

Snapshots

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Successful BLM Projects
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Utah

Phase II Begins at Peters Canyon

The Peters Canyon wildland-urban interface mitigation project is underway. The project is located seven miles north of Monticello, Utah along State Highway 191 within BLM's San Juan Field office resource area.

The project covers 158 acres of overstocked beetle-killed pinion-juniper. Several homes surrounded by public lands could be severely impacted by wildfire without mitigation efforts.

BLM crews have been hand-thinning in Peters Canyon over two years to treat areas where using machinery wasn't an option. This spring, contractors will bring in a brush hog to treat accessible parts of the remaining project area.

Slash generated by crews will be piled and prepped for



Pile burning is taking place as part of work being done in Peters Canyon.



Home in the wildland-urban interface located on the west side of the Peters Canyon project.

burning the following winter. Larger slash will be made available to the public for firewood through the wood permit program.

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Fuels build up in the Peters Canyon area that will be treated.

Brookside Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Underway in Southwest Utah

In 2002, residents of Central, Brookside, and Mountain Meadows completed writing a community fire plan which identified a need for fuel breaks on public lands around them. Over three years, members of the Dixie Regional Council for Fire Prevention and Preparedness worked with officials from Utah Forestry, Fire, and State Lands, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management to increase wildfire preparedness, educate homeowners about defensible space, and mitigate hazardous fuel loads on private and public lands.

With help of Utah Forestry, Fire, and State Lands and contractors paid with National Fire Plan grant monies, over 90 properties in the surrounding area have reduced threats of wildfire by creating defensible space around homes. In February of this year, Color Country Fuels and Wildland Urban Interface Committee representatives and Fred Frey, chairman of the Dixie Regional Council for Fire Prevention and Preparedness, accepted a National Fire Plan Award for excellence in hazardous fuel reduction on behalf of work that done in the Central - Brookside area.

Last summer, the communities of Brookside and Central were threatened by several fast moving wildfires, forcing home



In summer of 2004, the Dammeron Fire burned 3,400 acres adjacent to the community of Brookside and Brookside fuels project.

evacuations on two separate occasions. Fortunately, no homes were lost in either case. A fuel break implemented by Dixie National Forest is credited with slowing one fire that had potential to destroy many homes. Nearly 100 households were evacuated when the Cal Hallow Fire pushed towards community homes, but once fire hit the fuel break it dropped to ground and allowed firefighters a chance to suppress it.

Over the next few months, nearly 1,000 acres of BLM land surrounding Brookside will be treated to create a fuel break to reduce the threat of wildfire on private lands. In the 1960's much of the project area had been chained and seeded with a mix of native and non-native



The mobile chipper-shredder was used to treat an area near several homes along the Santa Clara River.

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grass species, but over the past 40 years, trees have gradually returned.

The project area is considered critical mule deer habitat. Treatments will increase forage opportunities by releasing grass, forbs and shrub species once competing pinyon and juniper trees are removed.

Along with a continuous fuel load surrounding the community, Brookside has an issue with road access. Homes east of the Santa Clara River have only one adequate escape route which crosses the river to the north. In event of wildfire, many residents may not have time to get out using it road because of the amount of fuel present. An escape route may be cut off completely by a fire from the north.

BLM has worked closely with the Dixie Regional Council to develop an area for residents to gather should their exit access be compromised.

So far approximately 70 acres on the south end of the

The Dixie Regional Council for Fire Prevention and Preparedness has been successful in urging homeowners to do their part in reducing wildfire threat. So far over 90 properties have done fuels mitigation work.



BLM "bullhog", a mobile chipper/shredder, works along the Baker Dam Recreation Area.

community have been treated using a mobile chipper shredder and seeded with fire resistant plant species to create a green strip. An additional 50 acres along the Baker Dam Reservoir Road north of the community has been similarly treated, offering residents fire protection at a popular recreation area.

This summer approximately 700 acres will be hand cut by contract and BLM crews, and an additional 160 acres will be treated with a mobile chipper shredder. For more information on this fuels reduction project or other projects in southwest Utah visit www.colorcountryfire.gov.

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Salt Lake Uses a New Tool—Stewardship Contracts, an Innovative Approach to Reduce Fuels

When Utah State University Tooele County Extension Agent Linden Greenhalgh heard about the Hill Spring Stewardship Contract offered by BLM's Salt Lake Field Office, his interest was piqued. Promoting economic development and opportunity is a large part of Greenhalgh's job and he liked what he learned about the project.

Within days an on-site visit was arranged for Greenhalgh, an interested citizen, Dave Scott, BLM forest product specialist Kyle Hansen, and BLM Fire Education and Mitigation Specialist Erin Darboven.

