seth Conlan and Huey Long.



The historical bridge and adjacent fuels.

Photos by Terrina Mullen.



Jen Godwin, Huey Long, Sarah Lamarr, Vickie Satterlee, Seth Conlan, Carrie Kiely, John Thompson and David Beaver pack up gear after removing ladder fuels from the area in front of the bridge.

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Undaunted Planning - Fire Prevention Encounters Lewis and Clark

Early in 2005, residents of the Intermountain West were hearing a lot about two things, the expedition of Lewis and Clark, and predictions for potentially record-breaking fire season. Those two things may not seem to have much in common, unless you are a fire prevention specialist. With expectation of thousands of Lewis and Clark enthusiasts following the Corps of Discovery historic path across the Northwest, fire prevention specialists recognized a need to be prepared.

An opportunity to sharpen fire prevention skills came in April 2005. Firefighters and prevention personnel gathered in Bozeman, Montana, for the seventh annual Northern Rockies-Great Basin Fire Prevention Workshop. This year's theme was "Planning for Prevention and Education in the Changing Landscape." Nearly

100 attendees participated in workshop programs with guest speakers, working group sessions, multiple networking activities, and an information-sharing "swap meet" where participants brought materials and ideas to share.

A special feature of this year's workshop was development of fire prevention plans for key sites along the Corps of Discovery path that will see significant increases in visitation in the next couple years. By developing these plans, attendees practiced skills gained during the week and developed implementation strategies for when they return to their local areas.

With most of the Northwest going into its seventh year of a drought, state and federal agencies, as well as local fire departments, recognize the importance of helping people understand threats to natural resources from careless fire use. Getting this message to the public is one critical element of fire prevention.

What makes fire prevention even more challenging is an expectation that thousands of out-of-area visitors are headed west to celebrate the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. Many will be from urban areas or from areas that don't experience

western wildfires. This multiplies the need to provide an understanding of fire danger and visitor's role in preventing wildfires.

Workshop participants developed prevention plans with these considerations in mind. Their creative slogans and fire prevention strategies will be put to good use and implemented during Bicentennial area events scheduled over the next two years.

Workshop coordinators included members of the Northern Rockies Coordinating Group Fire Prevention Committee. The workshop was sponsored by Montana-Dakotas Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service Region One, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and Keep Montana Green.

Article by Terina Mullen, BLM Butte Field Office and Kari Vannice, Gallatin National Forest. Photo by Terrina Mullen.

Utah

West Desert Adaptive Resource Management Group Make Strong Partners

"Link your will with the purpose of others, lead by reason and a gift of cooperation."

Woodrow Wilson letter to Mary A. Hulbert, September 21, 1913

BLM's Salt Lake Field Office is a proud partner of the West

Desert Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Group whose main mission is to develop a greater sage grouse conservation plan.

As an active member of the West Desert Adaptive Resource Management group, the Salt Lake office has been able to enhance its relationship and communication with university academics, community members, landowners, local industry, conservation groups, county and state personnel. The local working group geographic region includes Tooele, Juab and Millard Counties in Utah.

Monthly meetings facilitated by Utah State University Extension Services enable cooperators to identify issues that may be contributing to declining sage grouse populations. Issues identified include habitat loss, fragmentation, degradation, Mormon cricket outbreaks, predation, and human disturbance. Formation of West Desert Adaptive Resource Management working group has prompted planning and coordinating efforts to conserve and manage sagebrush habitat for benefit of sage grouse and other wildlife populations.

"I can't think of a better forum for input, information and understanding than that provided by the West Desert Adaptive Resource Management local working group," said BLM Salt Lake wildlife biologist Randy Swilling. "Our partnership allows me to sit down at the table with



Workshop participants discuss fire prevention strategies during one of the workshop's networking sessions.

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graduate students interested in specializing in sage grouse thesis work, landowners that offer private land for sage grouse studies, ranchers concerned with threats to grazing, and many others, I always learn something new at our meetings,” he said.

With stewardship management responsibility for more than 600,000 acres, BLM’s Salt Lake Field Office recognizes a critical need to maintain and restore sage grouse sagebrush habitat. The partnership philosophy from the West Desert Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Group has helped ensure that BLM strategies will parallel and complement efforts led by participating agencies, organizations, landowners and local communities.



West Desert Adaptive Resource Local Working Group examines sage grouse habitat project area treated in fall 2003.