

Snapshots

September 30, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

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California

Camp Smokey Gazebo Promotes Biomass Utilization and Fire Education

A gazebo built at the California State Fair was used to demonstrate and promote small wood biomass utilization and provide an outreach structure for a fire prevention and education program known as Camp Smokey. Camp Smokey is an outdoor fire prevention, fire safety, and conservation education exhibit created and staffed by a multi-agency committee to outreach up to a million visitors a year.

The Camp Smokey gazebo was built under a cooperative agreement between the Bureau of Land Management and the Watershed Research and Training Center located in Hayfork, California. The Watershed Research and Training Center is a community-based nonprofit

organization started in 1993 to promote healthy communities and sustainable forests through research, education, training, and economic development.

The center is also a partner in *The Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities Partnership* which is creating economic opportunities in small communities by finding new ways to foster land stewardship. They are developing locally-owned small business and community cooperatives to undertake watershed restoration activities and marketable woody biomass products.

The gazebo was built using small-diameter round wood taken from hazardous fuels projects in northern California and southern Oregon. Logs taken from these projects are typically unmarketable wood. Utilizing them for products such as a gazebo helps to offset the costs of hazardous fuels reduction and reduce biomass waste.

One of the project areas, Post Mountain, near Trinity Pines, California has been identified in the Trinity County Strategic Fire Management Plan-Community Wildfire Protection Plan. It is a multifaceted cooperative project between the U.S. Forest Service, BLM, Watershed Research and Training Center, and private landowners. In 2002, the Post Mountain Volunteer Fire Department received \$50,000 from the BLM Community Assistance Program to implement a private lands fuels reduction project in the Post Mountain project area. Since 2001, BLM has provided approximately \$400,000 in grant funding to Trinity County to assist in pre-fire efforts.



Post Mountain project area fuels reduction work; a multifaceted cooperative project in northern California.

Outreach messages at Camp Smokey this year included defensible space, fire safety, fire ecology and biomass utilization.

Contact: Miriam Morrill, BLM California State Office, (916) 978-4436

Watershed Research and Training Center <http://www.thewatershedcenter.org/>. Small-diameter and underutilized woody materials <http://www.fpl.fs.fed.us/tmu/>.



The Camp Smokey Command Post, built with small roundwood logs obtained from hazardous fuels projects in northern California.

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Fuels Reduction Protects Prehistoric Rock Art Site

BLM's Fort Ord fuels crew assisted in a hazardous fuel reduction project to reduce the threat of wildfire damage to a rock art site known as Birdwell Rock National Historic Place. The project meets National Fire Plans goals to reduce hazardous fuels and protect National Historic Places.

Birdwell Rock is a prehistoric archaeological site located in rural western Fresno County, California, and is between 800 to several thousand years old. The site was named after a local rancher, Ken Birdwell, who discovered the site and brought it to the attention of local archaeologists nearly 20 years ago. The site consists of a large sandstone



Crew members in front of Birdwell Rock.

boulder depicting ancient Native American symbols. Archaeologists conjecture these symbols represent ancient rituals associated with special Native American ceremonies.

Birdwell Rock is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a list of outstanding cultural resources found throughout the nation. This rock art site is special enough to make the list because of its unusual



Crew members remove hazard fuels from Birdwell Rock archaeological site.

characteristics, including the presence of pictographs and petroglyphs together on the rock. Pictographs are painted images while petroglyphs are carved, or sometimes “pecked,” into the rock

surface. It is uncommon to find both styles in the same place on one feature.

Last winter California received a lot of precipitation which contributed to a higher-than-normal fuel load for this fire season. Since the petroglyphs and pictographs at Birdwell Rock were imprinted onto very soft sandstone, it was decided that by reducing the flashy fuels around the archaeological site it would lessen the chance of wildfire damage.

Prior to vegetation removal, BLM coordinated with neighboring ranchers and consulted local Native Americans. The Santa Rosa Rancheria of Tachi Yokuts Indians were interested in the fuels reduction project and agreed that protection of the site was important.

The Bureau of Land Management's Hollister Field Office fuels reduction crew, fire mitigation specialist, wildlife

biologist, and archaeologist spent a day at the site to reduce overgrown vegetation immediately around the rock art feature. They were careful to remove excess vegetation without harming rare natural or cultural resources.

Although the size of the treatment area was quite small, the positive effects from the project were great. Birdwell Rock is now better protected from potential wildfire damage and there is increased awareness about this extraordinary rock art site.

Contact: Mike Chiodini or Erik Zaborsky, Hollister Field Office (831) 630-5000

Sparking Citizen Support Squelches Wildfire

A grant from the Bureau of Land Management through the California Fire Safe Council helped harmonize community wildfire safety efforts in the Fresno County area served by the Highway 168 Fire Safe Council. The grant for a Community Fire Safe Project Coordinator has increased citizen participation and support for fire safety projects.

“This project was more successful than anticipated largely as a result of enthusiastic community participation,” said Richard Bagley, Highway 168 Fire Safe Council president.

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Volunteers staffed the Highway 168 Fire Safe Council booth at the 2005 Fire Safe Festival in Prather, California. Council President Richard Bagley credits the enthusiastic participation of volunteers with an increased focus on fire safety in the Council's area.

As the project was underway, a rapidly spreading wildfire threatened some 100 homes and barns in an area south of Shaver Lake. It hit a fuel break, demonstrating the effectiveness of fire hazard mitigation. This fanned the flames of volunteer support.

