

Snapshots

September 2, 2005



Successful BLM Projects
Supporting the National Fire Plan

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Arizona

Nation's 100th Firewise USA Community Recognized

Palominas recently became Arizona's fourth recognized Firewise community and the 100th in the United States. The Palominas Firewise Community consists of a 25 square mile area adjacent to the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area in southeastern Arizona. Located along the Mexican border, the community includes 300 homes with 750 residents.

Just 16 months after attending a statewide Firewise Communities workshop in Tucson, a small group of motivated homeowners along the San Pedro River completed a community wildfire protection plan. Their community plan was linked to a wildfire hazard assessment and mitigation plan completed by BLM in 2003.

the Palominas Firewise Community has been working closely with BLM during the past year and a half, along with the Arizona State Land Department Forestry Division, Cochise County, Palominas Volunteer Fire Department, the Nature Conservancy, Audubon, Palominas Community Alliance (non-profit partner), Arizona Department of Transportation, Home Depot, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Take Pride in America and Boy Scouts of America.

Last fall the community and Boy Scouts worked with BLM to establish a firebreak at the community and public land boundary. The firebreak was established along a state highway right of way to keep wildfires from spreading from BLM land and threatening homes to the north.

In order to achieve Firewise Communities USA status, the Palominas Firewise Communities board volunteered over 650

hours, completed a firebreak between BLM public land and private property, attended Firewise workshops and obtained cooperative agreements with nine key partners.

"The history of wildfires around the San Pedro River corridor near the Mexican border illustrates an ongoing threat to lives and property of those of us living and working nearby, as well as a threat to the natural environment and community aesthetics," said Katie Salwei, Palominas Firewise Community Board Chairperson. "Working together with my neighbors and various organizations to address this threat has been a very rewarding experience."

Major priorities of the Palominas Firewise Community are hazardous fuels reduction projects, burying utilities, and fire awareness outreach projects. They are working with BLM to acquire grants and to complete future projects. One project recently completed with BLM

funds was construction of a Firewise kiosk by a local carpenter placed at the community center.

Contact: David Peters, Gila District Fire Mitigation Specialist, (520) 258-7207

Arizona BLM and Arizona Department of Transportation Join Forces

Arizona's Department of Transportation and Arizona Bureau of Land Management have teamed up to alert motorists on Arizona highways about extreme fire danger that persisted this year. Highway information signs, familiar to motorists, were used to carry timely fire danger warning information. Signs included permanently mounted units above roadways and portable roadside trailers. BLM pays for hourly costs of operation and the Arizona Department of Transportation assists with programming, coordinating run times, and maintenance associated with each sign.

Located across the state on highways and interstates, 22 signs were programmed this year and were turned on during main burning time each day. Over the Fourth of July weekend, only six human caused fire starts were reported. Whether the signs had an impact or not is open to discussion, but, this minimal number of ignitions is a new record low for the state.

Contact: Glen Burkhardt, Arizona Mitigation-/Education Specialist, (602) 417-9310



Arizona motorists were alerted to fire danger with signs along highways.



Pictured left to right: FRONT ROW: Bernadette Polley from US Rep. Jim Kolbe's office; Katie Salwei, PFC Chairperson; Gordon Lewis, PFC Board; Tom Warfield, AZ St. Land Dept. Natural Resource Manager; BACK ROW: David Peters, BLM Fire Mitigation Specialist; Kim Collins, PFC Board; Bill Childress, San Pedro Riparian NCA Manager; Walter Kolbe, PFC Board; Damon McRae, BLM Fire Officer.

Palominas Firewise Community receives national certification on May 17, 2005.

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Mitigation and Prevention Messages on the Road

During this summer's fire severity season, BLM's Gila, Arizona District put up a couple different prevention messages in three towns. Since cars and trucks often start grass fires, the district felt it was important to get the word out in a few larger towns in southeast Arizona. Four stationary billboard signs were put up in Tucson, Sierra Vista and Safford, to encourage people to be careful not to start wildfires with their vehicles.

In addition to stationary signs, the Safford-Tucson Fire Management Zone set up traveling billboards in Tucson. Signs on trucks illustrated vehicle use and dry grass fire prevention messages, along with a survivable space Firewise message.

Contact: David Peters, Fire Mitigation Specialist, (520) 258-7207



One of the Safford-Tucson traveling billboards.

