

Snapshots

June 24, 2005



Successful BLM Projects Supporting the National Fire Plan

Table of Contents

Contents

New Mexico

Wildland Urban Interface Cooperation	1
Pre-Season Meeting Productive and Appreciated	2

California

Restoration of an Island	2
Just One Spark Lights the Way in Fire Safety Education	3

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

*Published by the Bureau of Land Management, Office of Fire and Aviation
National Interagency Fire Center, Boise, Idaho*

Snapshots

June 24, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

New Mexico

Wildland Urban Interface Cooperation

Edgewood, New Mexico is a rapidly growing community 30 miles east of Albuquerque. BLM's Taos field office and town of Edgewood are combining efforts to respond to needs of both local residents and resource management.

A 280 acre parcel BLM land covered with thick pinyon pine, juniper and ponderosa pine woodland is in the middle of Edgewood neighborhoods. With a high density of trees on the land, there are significant concerns about wildfires.

The Town of Edgewood applied for a Recreation and Public Purpose Patent from BLM, which would allow it to plan for public use and take responsibility for general management of the



Justin Dean, BLM's lead biological technician explains the process of hazardous fuels reduction at a public scoping meeting.

area. However, the patent would not relinquish responsibility of the Taos BLM office to manage resources or cooperate with neighbors. As a result, the fire program staff is responding to requests for fire protection in this wildland urban interface area.

Historically, fire has maintained pinyon, juniper and ponderosa forests in northern New Mexico. Hazardous fuels reduction projects through the use of the Healthy Forest Initiative have been planned by the Taos fire program. The first priority will



A view of the heavily vegetated BLM land and the neighboring community of Edgewood.

be to mechanically thin the area to reduce the number of trees and open up the canopy. After thinning is completed, slash will be piled and burned. These treatments will improve forest and watershed health by reducing tree density and promoting regeneration of ground cover and the growth of native grasses.

The categorical exclusion for wildland urban interface treatments and the Recreation and Public Purposes patent require public scoping. Since these projects were being planned concurrently, a joint public scoping meeting was held. At the meeting, interested community members had

opportunity to learn more about the proposed projects. BLM staff explained the hazardous fuels reduction projects and gave examples of what people could expect to see, and Edgewood's planner outlined the town's recreation patent application proposal.

Mechanical treatments are scheduled to begin this summer and area residents are excited to see results. One Edgewood resident commented, "I observed a thinning project in an area which greatly improved it. It provides fire protection and better health for the forest. I absolutely support the proposal." By working together, BLM and Edgewood have found common ground in improving management, protecting residents and restoring forest conditions.

Contact: Pat Pacheco, Fire Management Officer (505) 751-4717



Current canopy conditions on the Edgewood BLM parcel.



Typical conditions on the BLM-private land border.

Snapshots

June 24, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

Pre-Season Meeting Productive and Appreciated

Wild Horse, New Mexico is a remote rural community located in Catron County. The area is a classic wildland urban interface with permanent and vacation homes nestled among ponderosa savannahs, pinyon-juniper woodlands and grasslands.

Recently, BLM's Grants Field Station fire crew organized a pre-fire season meeting in the community based on several recommendations that came from the final 9/11 investigation report. The report suggested establishing regular local planning and training meetings with diverse agencies and resources so they could practice working together to improve multi-agency response to incidents. Applying this recommendation to the upcoming fire season seemed both timely and worthwhile.

The meeting was specifically designed to have the BLM initial attack fire staff meet the rural fire department's volunteers and community members, and



Representatives from Wild Horse and Pie Town volunteer fire departments and BLM meet prior to the start of fire season.



BLM and volunteer department members practice during the pre-season wildland fire drill.

provide a mock fire scenario as a training exercise.

As word of the meeting spread to nearby Pie Town, volunteer fire department members decided to participate. The get together provided an opportunity to discuss communication and radio frequencies, available equipment, personnel and qualifications, Incident Command System organizational structure, unified command, and checkpoint protocols for incoming resources and outgoing residents. It confirmed that local volunteer fire departments want to be involved with protection and suppression activities within their home jurisdiction. Local knowledge of hazards, roadways, homes and fuel conditions are invaluable tools to agency responders

who live outside the immediate area.

The mock fire scenario involved a structure fire moving into the wild lands, a real possibility in the community. The exercise was designed to get different groups to communicate with one another, have the initial attack group provide directions to the fire for the incoming responders then brief them on scene. The mock drill went well but a difference in briefing techniques



Participants strategize during the mock fire scenario.

between various responders was identified. In an effort to develop consistent local protocols, BLM provided National Wildfire Coordination Group Incident Response Pocket Guides to all participants.

The BLM fire crew's extra effort to meet with interested residents and volunteer department members prior to the start of fire season was productive for all involved and especially appreciated by local residents. The day's success assures that this will become an annual meeting to help everyone prepare for the threat of wildland fire.

California

Restoration of an Island

You might ask yourself why BLM is using fire to help in the restoration of an island in the Central Valley of California. It is no ordinary island and no ordinary restoration project.