Not only did Greenhalgh and Scott like what they heard, they really liked what they saw. Walking through approximately ten of the available 300 acres available on Hill Spring, they saw huge potential for juniper fuel wood, posts, and poles. They talked about potential for fence post sales at a local farming equipment store, firewood for vending and personal consumption, and economic opportunity for local non-profit organizations, church organizations and scout troops to gather and sell firewood, posts, and poles.

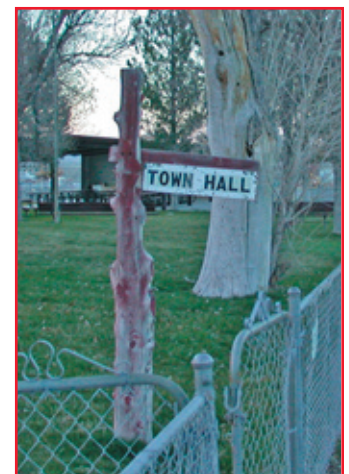
Greenhalgh asked BLM Salt Lake field office staff to give a presentation about Hill Springs contract to a local meeting hosted by a state agency for



Rush Valley residents gathered to learn about stewardship contract opportunity on adjacent federal land.

local farmers and ranchers. The audience also liked what they heard about the stewardship contract. Many wanted to sign up immediately to gather wood and posts. As a result, a core group of residents is working with an attorney to determine requirements to form a local association of wood gatherers to bid on the project. Their excitement level remains high.

BLM has a variety of tools at its disposal for reducing hazardous fuels. Initial field office experience with stewardship contracting has shown positive social and economic impacts. Contract size is only one aspect for success. Others are



Town Hall sign used thinned juniper post from the stewardship contract!

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Utah State University Extension Agent Linden Greenhalgh simulates how the juniper stand can be thinned and wood by-products made.

timeline, activities involved, contracting mechanism used, and performance measures employed.

The Hill Springs project is an example of dedicated BLM staff working toward interconnected goals of reducing hazardous fuels, creating wildlife habitat, improving rangeland health and managing recreation areas while helping communities.

Partnerships, such as those promoted through stewardship contracting, allow BLM to use a creative approach to reducing hazardous fuels while building rural community capacity to capitalize on new trends in natural resource management.

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Nevada

Sagebrush Mowing Benefits Wildlife, Reduces Catastrophic Fire Risk

Creation of a long fuel break in the Owyhee Desert north of Elko during October-November 2004 will mitigate dangers of catastrophic wildfire and improve habitat for sage grouse and other wildlife species.

The 700,000-acre treatment site in the Owyhee Desert is one of the largest unbroken sagebrush areas in the United States. It is located 100 miles north of Elko, west of Wilson reservoir. BLM hired a contractor to mow sagebrush and other vegetation in a 13-mile long strip, which varies from

300 to 500 feet wide.

“We want to protect the area from large wildfires like we experienced in 1999, 2000, and 2001, and we want to improve the wildlife habitat – particularly for sage grouse,” said BLM Elko Field Office Wildlife Biologist Ken Wilkinson.

According to Wilkinson, the zigzag “S” pattern of mowing was designed to provide cover for wildlife.

“The ‘S’ pattern is less visually distracting as well,” he said.

BLM also instructed the contractor to alternate rows. For example, they might mow 26 feet, leave 13 feet intact, move over and mow another 26 feet.

“This alternating pattern keeps some wildlife cover intact and also allows room for new plants to establish,” Wilkinson said. “The alternate mowing pattern also follows accepted Nevada sage grouse guidelines for habitat restoration.”



Photo was taken after first snowfall. The zig zag “S” mowing pattern is visible. It was designed to provide wildlife cover.



A virtual sea of sagebrush stretches north into Idaho

Additional considerations were necessary for improving breeding display, or “lek” areas.

“We instructed the contractor mow a three-acre and a two-acre block near a sage grouse breeding display area that resulted from a small wildfire in the 1980s,” Wilkinson said. “The lek area was starting to get overgrown, and sage grouse prefer breeding areas with short vegetation.

“We also seeded about six miles of mowed areas with yarrow, a forb that sage grouse like to eat,” Wilkinson said. “The initial efforts appear to be working right away.”

One evening during autumn the contractor spotted about 50 sage grouse roosting in several flocks along six miles of freshly mowed rows. According to Wilkinson, this is important because it shows sage grouse are not avoiding mowed areas and several flocks have actually selected it for night roosting.

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“During a sage grouse lek survey overflight in April 2005, we saw several sage grouse strutting in a three-acre block we made allowances for during mowing,” Wilkinson said. “This means that the treatment we did last fall worked as planned.”

According to Assistant Fuels Manager Ky Kincade, the design breaks up continuity of fuels, helping to prevent catastrophic habitat loss in event of a major wildfire.

