

Snapshots

October 14, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

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Nevada

Volunteers Create Defensible Space for Unionville Home

More than 40 volunteers from the Student Conservation Association, Nevada Division of Forestry and BLM Winnemucca Field Office spent a Sunday morning in late July removing excess vegetation from around the rural home of an elderly Unionville woman.

Organized by the Student Conservation Association Fire Education Corps based in the BLM Winnemucca Field Office, the project was designed to make the home of 72 year old Jeannie Koons safer from wildfire and create a demonstration site to show how defensible space around residences can also be attractive.



Nevada Division of Forestry Crew Leader Mary McDowell and homeowner Jeannie Koons watch as crews clear brush and tall grasses near the home in rural Unionville, Nevada.

Unionville is located on the east slope of the Humboldt Range, about 40 miles southwest of Winnemucca. A youthful Sam Clemens once tried his luck as a miner in Unionville during the boom years when silver from the Comstock Lode helped fund Union victory in the Civil War and accelerated statehood for the wild and turbulent Nevada Territory. Clemens would later achieve fame as one of America's greatest authors, writing under the pen name of Mark Twain.

When the cadre of workers arrived at the Koons house early on Sunday morning, July 24, they were determined to do the necessary work to help protect the town and its residents from the dangers of wildland fire. The bulk of the work was completed by the full group on the first Sunday, but it took several more days for the Winnemucca Student Conservation Association Corps to complete all the finishing touches.

Students removed substantial amounts of duff and debris that had built up close to the house and on the roof over the years, trimmed dead wood and lower tree limbs to help prevent rapid spread of wildfire from grasses at ground level into the overhanging branches into entire

trees, thereby endangering nearby structures. Brush was cleared away from the house, covered bridge and several outbuildings. A gravel walkway was installed and driveway re-graveled to create firebreaks and protect the house.

Corp members chipped tons of brush and debris into mulch which was spread over a large area between the house and a mountainside to inhibit the growth of new weeds and shrubs, which could potentially become fuel for wildfires. A low water use, drought tolerant zeriscape planting area was created to be both fire resistant and attractive in the mulched area. Plants such as October Daphne Sedum, Vera Jamison Sedum and Sand Cherry were purchased at reduced prices from a commercial nursery in Reno as well as from the Nevada Department of Forestry Washoe Nursery in Washoe Valley, south of Reno.

Streetsboro, Ohio, native Nichole Baker from the Winnemucca Fire Education Corps team coordinated the project. Cooperators included four other members of her team,



Before and after photos of the covered bridge. Work crews cut away thick brush for 30 feet on each side of the bridge to protect the property from wildfire threats.



five members of the Student Conservation Association Corps team based in BLM's Carson City Field Office, Nevada Division of Forestry Fire Protection Officer Zeke Stanton from Ely, Nevada Department of Forestry work crews from Winnemucca and Wells, and a BLM Winnemucca fire engine and crew.

"I really want to thank all the hardworking people from the Nevada Division of Forestry, BLM and the Student Conservation Association, as well as those who helped with the plants and the food," said Baker. "Without everyone working together we couldn't have completed the project."

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BLM mitigation specialist Jennifer Myslivy uses a heavy duty trimmer to cut away years of accumulated brush along a wooden fence line to reduce fire threats.

“All of us are very happy that we were able to help make Jeannie Koons’ house safer from wildfire, and we hope this encourages many others in the area to perform similar work around their homes and buildings.”

The brush along the creek bank both above and below the covered bridge had gotten so thick that even a man on foot couldn’t push his way through it. Workers cleared away the brush

not only to protect the bridge from wildfire and improve the view, but also to make it possible for wildland fire engines and other vehicles too large to fit through the bridge to ford the creek in an emergency.

All of the smaller-diameter brush and tree limbs were shredded by a mechanical shredding machine furnished by Nevada Division of Forestry. The larger diameter material was cut into firewood, and later added to the stack of fire logs across the creek.

