

# Snapshots



Successful BLM Projects Supporting the National Fire Plan

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May 27, 2005



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## Oregon

### Burning with a Purpose

The North Bank Habitat Management Area is a smoky place to be towards the end of summer. Each year Roseburg, Oregon BLM firefighters head out to the old ranch site and use fire as a tool to improve 800 to 1,000 acres of Columbia white tail deer habitat. The BLM crew spends a week or two burning off thick grasses, hardwood brush, and oak woodlands in an effort to restore prime habitat for the endangered deer population.

The 6,581-acre North Bank Habitat Management Area was acquired by BLM in 1994 and is located northeast of Roseburg, Oregon. Formerly the Dunning Ranch, the area was obtained through a land exchange to acquire secure habitat for the federally endangered Columbian white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus*

*virginianus leucurus*). Since acquisition of the area in 1994 and with the deer population meeting recovery objectives, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service down-listed the deer from endangered to sensitive in 2003.

The old Dunning Ranch is surrounded by rural homes, working ranches, industrial timberlands, and is designated wildland urban interface in BLM planning documents. The habitat area consists of low elevation oak woodland, oak savanna and grassland habitat interspersed with conifer-hardwood stands and dissected by numerous riparian areas. Columbian white tail deer prefer riparian areas and associated oak woodland shrub habitat for forage and cover

*Crew member Mike Crawford firing off treatment on the North Bank Habitat Management Area.*



*Andy Murrin and Karly Osowski work to strip pasture grass and improve deer habitat.*

but use a variety of habitats throughout the year.

Habitat on the North Bank area has been degraded over the years through overgrazing and invasion of noxious weeds and

grasses. Exclusion of fire has allowed for conifer

vegetative conditions include prescribed fire, controlled livestock grazing, mowing, planting, and seeding and noxious weed control. Burning will reduce thatch in grassland areas, renew shrub species, and slow conifer encroachment in oak woodlands. Seeding and fertilization after burning will provide more desirable forage species and help in reducing noxious weeds. Improved forage conditions will increase fawn survival and deer health leading to further recovery of the deer population.

encroachment into oak woodlands. Desirable shrub lands are becoming overgrown and dying out. The absence of grazing and fire in the improved pasture areas has resulted in heavy thatch buildup and reduced availability of quality forage during harsh winter months and fawning season.

Vegetation management to improve forage and cover for deer is the highest priority. Management activities being implemented to improve

Under the direction of Fire Management Officer Tom Lonie an ambitious prescribed burning program was initiated with goal of providing improved deer habitat and reducing hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface.

The habitat maintenance and fuel reduction project takes a coordinated team effort. BLM's maintenance crew grades and fixes fire access



*A lone lighter torching off mixed hardwood forest to improve habitat.*

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roads on the ranch every year. Special care is taken to scalp the dry grass off roads so they can be used as control lines.

Next, a local contractor is hired to construct tractor fire lines around the rest of the burn compartments. The contractor is also available in a stand-by mode to perform holding duties during the lighting operation. Prior to actual burning, a Douglas Forest Protective Association crew helps brush and prune away hazardous fuels adjacent to control lines. Finally, the BLM fire crew looks for a good window of opportunity in which to burn the habitat area in a safe, controlled manner.

Burning in late summer can be challenging. Weather is normally hot and dry, and wind can be a problem. BLM has restrictions on conducting prescribed fires when active wildfires are causing a drain on firefighting resources. The local protection agency can also stop prescribed burning because of extreme weather conditions.

The Roseburg office conducts prescribed fire burning in late summer and early fall because of good fuel consumption, harmful weeds destruction, and better control for insects and pests. Fall rains will eventually help mop-up the burn units.



*Smoke column building over the habitat area during prescribed burning.*

Additionally, BLM's regular staff is required to fight fires all summer and is available only later in the season to assist with prescribed fire treatments.

Once burn compartments are within the required weather and fuel prescription it takes the fire crew about a week to conduct habitat burns. Crews patrol burns until fall rains extinguish all threats to control lines. As soon as the last fires are out, a new cycle of burn planning begins. The deer only have to wait a few months for green up to enjoy a bounty of fresh grasses and herbs.

The ranch has proved to be an excellent training ground for inexperienced firefighters. Crew leaders and supervisors put torches in the hands of new firefighters and observe how they respond.

Holding and mop-up techniques are learned in a fuel type that can burn with tremendous energy. Engines are used to give inexperienced crew members a chance to learn necessary skills. Burning flash fuels like grass and brush is exciting. Supervisors make sure different jobs are shared equally to produce well trained, experienced firefighters. Task books are routinely reviewed and updated and firefighters are able to add new qualifications to their "red cards".