Atwell Island is in the southeastern portion of Tulare Lake which as recently as 100 years ago was the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi River. The lake has been dry for many years, with its water now stored behind foothill dams and used for agriculture. The Atwell Island Restoration Project is part of the Bureau of Reclamation Farmland Retirement program, designed to remove marginal farmland from production so the irrigation water can be used on more productive lands.

Snapshots

June 24, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

In the case of Atwell Island, although the land was purchased by the Bureau of Reclamation, all 6,000 acres are now owned and managed by BLM. The purpose of the project is to restore native valley grassland and alkali sink habitats on an area that for the past 100 years was covered by vast fields of cotton, oats, and alfalfa. Atwell Island is currently home to three federally listed animal species; mountain plover, Tipton's kangaroo rat, and the San Joaquin kit fox. One of the restoration tools being used is prescribed fire which aids in seedbed preparation and the removal of the invasive non-native weed plants that have taken over the fallow fields.

Several different phases of restoration involving fire took place this past year. One included using an AmeriCorp crew to remove the non-native vegetation from the banks of the irrigation canals. Once the vegetation was removed, the crew came back in and planted creeping wild rye (*Elymus triticoides*)

seed and Goodding's yellow willow (*Salix gooddingii*) cuttings along the newly cleaned banks. The piles were then burned in place to help reduce the chance of the seed spreading into other parts of the project area and on to neighboring farm fields.

During 2004, a broadcast burn totaling 40 acres was also completed. This project was designed to remove the non-native invasive annual plant five-hook basia (*Bassia hyssopifolia*) and to stimulate saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) regeneration in the area. This burn was used as a test to determine whether broadcast burning was a good approach to restoration in this habitat, and so far, the results show that the burn was successful.

A mix of native seeds was planted in the burn area within a few days after the fire including valley saltbush



Photo of prescribed burn taking place.

(*Atriplex pycnantha*), goldenbush (*Isocoma acradenia*), common spikeweed (*Hemizonia pungens*) and goldfields (*Lasthenia californica*). Six months later, the saltgrass has come back well after the burn and the annuals that were seeded achieved over 80 percent cover at the height of the spring bloom. Prescribed burns are looking like a very important technique in future restoration efforts. An additional 120 acres are scheduled to be burned and seeded in the fall of 2005.

The Atwell Island Restoration Project serves as a good example of how fire and resources can work together to achieve land management goals.

Contact: Steve Laymon, Atwell Island Project Manager, (661) 391-6117

Just One Spark Lights the Way in Fire Safety Education

California's urban centers have been expanding into wildlands, creating new rural communities where wildland environment and urban attitudes have melded into a situation where one spark has

potential for major consequences.

To help avoid potentially explosive scenarios during wildfire, the High Desert Fire Prevention Association has been leading fire safety efforts in Kern County for the past 20 years. A large fire safety program component is teaching fire safety to over 4,500 elementary students each year. The High Desert Fire Prevention Association is an interagency group of fire professionals from BLM's Bakersfield Field Office and California Desert District, U.S. Forest Service's Sequoia National Forest, Kern County Fire Department, and China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station.

This year the association, Kern River Valley Fire Safe Council, State Farm Insurance, and Walmart collaborated on a fire education effort which focused on promoting the message "Just One Spark" during a poster contest supporting Wildfire Awareness Week. Presentations were made to over 4,000 kids throughout the county from kindergarten to fifth grade. The group judged 1,190 posters identifying winners based on the artwork, theme, and message.

"Just One Spark" was a message carried like wildfire throughout the county; starting in the heart and imagination of child's artwork, carried by the media and fire agencies, and continuing through a wide range of community members. Heidi Yi, a first place poster winner, drew a picture with people standing in



San Joaquin kit fox. (US Fish and Wildlife Service photo)

Snapshots

June 24, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

a line holding hands, providing a link between a healthy environment and a scarred, burned landscape and celebrating collaboration.

First place poster winners received a \$50 gift certificate from Walmart and a chance to compete for a grand prize. Second place winners received a \$20 gift certificate, and third place, a backpack filled with educational items from Smokey Bear himself. There were a total of 36 prizes awarded

valued at over \$1,000, and two different art campaigns which were used to advertise and promote wildfire safety. With the collaborative education efforts of the High Desert Fire Prevention Association, community attitudes in Kern County's wildland-urban interface are in support of fire safety and a balance between urban and wildland issues.

Contact: Deborah Santiago,
Fire Mitigation & Education
Specialist, BLM Bakersfield
Field Office, (661) 391-6097



Poster Contest Grand Prize Winners, Heidi Yi, and Boyer Coursey

WILDFIRE!
Just One Spark...

WHAT IF YOU LOST YOUR HOME?
We all need defensible space.
Help make your wildland communities fire safe.

ARE YOU READY?
High Desert Fire Prevention Association and the Kern River Valley Fire Safe Council
Working together to educate communities.

Support provided by:

www.krvfiresafecouncil.com

WILDFIRE!
Just One Spark...

STAND UP!
Working together our communities
will be fire safe.

ARE YOU READY?
High Desert Fire Prevention Association
Kern River Valley Fire Safe Council
Working together to educate communities.

Support provided by:

www.FireSafeCouncil.org

Winning posters from the elementary students.