“We’d like to create a network of fuel breaks in the future to help protect the area,” Kincade said. “The more fuel breaks we have, the better. In the event of fire, the fuel breaks provide fire fighting anchor points.”

Idaho

Myrtle Creek Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Project

What do you get when you combine effects of drought, 90 years of fire suppression, a long hot summer, an unknown fire source, and a municipal watershed? A not-so-typical late summer fire in northern Idaho that quickly and severely impacted water supply for the City of Bonners Ferry.

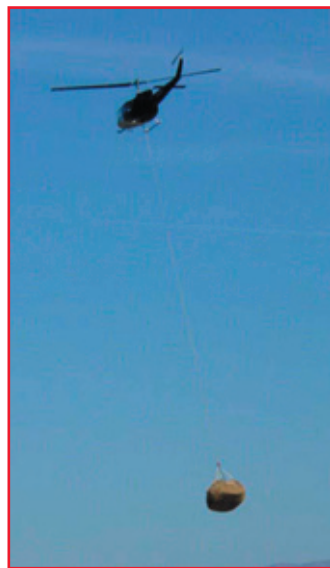
The Myrtle Creek Fire started September 2, 2003, and quickly burned 3,600 acres of heavy fuel laden forest in the municipal watershed for the City of Bonners Ferry. The fire burned hot, leaving behind layers of ash which rapidly slid



Revegetation efforts: Contractors planting shrubs and fire resilient tree species in April 2005.

down steep terrain and into the city’s water source. The city responded quickly and shifted to their secondary water source, the Kootenai River.

Up until about 15 or 20 years ago, “good” forest



Certified weed-free straw mulch was sling-loaded and dropped using a helicopter to scatter straw across the burned landscape.

management included full suppression of most fire starts. Fire was thought to be mostly destructive and ecologically unsound. Most of us can remember seeing and hearing Smokey saying, “Only you can prevent forest fires.” In recent years land management agencies recognized ecological ramifications of suppressing all wild fires and are now implementing new approaches under National Fire Plan guidelines.

As a result of full suppression philosophy, natural fuels built to alarming levels, especially in stands where fires naturally burned at seven to 30 year intervals in low-severity areas and every 35 to 100 years in mixed-severity areas. The stage had been set for the 2003 wildfire in Myrtle Creek’s drainage.

Of 3,600 acres burned in the Myrtle Creek Fire, the majority is managed by Idaho Panhandle National Forest.

Bureau of Land Management Coeur d’Alene Field Office, manages 210 acres while the remaining land is either private or managed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Due to the small, scattered nature of BLM public lands in northern Idaho, the U.S. Forest Service or Idaho Department of Lands has responsibility for wildfire suppression. A Type 1 Incident Management Team was called in for the Myrtle Creek fire due to complexities, size and issues involved.

Even before control of the fire was achieved, the U.S. Forest Service formed a Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation Team, which recommended immediate stabilization efforts to minimize soil movement, sedimentation into Myrtle Creek, and impact to habitat for threatened and endangered species within the watershed.

Approximately \$1.2 million was appropriated for emergency measures on both forest service and BLM



Straw, dropped by helicopter, falls like gold dust onto the charcoal landscape.

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lands. Stabilization measures implemented on BLM lands were contracted through the forest service. In an attempt to stabilize the area prior to onset of fall rains and snows, funding was used for applying aerial straw mulch and aerial and ground hydro mulch, planting brush, treating noxious weeds, installing straw check dams and new culverts, and hardening road surface for ephemeral stream crossings.

Based on subsequent implementation monitoring, stabilization efforts were successful in minimizing excess sediment loads moving into the creek. Other than a for a short time immediately after the fire, Myrtle Creek has been able to supply high-quality potable water to satisfy city needs.

A 40 acre parcel of BLM land with a southern aspect was severely burned due to a chimney effect of flames moving upslope and through draws. Unfortunately, many large old ponderosa pine trees

were killed on steep slope due to extreme heat and flame lengths generated by heavy fuel levels.

BLM initiated efforts to salvage merchantable timber during fall and winter of 2003-2004. Since ponderosa pine begins to decline in value shortly after trees are killed, there was a sense of urgency to remove them while they had merchantable value.

The Myrtle Creek drainage lies within a grizzly bear management unit requiring forest activities to be completed by April 1, a time of year when bears begin emerging from dens. With the clock ticking, the Coeur d'Alene Field Office implemented a salvage sale that ultimately removed approximately 750,000 board feet of dead and dying ponderosa pine and Douglas fir.