As workers toiled away removing vegetation, one of them asked Koons if she’d ever seen trout in the stream that flowed beneath her covered bridge.

“There used to be, but not anymore” Koons answered sadly. “Not since it flowed so muddy for weeks this spring, with all the heavy rains we had on top of the big snowmelt.”

Later when much of the brush had been cleared from Buena Vista Creek, both above and below the covered bridge,

workers told Koons they’d seen at least three brown trout basking in the sun in a pool not far from the bridge.

A broad smile broke out on Jeannie Koons’ face.

Air Race Visitors Learn About Fire Prevention, Tankers and Smoke Jumpers

Every September for the past three years, the Reno Air Races have drawn large crowds of aviation fans out to Stead Air Field, north of the city. From 2002 to 2004, the races have brought in an average of 220,000 people for the five-day event.

This year, nearly a thousand visitors came to BLM’s Stead Air Tanker Base at the east end of the tarmac to learn about air tankers, smoke jumpers and fire prevention.

Sven Reibensalm and Dick Lagerwerff with the BLM Boise smokejumpers suited up scores of visiting school children with the outfit and gear that each of



The Reno, Nevada Air Races at Stead Air Field drew an average of 220,000 people during the annual five day event.

them wear when parachuting into remote areas to fight wildfires. The heavy back pack that the jumpers must carry out after the job is done was bigger than some of the children donning the gear.

One grade school boy wanted to know if jumpers had ever gotten killed while parachuting into the wildlands during a fire. Dick reassured the boy that smoke jumpers trained hard for their jobs, and were always careful when they jumped out of that “perfectly good airplane.”

Busloads of school children from grade school through high school learned the importance of fire prevention from BLM Battle Mountain’s Jennifer Myslivy, BLM Carson City’s Steve Edgar, and of course, from Smokey Bear.

BLM Aviation Manager Greg Gall and pilot Don Moline talked to scores of visitors about air tankers big and small. Their exhibit



Nevada Division of Forestry crew members trim large pine tree limbs adjacent to the home. The work was done to create a demonstration site showing how homes in small communities can be better protected from wildfire.

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Jennifer Myslivy from BLM's Battle Mountain District teaches school children about the importance of fire prevention.



BLM Boise smokejumper Dick Langerwerff puts a jumper suit on a school boy as part of the demonstration site at the Reno Air Races. Fellow jumper Sven Reibensalm worked with students during the event.

displayed photos of some of the earliest air tanker bases in the nation, and a small jar of red fire retardant.

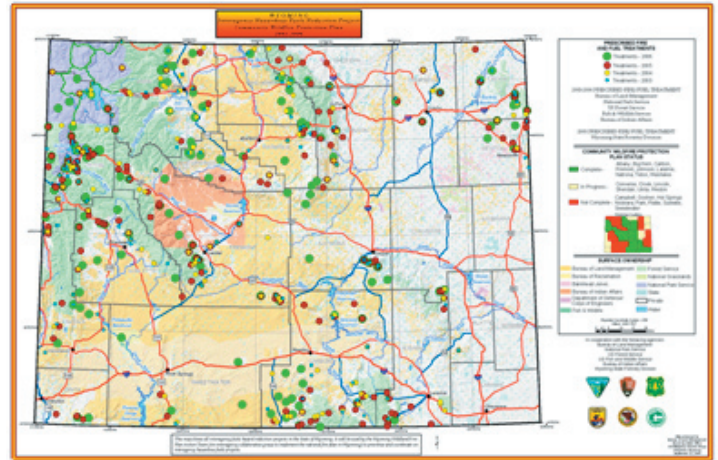
And like everybody else at the event, both BLM employees and their visitors stopped their ears and looked skyward when the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds screamed by at low altitude.

Wyoming

Interagency Collaboration

Interagency collaboration, coordination and communication are critical aspects of the 10 Year Comprehensive Strategy, the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003.