“The wildfire hit the recently completed Council fuel break and the fire ‘went to ground,’ burning only on the forest

floor where fire personnel were able to stop its spread and save all the homes,” said Bagley.

Other Council achievements were coordinating and completing a community wildfire protection plan, incorporating fire safety and fire ecology in elementary and high school curricula, hosting an annual community Fire Safe Festival and helping a local teen become an Eagle Scout.

Contact: California Fire Safe Council Sierra Region Grants Manager, Brenda Rightmyer, (800) 257-7066

Thanks to its education programs and the combined efforts of the community, the Council reports a 30 percent greater compliance with hazard reduction clearance regulations and a 20 percent reduction in preventable fire starts.



Sierra high school student Daniel Foster earned Eagle Scout status for his fire safety project that included installing mile markers along a remote road and using GPS to map most of the home addresses in the area. Foster gave a copy of the map to each fire station in his home area.

Montana

Good Medicine for Bighorns

The Bureau of Land Management's Central Montana Fire Zone recently coordinated a successful prescribed fire designed to improve bighorn sheep habitat about 15 miles north of Winifred, Montana.

The Wild Horse prescribed fire project area included roughly 1,700 acres of public land near Chimney Bend south of the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River.

“We hoped to burn 30 to 40 percent of this project area in a mix of burned and unburned mosaic. Doing so would increase vegetation diversity, rejuvenate palatable shrubs, forbs and grasses, and reduce the amount of dense juniper and reduce conifer encroachment onto open rangeland. Our wildlife biologist felt if we could accomplish these objectives it would convert some pretty good bighorn habitat into great habitat,” said Cindy Wilson, BLM fuels specialist in Lewistown.

Prescribed fire on public land in this area already had the benefit of public involvement through several planning efforts. The adjacent landowner and grazing permit holder was highly supportive of the effort. Staffers in BLM's Central Fire Zone carefully assessed potential impacts and defined the prescriptions or conditions

necessary to complete a safe, successful burn.

“After conducting field inventories, working with area landowners and fire planning you just have to wait to see if the weather allows you an opportunity to burn,” Wilson said.

In April the necessary conditions did come together and about 20 BLM and Lewis and Clark National Forest fire staffers went to work. On the first day, they used drip torches to black line a portion of the project area perimeter. This break would lessen the potential for an escape during the main burn the following day.

On the second day, burn boss Steve Knox, a BLM fuels management specialist in Lewistown, had about 32 fire personnel from the Lewistown and Miles City BLM offices, Lewis and Clark National Forest and Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge on hand. Each was assigned specific control and safety duties.



Ignition Specialist Dennis Crawford and Wildlife Biologist Fred Roberts discuss first-order fire effects in a recently burned area.

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A group of bighorn sheep moving out of the project area prior to burn implementation.

Weather conditions were perfect, the short-term forecast looked good and Knox decided to ignite the interior. “We had good weather conditions, a good forecast and solid fire personnel to help. These things all make the decision to burn a little easier,” Knox said.

A helicopter owned by Gliko Aviation of Belt, Montana, dropped ignition spheres, balls slightly smaller than a ping-

pong ball filled with ignition chemicals, at strategic points designed to use wind direction and speed to move the fire in the right direction.

Within several hours, the personnel had dropped about 18,000 ignition spheres on target. The Wild Horse prescribed fire started and burned just as it was planned. After about five hours approximately 40 percent of the project area had burned into a

mosaic pattern, and there had been little problem with slop-over or spot fires.

During the next two days the area received light precipitation. For another four days Knox had the fire patrolled to reduce the chance of a flare-up or any other complication. Again, there were no problems.

The Wild Horse met the objectives it was designed for and was a very successful prescribed fire.

While it’s still early, the burned area experienced good green-up and all indicators point toward greatly improved sheep habitat and range conditions. Fred Roberts, a BLM wildlife biologist in Lewistown, was very pleased with the effort.

Eastern States

Hotshots Provide Hurricane Relief

While people all over the United States were tuned into their televisions watching the unfolding widespread devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Eastern States Office employees in Jackson, Mississippi weren’t. Their televisions didn’t work and they were living the experience.

Even though Jackson is approximately 200 miles from the coast, Katrina was still a Category One hurricane when

she blew through town, taking any sense of normalcy with her. Suddenly Jackson had no electricity, ice, or gas. Conveniences taken for granted suddenly were gone. Jackson wasn’t even one of the worst hit areas.

The Jackson Hotshots were on standby and were quickly deployed to the hard hit Mississippi Gulf Coast. Their sawyer skills were in high demand since so many downed trees had cut off the coastal communities from the rest of the state.

Jackson Hotshots spent a full tour of duty removing trees and other debris from roadways, highways and driveways. They also spent several days clearing a pad for a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital unit coming to assist with the coastal communities’ medical needs. While they were on rest and rotation,



The Premo Sphere Dispenser proved to be the right ignition tool for the job.



Jackson Hotshot crew member cleaning storm debris along the Gulf Coast.

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Hurricane Rita made landfall. The Jackson Hotshots were immediately deployed to San Antonio, Texas to await their orders. The response continues.

Contact: Shayne Banks (601)
977-5405



Residents had to resort to basic communications during the storm aftermath.



Highway view to the Gulf showing Katrina's devastation.