*The new Southern Regional Fire Training Center in Pearl, Mississippi.*

facility services Jackson Hotshots and rural firefighters from across the southeast.

Classes vary from educational and informational to hands-on required training. Many courses are scheduled to be taught by experienced Jackson Hotshot crew members.

## Eastern States

### Hotshots Assist in Training

With completion of construction of the Southern Regional Fire Training Center complex, classes are now underway. The complex, located in Pearl, Mississippi, includes two buildings. One is home to the Jackson Hotshots, which will serve as operational center and warehouse for equipment and vehicles.

The other is the training center. This state of the art training

The Southern Regional Fire Training Center will be used as an interagency center to train fire crews in fire suppression and prescriptive fire use. Federal and state crews from will benefit from this facility. Completion of the center is the culmination of a partnership between BLM, U. S. Forest Service and Mississippi State Forestry Commission. The official grand opening ceremonies are expected to occur later this year.

*Contact: Shayne Banks (601) 977-5405*



*Jackson Hotshot crew members in classroom training at the center.*

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## Arizona

### Tucson Field Office, Another Community Becomes Firewise

Last fall, BLM fire crews began thinning thick mesquite stands in what was the beginning of the largest firebreak project planned for the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation area. Crews thinned BLM managed lands

and private land immediately south of the Community of St. David, approximately 10 miles south of Benson. Crews worked throughout winter and spring with the target of completing the entire firebreak by next year.

The completed project will be approximately 4,000 feet in length and will help protect the community from wildfire spreading from the south and southwest.

Following completion of the firebreak, mesquite stumps will be removed to reduce maintenance. The firebreak will be completed on both sides of an access road that leads directly to homes on the south end of the community. It will also tie into the San Pedro River corridor.

BLM crews have completed work with private landowners and are currently working with three others in the area



*Before and after photos of a fire break in the St. David community.*

to complete the western edge of the firebreak. Crews are removing tamarisk trees growing along the main access road leading to various areas of privately owned land. FireWise signs have been installed near the St Davis Fire District station to promote fire safe activities.

BLM biologists are working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to complete consultation and willow flycatcher surveys necessary to obtain clearances for implementation next fall.

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

### Phoenix Field Office Black Canyon City, A Careless Sparks One Year Kindles Community Care the Next

Black Canyon City, Arizona is north of Phoenix along Interstate 17. In 2004, the risk of wildfire was evident around this community. Dry grass and brush was against sides of homes, brush piled under a bridge near the town's center, along with a continuing seven year drought cycle. Some homeowners prepared for the worst and the worst happened.

On June 5, 2004, a careless spark started a fire which spread toward nearby homes and into a large brush pile under the bridge in the middle of town. The towering flames and black smoke were seen by the entire community. Twenty acres were quickly consumed.

While it was quickly controlled, the close call reminded community leaders of the importance of working with BLM fire management experts, volunteers, and other groups to continue cleanup efforts not only reduce fuel loads in the area but beautify the community itself.

Turn the clock ahead almost a year to May 7, 2005. A sea of yellow tee-shirts is evidenced by some 200 volunteers who are cleaning up the community, removing brush, branches, and dead trees in the riverbed area and around the community where the fire occurred one year earlier. Community volunteer groups young and old alike, Arizona Public Service volunteers, and BLM crews used chippers and trucks to reduce vegetation, thereby reducing the potential for an urban interface wildfire.

BLM's Phoenix Field Office brought in fire crews, another chipper, and sawyers to cut up dead and dying trees along the Aqua Fria riverbed. Dead and down materials were chipped into piles of mulch which were made available to the public.

Dry weeds were removed from the medical center's helipad, neighbors helped others who could not clear dried vegetation



*The combination chipper hauler trucks from Arizona Public Service were a huge help on the project, clearing large piles of brush in a matter of minutes.*

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themselves, and seniors cleared grass and weeds from around the local community center as younger volunteers helped load trailers around the area.

This project was a true community partnership, with Arizona Public Service volunteers, BLM, local youth and senior groups, church and civic leaders brought together with a common purpose aided by National Fire Plan funding and the contributions of others.

*Contact: Ken Shaver, Fire Prevention Officer (623) 580-5578*

## Community Based Fire Prevention Project

The 10 year Hassayampa River Preserve Cooperative Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project began in 2003. The project has a special focus on the 333 acre Hassayampa River preserve, located two miles southeast of Wickenburg, along Highway 60 and neighboring private and public properties.

The preserve is cared for by The Nature Conservancy, a non-profit land conservation and management organization. It is bordered by private land owners, small businesses, Bureau of Land Management public lands, Burlington Northern – Santa Fe Railroad and Arizona Department of Transportation rights-of-way. Home to the southwestern willow flycatcher and other species, the preserve also houses a number of important historic structures. One building is currently being used as preserve headquarters and another is used to provide educational programs for youth and adults.