A hazardous fuels project checklist was developed by the Wyoming Fire Action Team, comprised of the Wyoming Division of State Forestry, BLM, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Wyoming Association of Counties. By utilizing the checklist, Wyoming BLM effectively collaborates with its interagency partners at the local and state level to meet National Fire Plan goals. The Wyoming Fire Action



Map of Wyoming's interagency fuels reduction projects.

Team reviews and categorizes each agency submission to insure that Wyoming is meeting national direction.

BLM fuels specialists fill out attachments for each fuels funded project for the current fiscal year. A compilation of the checklists is sent, either electronically or hard copy to the Assistant State Fire Management Officer for fuels by September 1 of any given year. The approach brings coordination to the process of selecting projects for the year for all agencies involved.

Prescribed Burn with Many Benefits

A multi-agency prescribed burn project has been completed by the BLM Kemmerer, Wyoming field office in an effort to reduce hazardous fuels and improve plant communities on federal lands adjacent to a wildland urban interface.

The 12,000 acre Rock Creek Prescribed Burn included aspen,

conifer, sage-grass, and mixed mountain shrub vegetation types. In the absence of fire many of these plant communities were in a decadent and dying state with little vigor or age class diversity. In conjunction with the prescribed burn there was also a 3,500 acre herbicide treatment on the northern boundary of the prescribed burn area that was completed in September of 2005.

Objectives were to reduce hazardous fuel accumulations and create burned and unburned mosaic to improve aspen, mountain shrubs, and sagebrush by improving the health, vigor, and age class diversity of these plant species. By improving plant communities in this area, the burn improved watershed health as well as critical big game winter and transitional range for mule deer, elk, moose, and antelope. The burn also improved habitat for other wildlife species such as brood rearing habitat for sage grouse.

As a result, land use objectives

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Hand igniting to secure the northern boundary at Rock Creek.



Helicopter preparing for aerial ignition for the Rock Creek prescribed burn project.

in the resource management plan and Rock Creek Area Management Plan are being achieved, and Wyoming Game and Fish Department big game herd unit objectives are supported.

Post burn utilization standards have also been developed to ensure proper post burn livestock management. This landscape scale treatment will help improve winter and transitional range in

one of the most crucial winter ranges in Wyoming, and for the only elk herd on the Bridger Teton National Forest that does not have a permanent feed ground.

on these treatments.

The project was submitted to the Southwest Wyoming sage grouse working group and the local Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation chapter. As a result they ended up committing dollars to help implement the project. With current issues associated with sage grouse and vegetation management, getting support from the working group was crucial to success.

Public education was done through press releases, flyers, public meetings and interpretive signs posted during the burn. There will also be permanent interpretive signs installed to inform the public of the natural role of fire and the benefits of using prescribed fire.

The work done provides a great opportunity to compare the vegetation data post burn for National Park Service lands which have no livestock grazing but about 300 elk using the area



Terra torch operations blacklining the perimeter day (above) and night (below).



Besides the many cooperators, donors contributed money to the project. The BLM, National Park Service, Forest Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and Southwest Wyoming Sage Grouse Working Group all provided funding to help implement it.

The prescribed burn was done in conjunction with an elk collaring study by BLM, U.S. Geological Survey, National Park Service and Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Elk were collared last winter and additional elk will be collared this year in an effort to see which treated areas elk use at different times of the year, and the effect of grazing

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frequently with BLM lands that have livestock as well as wildlife grazing. Ten permanent vegetation transects and photo points were established so that post burn data can be collected and analyzed to see if vegetation objectives were met, as well as interpret post burn results to help educate the public as well as present data to professionals in the prescribed burn field.

The elk collaring study will also be used as a public education tool to help explain which treatment areas are being used by wildlife as well as the effects of this use. The site will also be used as an educational location for Kemmerer fifth grade school classes, as well as tours for wildlife, public and scout groups. BLM's Kemmerer Field Office has already set up a tour for October 13 for a Russian delegation of natural resource specialists to tour the burn and learn about the natural role of fire and benefits of prescribed fire.



Starting aerial ignition operations on the project.



Photo after the burn showing the mosaic pattern created.