

Snapshots



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

January 21, 2005

Wyoming

Mixing It Up in Wyoming's North Zone: The Best Recipe

For the Cody Field Office, which is part of Wyoming's North Zone, a good mix of fuels treatment methods and improved grazing strategies enhances the health, diversity, and productivity of public lands, both in upland and riparian areas. The mix was made possible through solid stakeholder relationships,

This winning management approach first gets its strength from rapport the field office has established over the years with local landowners, state and federal wildlife agencies, assorted grazing and wildlife organizations, and community leaders. Developing trust with stakeholders and finding common ground creates the foundation necessary to implement best management practices on a landscape basis.

Working with stakeholders, the field office blends proper grazing management with its use of prescribed fire and

other fuel treatment methods to meet multiple resource goals laid out in Cody's Resource Management Plan and the National Fire Plan.

One example is success in the Crystal Creek Allotment. Historically, this allotment was grazed every spring and fall by livestock on their way to and from grazing allotments on the Bighorn National Forest. This repeated annual use did not allow for plant recovery time and negatively affected both the upland and riparian area systems. When the Crystal Creek Allotment Management Plan was developed in 1994, it included a rest rotational grazing strategy that provided ample plant recovery time. The new grazing strategy called for grazing use in only one season each year, and required a full year's rest from livestock grazing once in each three-year cycle.

In addition to grazing management, prescribed fire projects conducted in the Crystal Creek watershed met resource objectives in a number of ways. The Cody Field Office met goals through reducing fuels, stimulating desirable

herbaceous and deciduous plant growth, improving wildlife habitat, improving forage quality and quantity for livestock and wildlife, and bettering overall rangeland health.

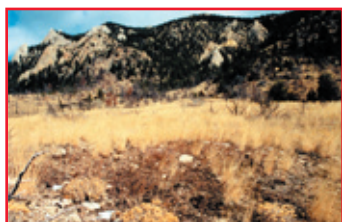
As seen in these striking before-and-after pictures of the Crystal Creek Allotment -- one photo from 1994 and one photo taken almost ten years later -- the trend in vegetation is up and improving on both upland and riparian area sites, even with Wyoming's recent drought conditions. It is readily apparent that the riparian function is

healthier because of grazing management changes and valuable fuels projects.

Another excellent example of appropriate management backed by stakeholder support can be seen in photos of Rattlesnake Creek. Everyone involved with the land recognized that the area had missed a natural fire cycle. Over the years, woody vegetation increased and competed with the herbaceous and desirable shrubs. Use of prescribed fire at Rattlesnake Creek reversed the situation. This great management tool gave the natural succession of



The two photos show the remarkable riparian area change at Crystal Creek.



Photos of the Rattlesnake Creek project. Stakeholder support was a key factor in achieving improvements.

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Arizona

Cascabel Firewise Group "Getting It Done"

After nine years of drought conditions, summers filled with smoke, and media coverage of large wildfires burning in Arizona, the Cascabel Volunteer Fire Department decided it was time to take action. The Cascabel Volunteer Fire Department organized a Firewise Group and has been working with the BLM to establish a Firewise program in this community of 75 homeowners. Together, BLM and the Firewise Group have completed a multi-year environmental document plan. Next the volunteer fire department plans on completing a community wildfire protection plan, applying for grants for a wood chipper and saws, conducting fire awareness outreach, completing home surveys, and constructing nine firebreaks on BLM and private land in this scenic community near the San Pedro River.

Additionally, Cascabel trained volunteers to complete home surveys. About a quarter of the community's homes have been surveyed, with the remaining homes to be completed in 2005. Once all the homes have been surveyed, the data will be transferred to geographic information system linked mapping RedZone software, which will

plant growth a chance, and eventually increased plant diversity and enhanced watershed health.

Results at Crystal Creek and Rattlesnake Creek bring lasting rewards, and encourage the North Zone's Cody field specialists to look for more ways to achieve similar watershed benefits throughout the field office area.

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Mechanical Treatment Reduces Catastrophic Fire Threat Near Newcastle

In September 2004, the Newcastle Field Office began the first phase of mechanical treatment to reduce encroachment of pine and juniper trees into historically open meadows on BLM lands located one-half to three miles northwest of Newcastle,



Photo of the feller-buncher machine and of the mastication head used.

Wyoming. These meadow encroachment treatments are being conducted in conjunction with thinning treatments in heavily stocked Ponderosa pine stands.

Many historically open meadows within the treatment area have slowly become overgrown with Ponderosa pine and juniper vegetation. The resultant "closed canopy" that occurs places the entire area at a much higher risk of catastrophic fire.

Natural resource specialist Chris Frank with BLM's Newcastle Field Office has developed a multi-year plan for the treatment of



fuels in this area. Last year marked the starting point for treatments under this plan.

The meadow encroachment work was contracted out and consisted of mastication, chip and scatter. Equipment used by the contractor was a tracked feller buncher with a masticating head attached to the boom.

Treatment involved the removal of all conifer trees under nine inches diameter at breast height and over two feet in height. Hardwood trees, dead trees or standing snags were not removed.

After treatment, standing trees are reduced to chips, small chunks and short lengths of branches. Mastication of material reduces the need for burning slash piles generated from thinning and piling operations. Before and after results are quite dramatic.

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After treatment, open meadow returns.

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Protect Your Home from Wildfire sign on the porch of the Cascabel Community Center.

provide firefighters with locations of homes. This will aid wildland firefighters responding to wildfires in rural southeast Arizona.