The Hassayampa River Preserve is currently in danger of a potential urban interface fire because of the heavy fuel loading and lack of defensible space on the preserve and adjacent private properties. Additionally, it's proximity to the highway increases fire threat spreading through the preserve and onto adjacent private lands.

BLM is working with all parties to develop strategies to reduce threats to private property, historic structures, local businesses and public lands. A combination of existing roads, trails and fence lines within the preserve will be used to create 30-foot firebreaks. This will aid in breaking up fuels and provide safe access for emergency personnel during fire suppression efforts. Other efforts include providing education on defensible space and working with private landowners adjacent to the preserve to create fire breaks along property lines. In addition, rights-of-ways will be cleared of light and heavy fuels.

With a mutual goal of fuel reduction and the creation of defensible space, this community-based partnership will successfully reduce potential of a large wildfire spreading through rare riparian habitat.

*Contact: Ken Shaver, Fire Prevention Technician, (623) 580-5578*

## California

### Getting Together, How Collaboration led to a Stewardship Contract

A California resource conservation district known for leading the way on forest health activities has received Bureau of Land Management approval for a 1,000-acre stewardship contract.

The Trinity Resource Conservation District received approval for the Weaverville Community Forest Stewardship Project this year. The district is working with BLM's state office to set out a work plan. "The goal is a cooperative agreement between the Resource Conservation District and BLM this spring, and then implementing work this summer," says Pat Frost, district manager.

Receipts generated by stewardship contracts are reserved for future stewardship work, notes BLM State Forester Glenn Lahti. "We think there will be merchantable timber, and receipts would come back into a contributed account that we can use for future projects."

Identified projects in the Weaverville area would be priorities, with nearby watersheds another choice. When stewardship contracts generate receipts, "We can be doing restoration work in future years that would have ended up costing money," Lahti says. A local sawmill will be called upon to handle the saw logs, and that will support local businesses.



*Working to clear a firebreak along a road.*

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The conservation district in northwestern California will use its own forest fuels reduction crew and private contractors to accomplish the work. It has been active in on-the-ground fuels reduction work and also technical assistance, outreach and education about hazardous fuels and protecting private lands. The district also led efforts to establish a community wildfire protection plan for Trinity County. It works closely with other community groups, including the Trinity Resource Conservation and Development Council.

Named for the nearby community of Weaverville, the project will achieve multiple resource goals identified during a community meeting in May 2004 and two others held in November.

The Trinity Resource Conservation & Development office hosted the meetings. The May session was attended by citizens, county supervisors and planning staff, representatives of the resource conservation district and two BLM staff members, including Assistant Field Manager Francis Berg. Ray Ledgerwood of Spokane, Washington, a professional facilitator, helped the group to establish goals, identify issues and conflicts, and evaluate possible

ownership and management options.

On the resource front, there was general consensus on pursuing community-based management of the forest lands, including view shed protection, fuels reduction, timber management, and wildlife habitat improvement -including fisheries, firewood collection, and enhancing recreational and educational opportunities.

Other potential benefits identified at the community meeting included providing saw logs to a local mill and otherwise providing economic benefits to the community, jobs for local citizens, research opportunities, expansion of the local trail system, management of unstable slopes, retention of archeological values and providing a laboratory for local schools and universities.

At the suggestion of BLM Field Manager Steve Anderson at one of the follow-up meetings, the district worked with the agency to implement a stewardship contract for management of the 1,000 acres of public land to meet community and resource management goals.

The local community has shown a strong interest in the lands, and local collaboration has been high. The community has been clear about how it would like BLM to manage and restore these lands.

That makes the stewardship contract a good fit, says Frost. "This vision now can be integrated into a multi-year stewardship agreement that will lay out a work plan with specific projects for the next couple of years and longer-term restoration and management goals. It's all about building a

strong link between the people of Weaverville and the natural resources that brought them here in the first place," he says. "Ultimately, I see our school children participating in this land stewardship through our Conservation Legacy Program and creating a link to future generations of our community."

BLM is working on eight stewardship contracts in California, says Lahti. He likes the possibility. "It extends our workforce," he says of efforts like the Weaverville Community Forest project.

To find out more about the Weaverville Community Forest Stewardship project, visit the district's Web site at [www.tcrd.net/](http://www.tcrd.net/). Click on Weaverville Community Forest on the home page.

Contact: Pat Frost at [pfrost@tcrd.net](mailto:pfrost@tcrd.net), or Glenn Lahti, BLM, (530) 224-2182



*The Trinity Resource Conservation District in northern California hosted meetings to identify resource goals for a stewardship contract on the Weaverville Community Forest.*