Following the sale, remaining slash and natural forest fuels were mechanically treated during summer of 2004. A

local contractor used a small, tracked excavator to pile fuels into windrows, which were burned during February and March of 2005. The larger diameter downed woody material was not piled and left on-site to provide habitat for wildlife and to decompose naturally.

In addition to emergency stabilization efforts implemented immediately after the fire, BLM identified longer term rehabilitation measures including seeding native grasses and planting shrubs and fire resilient trees.

During fall of 2004, seeds of two native grasses, Idaho fescue and blue bunch wheatgrass, were aerially broadcast over a 40 acre south-facing parcel. About 50 acres of the most severely impacted area were reforested with ponderosa pine, western larch and western white pine in April 2005. In addition, native shrubs consisting of thimbleberry, ninebark, Oregon grape, red-stemmed ceanothus and Scouler willow were planted on the 40 acre piece.

A small business contractor planted trees produced from locally collected seed to ensure maximum seed viability and site-specific survival of seedlings. Shrub species were selected for site-specific viability and to mimic natural vegetative communities. Although winter of 2004-2005 was drier than average, the onset of plentiful spring rains provided almost optimum planting conditions. The Coeur d'Alene Field Office provided



Trees scorched by the Myrtle Creek fire were salvaged.

two to three project inspectors during all contract phases to ensure project specifications were followed.

It has been almost two years since wildfire initially impacted Myrtle Creek watershed in Boundary County. Conditions are vastly improved as a result of interagency efforts to stem accelerated surface runoff of sediment and to rehabilitate forest service and BLM lands.

Though BLM rehabilitation efforts are winding down, the U.S. Forest Service Bonners Ferry Ranger District in collaboration with its Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative partners are developing a strategy to protect the watershed from future catastrophic wildfire. With stabilization and rehabilitation measures in place and ongoing planning effort, the City of Bonners Ferry can rest easier knowing their domestic water supply will be less susceptible to effects of catastrophic wildfire.

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One of many new seedlings planted after the Myrtle Creek fire.

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Extensive Sagebrush Planting Responsive to Wildlife and Vegetation Needs in Idaho BLM Twin Falls District

When Idaho Bureau of Land Management refined its organization to enhance customer service and access, a fourth management district was established in October of 2004.

The fire and aviation program, formerly called South Central Idaho Fire and Aviation, was reorganized as the Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation Program. With the change, their wildfire suppression responsibility expanded from 3 to 4.3 million acres of public land with addition of the Jarbridge Field Office area.

In an effort to respond specifically to needs of the Jarbridge Field Office, Fire Use Specialist Brandon Brown developed a series of projects to

plant sagebrush in areas across field office and district lands to benefit wildlife and vegetation, as well as rehabilitate past fire areas. Each identified treatment area is less than 1,000 acres in size and will be hand-planted, which allowed the project to fall within categorical exclusion parameters of the President's Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003.

In early March of 2005, a fire and fuels crew completed an 800-acre sagebrush planting east of Bruneau Canyon. It is aimed at restoring a burned area to its historic fire regime by planting big sagebrush and perennial vegetation, which are critical to returning the fire cycle to more normal, healthy intervals. Reintroduction of big sagebrush also benefits wildlife and plant species such as sage grouse and Slickspot peppergrass. This is the first of several plantings that will be done across Twin Falls District.



Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation fuels crew member Clint Rogers works to plant one of 34,000 sagebrush plants as part of a fuels treatment within the Jarbridge Field Office.



Each about 12-inches tall, sagebrush plants will strengthen fire rehabilitation efforts, improve wildlife tracts and re-establish native vegetation in hazardous fuels areas.

Through an agreement with the Boise National Forest Lucky Peak Nursery, 34,000 seedlings, each about 12-inches tall, were purchased and hand planted in just under two weeks. With this first project complete, Twin Falls District began working on an agreement to donate 250 remaining seedlings to the College of Southern Idaho Horticulture Program where they will be planted at a campus facility for seed cultivation to be used for future BLM fuels work.

Brown subsequently obtained another 100,000 seedlings to be planted each year for the next five years, totaling 500,000 plants. The first 100,000 will be utilized in three upcoming projects, one each in Shoshone, Burley and Jarbridge Field Offices. In the Jarbridge area specifically, the next planting will be done in conservation areas for Slickspot peppergrass, a candidate for listing under the

Threatened and Endangered Species Act, as well as in isolated wildlife tracts and fire rehabilitation areas where sagebrush is not naturally re-establishing.

An upcoming Shoshone Field Office planting will be conducted in wildlife tracts and a former fuels treatment area where sagebrush is not re-colonizing at the desired rate.

In the Burley Field Office, isolated wildlife tracts will be included for planting, along with critical mule deer habitat. All will occur this fall, conditions permitting, with remaining projects to be completed in early spring of 2006 if necessary.

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