Utah

Like a Phoenix from the Ashes, Emergency Stabilization Plan Aids Ecological Renewal

Lake Mountain is one of the most fire-prone areas within BLM's Salt Lake Field Office jurisdiction. Lightning strikes and human caused fires combined with extremely flammable, light, flashy fuels make Lake Mountain host to many high intensity burns.

On the evening of September 17, 2004, a lightning caused Concrete Fire on Lake Mountain consumed over 500 acres of BLM managed public land in just 12 hours. When nearby residents awoke next morning they were stunned by dramatic blackened hills. Many wondered just how the land and their property would hold up to the upcoming monsoonal season.

Post fire rehabilitation work improves lands that are unlikely to recover naturally from effects of wildfires. Emergency stabilization work on land damaged by the Concrete Fire included reseeding burned areas, installing catch basins to handle increased water flows, and stabilizing slopes using straw. Renewable



Typical sediment catch basin on the Concrete stabilization project. Runoff sediment was caught to prevent flood runoff onto private and public land. At least 70 of these structures aided in slowing the flow of water and mud.



The spring of 2005 represented one of the wettest seasons on record, with record flows of runoff in the area. This catch basin represents many that were filled to overflowing capacity, going over the top. Like many, this catch basin was damaged but it did its job of slowing sediment and runoff flow in a highly above normal water year. It is planned that these sediment catch basins will be repaired and cleaned out this fall.

resource staff members from Salt Lake's Field Office drafted an emergency stabilization plan that included placing 70 sediment catch basins to prevent severe water erosion while protecting farmland and housing developments.

After five years of drought conditions, rains came with a

vengeance over the last year and dropped almost 150 percent of normal precipitation on land affected by the Concrete Fire. When clouds finally lifted in June resource advisors were pleased to see seeds sprouting from their labor and creating new vegetation. Work done under the emergency stabilization plan withstood above normal hard

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driving rains over the monsoon season. Ecological renewal on the landscape took place like a Phoenix rising from the ashes.

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New Mexico

Twenty Eight Communities Benefit from Seed Money

In 2004, the New Mexico Association of Counties and Bureau of Land Management agreed to be partners in an effort to reduce wildland fire risk to communities throughout the state. The association's link with all 33 counties within the state provided an effective outreach and education network for BLM's fire planning and risk-reduction efforts. Thus far, the partnership has been an unqualified success with wide ranging future potential.

Recently, the association launched its first Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant Program in partnership with BLM. The program was developed in response to a statewide survey

of county managers done by the association. When responses from all 33 counties were compiled, a clear picture emerged for at-risk communities and lack of sufficient funding to implement priority risk reduction activities were indicated. The resulting Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant Program was designed to specifically target at-risk communities by offering seed money to help defray costs of developing community wildfire protection plans or implementing fuel reduction treatments.

During the first funding cycle, 20 community based risk reduction proposals were received requesting more than twice the funds available. The New Mexico Association of Counties convened an interdisciplinary, interagency selection panel to review and rank proposals. Projects were funded in priority order until all available funds were expended. The program awarded seven grants that will help finance development of five community wildfire protection plans covering 28 rural communities, and two treatments for priority projects identified in existing plans. Recipients of this first round of grants are the Village of Cuba, Catron County, Cibola County, Socorro County, Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District, East Mountain Interagency Fire Protection Association, and the San Juan County Fire Department.

"Many of the issues BLM deals with involve and affect local communities. Our vision is to bring government closer to the people so that the needs of public land users and their communities are better incorporated into our management of New Mexico's 13 million acres of public lands," said BLM New Mexico State Director Linda Rundell.

"It is important for us to establish an information and communicative relationship between the New Mexico Association of Counties and the BLM where we each have a direct responsibility in managing New Mexico's public lands, preserving our history and preparing for our future needs," said Gustavo "Gus" Córdova, Executive Director of New Mexico Association of Counties.

Success of both the survey and resulting grant program represents the first of many collaborative projects between BLM and New Mexico Association of Counties.



Communities in San Juan County, such as Farmington shown here, will benefit from funds received to develop their community wildfire protection plan.

Building on this very productive first year with innovative and cost effective projects will benefit New Mexico's communities at risk of wildland fire.

Contact: Joy Esparsen, New Mexico Association of Counties Intergovernmental Relations Manager, (505) 820-8111



New Mexico Association of Counties held meetings to help develop project priorities.

