

# Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



May 7

## New Mexico

### Keep the Home Fires Burning

For most people the warmth of a fire on a cold evening invokes visions of romance, home, hearth and coziness. Not many give it a second thought as a primary source of winter heat. However, there are still those in our country who depend on firewood to heat their homes and cook their meals—and some of them are families of citizen soldiers.

For more than 360 years, citizen soldiers of the Army National Guard have served when their country needed them.

The New Mexico Army National Guard 1116<sup>th</sup> Transport Company recently deployed 23 of its members to foreign stations. Many of these soldiers have family living in remote areas near Gallup and Grants, New Mexico, who depend on firewood for winter heat. The BLM Grants field station shares office space with the guard at the New Mexico Guard Armory in Grants, New Mexico and offered the firewood to assist the military families in preparing for the winter.



*Two members of the New Mexico Army National Guard and BLM Park Ranger Ken Jones load firewood to assist military families in preparing for winter.*



*Staff members from the Battered Women's Shelter and BLM fuels specialist Rob Bastik load fuel wood from thinned areas.*

Staff Sgt. Lawnikwa Spottedeagle, recruiting and retention noncommissioned officer for the New Mexico Guard, spearheaded the effort. When she asked families of the deployed soldiers what they needed most, many said firewood. When Spottedeagle discussed the problem with Ken Jones of the BLM Grants field station, Jones explained that they could help. "The BLM handled all the paperwork and all we had to do was show up with the manpower and trucks," Spottedeagle said. Army National Guard staff of the 1116<sup>th</sup> Transport Company and the 126<sup>th</sup> Military Police Detachment volunteered their time and provided vehicles to haul the wood to family residences. Spottedeagle said, "We even had volunteers as young as two years old out there dragging branches."

The donated high quality fuel wood source for this effort originated

from the Staircase project—a combination thinning and burning project in a wildland urban interface area designed to lessen wildfire impact and to keep fire on the ground to make suppression easier if a fire should occur in this area. The thinning and piling was performed by Eagle Pass Restoration out of Jackson, Oregon. Once the thinning was completed there was an abundance of high-quality fuel wood at the location.

The Staircase project area is located within the El Malpais National Conservation area managed by the Bureau of Land Management in west-central New Mexico. Unlike the national-level fuels management policy where it is permissible to sell wood products from management projects, there can be no commercial activity within a conservation area. These two conflicting policies posed a dilemma. The resolution was a

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May 7



*BLM's Robert Bastik prepares to haul a full load for the Grants, New Mexico women's shelter:*

joint decision by the district fire management officer, the district manager and the conservation area manager. The solution consisted of two phases. First was to give the wood away to local non-profit organizations. This would allow wood to be taken free of charge from the project area. Second was to open the area up to fuel wood sales in a controlled setting.

Robert Bastik, fuel specialist in Grants, made all of the contacts and arranged giveaways to organizations such as the Lighthouse Christian Center, The Church of Christ, The First United Methodist Church, The Church of the Nazarene, The Knights of Columbus and the Food Pantry and, of course, the local Army National Guard Unit. All the wood was given away free of charge and permits were issued to each of the organizations and individuals.

Presently, Bastik is also planning on organizing a public fuel wood weekend which will occur in spring 2004 for local residents in the surrounding area. The idea is to limit the impact on conservation area lands and also provide a wood product to local residents.

This fuels reduction project provided a good learning experience in working

together to come up with a solid solution for all involved. During the process, the BLM Grants Field Office was able to help those in need while working to create healthy environments.

## F.U.T.A. - Training for the Future

Removal of hazardous fuels is a cornerstone of the National Fire Plan's goal of reducing the risk of catastrophic wildland fires. Managers of fuel reduction programs require expertise and experience in a variety of disciplines including prescribed fire techniques. In order to assure a future pool of qualified candidates for these positions, the next generation of fuel program managers must be trained now.

Since 1998, the Southwest Fire Use Training Academy has been filling this critical need. The purpose of the academy is to "provide land management agencies the opportunity to develop and enhance employee skills in the implementation of fuels treatment projects on a landscape scale." This interagency center, located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is designed to connect classroom training with field work which includes supervised experiences with prescribed fires. During 8-week sessions, offered in the spring and fall of each year, trainees are exposed to the prescribed fire programs of various land management agencies and become familiar with the fuel types found

throughout the southwest and other geographic regions.

Trainees split their time approximately 50-50 between the classroom and field activities. Classroom sessions are based on core curricula of National Wildland Coordinating Group courses including Ignition Operations (S-234), Field Observer (S-244), Prescribed Fire Burn Boss (RX-300), Fire line Leadership, and Introduction to Fire Effects (RX-310). During field sessions, students participate in prescribed burns, conduct fuels inventories, and develop burn plans.