BLM crews have also done their part by completing the first firebreak for the Cascabel community and donating a fiberglass embedded sign to the Firewise group. The sign was used for Cascabel's Christmas Fair, and is currently sitting on the porch at the community center. It describes various things homeowners can do to protect their homes from wildfires. Additional signs are being developed for the area, including placing a fire danger sign in the area to inform both residents and visitors about current fire conditions.

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Achieving Goals Using Interagency Cooperation

BLM's Kingman Field Office, located in northwestern Arizona, has completed several critical fuels reduction and hazard mitigation projects by collaborating and cooperating with local agencies. Cooperating agencies include the Arizona State Land Department, Mohave County, city governments, local fire departments, businesses and special interest groups. BLM is the only federal land management agency in the Kingman area that addresses hazardous fuels and fire prevention issues on public lands, so it is extremely important to develop strong working relationships with local cooperators.

The BLM Kingman fire staff identified a need to develop stronger, more

cooperative relationships with local stakeholders. Several partnerships and relationships were formed which led to the completion of many critical projects.

The Pine Lake Working Group of state, county, homeowners association and local agencies was developed to address hazardous fuels reduction issues, fire prevention education and to reduce the wildfire risk to the Pine Lake community. Private land owners in Pine Lake have allowed fuel breaks to be constructed on private property and the local fire department assists in implementing prescribed fires and hazardous fuel reduction projects.

Mohave County and BLM have jointly funded repair of a critical emergency access route severely damaged by flashfloods, and the cleanup of a hazardous fuels dump

site which posed a threat to Meadview community residents. The county has provided several electronic fire restriction and closure signs at no expense, personnel and equipment to support wildfire suppression and needed native rock and fill materials to repair road damage caused by the Wild Cow Fire. Mohave County officials have taken a proactive approach in dealing with fire hazard mitigation issues and have been very supportive of BLM actions.

Local law enforcement agencies and fire departments have been more than willing to assist in complying with fire restrictions and closures. Local news media have played an important role in getting fire related messages out to the public. News releases and public service announcements are being aired throughout the year, keeping the local communities informed and assisting BLM by delivering fire related messages.

The state land department has assisted by assessing homes in high risk communities and providing expertise in bark beetle infested and drought stricken areas. The state has facilitated approving grants for the local fire departments and has been extremely supportive in the use of prescribed fire on state lands surrounding these small communities.



Road repairs on emergency access route in the Hualapai Mountains.

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Private companies have also provided services to assist in hazard reduction. Local contractors such as Waste Management, Gambi Disposal and several other small companies have offered services for free or at reduced costs. They have recognized the value of giving back to their community and have become willing participants when asked to help.

Kingman and Mohave County area stakeholders concerned about fire hazard reduction have demonstrated that by working together much more can be accomplished.

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Idaho

Jim Sage Vegetation Treatment Directly Responds to National Fire Plan Goals

When the landscape of south central Idaho's Snake River Plain was historically working properly, one could see juniper trees along the rocky Jim Sage hillsides that are the backdrop of Cottonwood Basin, with sagebrush alone blanketing the valley. Fire would burn through the area, ultimately renewing vegetation and wildlife habitat for the next 50-75 year cycle of growth.

But with fire suppression and historic livestock grazing playing key roles in the story of the Jim Sage area, sagebrush is now far from alone in the Cottonwood Basin. Juniper has encroached into the valley and now dominates one of the few remaining areas capable of supporting sagebrush-steppe habitat in the Idaho Bureau of Land Management's Twin Falls District. During the past 30 years, average fire size in the mature junipers of the Jim Sage area has been less than five acres, clearly not enough to be doing the job of renewing the landscape.

Responding to these issues, fire use specialist Rance Marquez looked to the National Fire Plan goals of reducing hazardous fuels and restoring fire adapted ecosystems. Marquez began planning for a vegetation



More than fifty years ago, juniper encroachment was already beginning on the Cottonwood Basin landscape.

treatment in the Jim Sage area in January of 2002. A ten year plan was completed that will eventually treat up to 28,000 acres, of which 12,000 acres would entail heavy treatment such as chaining or prescribed fire. The goal of the project is not to eliminate juniper

altogether, but to provide for correct juniper management and maintenance on the hillside rather than in the valley. The first on-the-ground work, 1,200 acres of juniper chaining, was recently conducted in December of 2004.



Due to fire suppression and historic livestock grazing, juniper encroachment has become a priority issue in Idaho BLM's Twin Falls District. The Jim Sage Vegetation Treatment will spend the next ten years working to restore the landscape to correct working order.

“This project is being implemented slowly because we don't want to produce whole scale changes on the entire landscape,” Marquez said. “With incremental treatments we are trying to ensure the area can provide habitat for various species over the long term.”

With project work now actually visible on the landscape, both negative and positive responses have been received, though the majority of feedback is supportive. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game and Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, among others, have expressed their support of the effort.

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“This isn’t a fuels project versus a wildlife project,” Marquez said. “The distinction between the two is not exclusive and one does not take priority over the other in this project. We’re trying to restore a healthy landscape that will be good for both fuels and wildlife.”

Success of the project can be accurately judged only with the passing of time. “As humans we can’t judge the success of a knee surgery the day after the procedure has been completed. It takes months and years before we can really gauge the effectiveness of the surgery,” Marquez explains. “That same principle of course applies with vegetation treatment. Just as it would be with Mother Nature running her course, it will be years down the line that we can look at the landscape and see it’s success through renewal and restoration.”

The Jim Sage Vegetation Treatment Project should enable future generations to look across the Cottonwood Basin landscape of Idaho’s Snake River Plain, see an area that is again working properly, and know that BLM’s Twin Falls District fulfilled its mission to “sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the public lands, for use and enjoyment of present and future generations.”



This is a December 2004 photo of Cottonwood Basin after juniper was knocked down and piled for slash burning next fall.