During the recently completed 2004 spring session, trainees assisted on over two dozen prescribed burns on national wildlife refuges, national forests, state lands, and Indian reservations where over 30,000 acres were treated. Without the benefit of the academy, trainees would require years to accumulate this type of exposure to, and experience in, prescribed fire techniques. The Southwest Fire Use Training Academy also provides other fuels and fire training throughout the year beyond the two main 8-week sessions.



*State-of-the-art classrooms at the Fire Use Training Academy.*

# Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



May 7



*Field experiences are an integral part of the curriculum.*

The academy is funded and supported nationally and regionally by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Fish and Wildlife Service and by the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. Additional details about the program can be found at [www.nationalfiretraining.net/sw/futa](http://www.nationalfiretraining.net/sw/futa).

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## Colorado

### County and Agency Officials Train to "Meet The Media"

Two "Meet The Media" Workshops were recently presented by the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service for federal, state, local and county organizations in northwest Colorado. The impetus for holding the training sessions grew out of collaborative work done on fire planning and fuels projects over the past couple of years.

With the varied audience the workshops provided an opportunity for people in emergency response positions to meet face-to-face, get to know each other, and network, as well as sharpen their interview and media

skills. It also laid the platform for establishing an information pool that could be utilized during any type of local incident and developing Crisis Communication Plans if none were in place on a county level.

The sessions ran eight hours. Topics covered included: principles of writing a press release; developing key messages and focus thoughts; techniques for handling tough questions and; preparing for an interview.

A media panel also addressed the class, sharing tips and suggestions for getting their stories told. The panel also answered questions from the group. One objective of this course was to raise the comfort level of agency representatives who may find themselves speaking with the media.

The day culminated with the students being divided into eight teams and each team being assigned a

different scenario. The teams had to develop communication strategies, talking points, and key messages. The exercise was set up as a press conference and teams took turns facing the press while being video taped and photographed. Upon completion of the exercise participants reviewed the video to study their presentation style.

The first Workshop was held April 30, Craig, CO covering Rio Blanco and Moffat counties. Attending the Workshop were State Patrol Dispatchers, Sheriff Department, local elected officials, National Park Service, BLM, Emergency Managers, County Natural Resource Advisor, and Volunteer Fire Department members.

The April 31 Workshop was held in Steamboat Springs, CO and included participants from Routt, Jackson, and Grand counties. This group was as diverse as the previous day, again with local elected officials, Search and Rescue, Service Foresters,



*A news conference scenario was presented with help from Grand County, Colorado natural resource advisor Billy Sumerlin as the spokesperson. U.S. Forest Service instructor Dave Steinke ran the camera.*

# Snapshots 2004

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May 7



*A news media panel including reporters from radio, television and newspapers met with workshop participants.*

USFS, Division of Wildlife, County Natural Resource Advisor, Emergency Manager, and Hospital Public Affairs Officer.

The Lead Instructors were Dave Steinke and Lynn Young, USFS Public Affairs Officers with over 20 years experience. Hosting and co-instructing the sessions was Lynn Barclay, BLM Mitigation/Education Specialist. The three instructors are also qualified type 1 Information Officers who have worked together on many incidents. "I felt this training was an opportunity to support the county, state, and federal partners I work with on a different level." "Potentially, participants from these classes could be mobilized for a local incident, and what an advantage if they have a common understanding of communicating and disseminating information in a concise organized manner," Barclay said.

*For more information contact:  
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## Arizona

### Moving Forward with Old Fashion Methods

Recently, a Forest Health Initiative Grant was approved for the Pine Lake community in the Hualapai Mountains located 12 miles southeast of Kingman, Arizona. The grant was designed to assist communities in dealing with recent drought conditions and Bark Beetle infestations that have created an unhealthy ecosystem and a high fire risk environment. The grant dollars are providing the community with the ability to perform treatments that are needed to improve the forest health and help to reduce the risk from wildfire in Pine Lake.

The Forest Service funded grant is a 50-50 cost share between Forest Service and Pine Lake community residents. Both the Forest Service and Pine Lake residents put up \$150,000. Mike Hart, Grant Coordinator for the Arizona State Land Department

is working closely with Pine Lake on the grant process. Some of Pine Lake's cost share is homeowner labor as they complete treatments outlined during a risk assessment completed for their property. Property assessments are being performed by prevention, fuel, and fire experts from the Bureau of Land Management, state lands department and Pine Lake Fire Department.

Property owners have taken a very pro-active approach to get their property assessed and implementing the recommended treatments. Some of the difficulties encountered by residents are the removal of hazard trees and brush from their properties. The steep, rough terrain makes hazard fuel removal extremely difficult. Recently, Robert Taghon along with his family relocated to the Mohave County area and brought their tree cutting skills with them. The Taghon family has a tremendous amount of large scale logging experience but what was needed in Pine Lake was something a little more old fashioned.



*Out of the forest onto the road.*

# Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



May 7



*Skidding a bark beetle killed tree.*

Robert Taghon and his two sons, Skip and Robby, are also expert equestrians and have ample experience in draft horse logging. This seemed to fit the bill on getting the hazardous, excess fuel out of the forest. They also own a portable sawmill and will be cutting up useable logs into lumber for resale. This helps offset the costs to residents employing their services. Local residents are excited and pleased to see the 2,000 lb Belgian draft horses hauling logs and brush up the steep slopes with minimal impact to the land.

Pine Lake residents have provided a location for temporary corrals and lodging at a very minimal cost to the Taghon family which shows the communities commitment to getting the work done. "We'll keep working up here in Pine Lake as long as there is work to be done," said Robert Taghon. Home owners are having a tough time keeping up with the pace of the hard working Taghon family. This type of hazard fuel removal has expedited the work that needs to be done.

In addition to the individual property assessments, firefighters are burning brush piles created by area residents removing excess hazard fuels from their property. A second burn was conducted to enhance the effectiveness of an existing fuel break on the south end of the community. The Pine Lake

Community including members of the BLM Kingman Field Office, ASLD, Pine Lake Fire Department, Hualapai Mountain Home Owners Association, Mohave County and concerned area residents, look at these treatment methods as another collaborative and cooperative effort in implementing citizen driven solutions that will reduce the risk from wildfires and improve the overall forest health of the lands surround their community.

*Contact: Michael Trent, Kingman, BLM Fire Prevention Officer; (928) 692-4451*

## Communications Site Protected

Thanks to the efforts of the Safford/Tucson Fire Management Zone, a 1.2-million-dollar communications site on public lands in southeastern Arizona is better protected from wildfires. Safford/Tucson Fire Management Officer Dave Hall and his field staff determined that hazardous fuels created a fire risk that threatened to damage facilities on Guthrie Peak. A hazardous fuels reduction project was proposed for the critical communications site, which is used by 16 companies and organizations, including four federal and state agencies, Arizona Department of



*Firefighters chip brush, after using hand tools and chainsaws to clear around Guthrie Peak Communications Site.*

Public Safety, Arizona Department of Water Resources, Federal Aviation Administration, and BLM. A hazardous fuels treatment Categorical Exclusion was approved in November. Once fire crews were given the okay, they used hand tools and chainsaws to trim and clear brush and trees around the communications site. It took 100 staff workdays to remove 12 acres of fuel. Once the clearing was done, the crew formed a human chain and fed these fuels through a 12 inch chipper. The chipped materials were relocated around Guthrie Peak. The project cost just over \$14,000.

*Contact: Roy Draper, Fire Engine Module Leader, Safford Field Office, (928) 348-4505*

## Getting the Firewise Message Out

Last fall over 20,000 people attended the annual Home Show at the Tucson Convention Center. This event is a prime opportunity to spread the news regarding Firewise construction and landscaping. The BLM and Forest Service set up a joint Firewise booth which included an interactive computer program the public could use to learn about Firewise concepts.

This winter, BLM set up a Firewise booth at Tucson's Gem and Mineral Show 50th Anniversary. With over 400 exhibitors the Gem and Mineral show is the largest annual event in Tucson. This event draws people from all over the world. The Firewise message was on display to over 30,000 participants during this three day event. The Rodeo-Chedeski, Bullock, and Aspen fires of the past two years are still fresh in the minds of Arizonans, so the display caught many people's attention. The Firewise

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May 7

exhibit offered them a source of fire information, and gave them ideas on how they can better prepare their homes and communities for the upcoming fire season.

This spring, BLM set up a Firewise booth at Oracle State Park for Earth Day. Approximately 200 people attended this event, which included representatives and displays from Rural Metro Fire Department, local fire equipment vendors, and a smoke detector trailer for children. The Show Low/Pinetop School District sent representatives to discuss ongoing community efforts in the aftermath of the Rodeo-Chedeski Fire.

The BLM is using every opportunity to provide information and education materials to the public regarding Firewise. These events reach thousands of homeowners who might not otherwise know about Firewise construction and landscaping. Large wildfires in Arizona have destroyed over 800 homes and structures. If this information is used to prevent additional homes and structures from being destroyed by wildfire in the future, these events will be considered a huge success.

*Contact: David Peters, Zone Fire Mitigation Specialist,  
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*Firewise Booth.*

*Dave Vickery, Snapshots editor  
Sheri Ascherfeld, layout and design*