

Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



December 22

Eastern States

Emergency Fuel Load Reductions in Florida

In early November, BLM's Jackson, Mississippi Hotshot crew spent three days performing emergency fuel reduction work to mitigate increased fire danger from trees toppled during recent hurricanes at Jupiter Inlet in northern Palm Beach County, Florida. They felled hundreds of aged sand pine trees snapped or severely damaged by Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne.

Almost 90 percent of the aging sand pine forest that had for decades dominated the Jupiter Inlet Natural Area was killed by sustained winds over 100 miles per hour that buffeted this coastal community twice during September 2004. The Jackson Hotshot sawyers dismantled the skewed piles of felled trees to hasten their decomposition and reduce the fuel threat. Contracted crews removed 17 and one-half tons of the heaviest fuels from the northern and southern edges of the site to provide an additional fire break in this urban area.



Trees at Jupiter Inlet Natural Area show damage from Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne. Jackson Hotshots did emergency fuel reductions to mitigate potential fire danger from toppled trees.

In Lathrop Bayou, Florida, Jackson Hotshot sawyers turned the clock back 15 years with three additional days of intense work. The crew fanned out across the island cutting thousands of young slash pine in a historically open longleaf pine stand. The thinning reduced the fuel loads in the vicinity of old longleaf pines, which will help protect them as the prescribed burns rotate into the hotter growing season burns needed to reduce the dense shrub understory.

The newly opened stands revealed some of the largest pine on the island, including one 20 and one-half-inch-diameter longleaf that almost doubles the size of many of the current red-cockaded woodpecker cavity trees. The crew left the few young longleaf pines that had regenerated without the benefit of periodic burns. Additional longleaf regeneration is expected now that fire has been reintroduced to the island. The island's second prescribed burn is scheduled for March 2005.

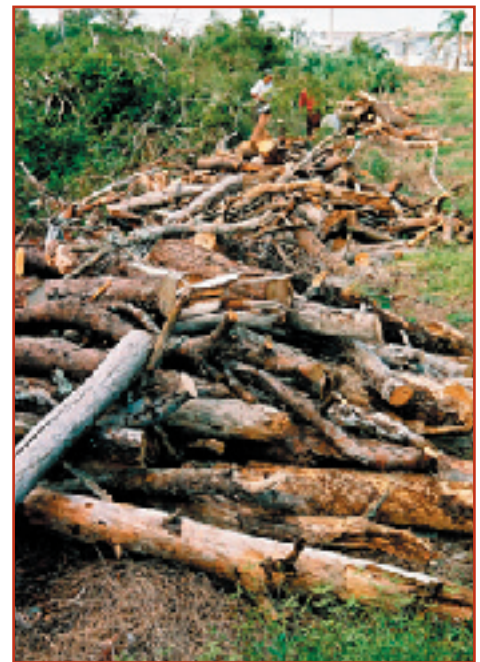


Jackson Hotshots reduced fuel loads at Florida's Lathrop Bayou by cutting young slash pines.

Contact Shayne Banks (601) 977-5405



Hotshot sawyer at Lathrop Bayou working to reduce fuels.



More than 17 tons of the heaviest fuel from the northern and southern edges of the site was removed to provide an additional fire break in the urban area near Jupiter Inlet.

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Oregon

Rogue River Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project

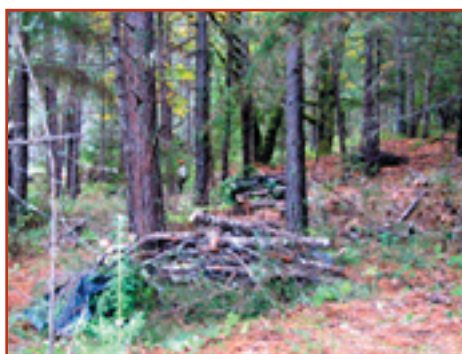
The Rogue River Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project was selected as the only Healthy Forest Initiative project in Oregon. A model environmental assessment component was used to administratively streamline the environmental assessment process and allow for more efficient management of fuel reduction efforts and fire-adapted ecosystem restoration projects

The purpose of the project is to reduce and manage the wildfire-fuel hazard within approximately 8,000 acres of public and private land that comprise the Hellgate Recreation Section of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River. The Hellgate Recreation Section includes portions of three communities at risk and approximately 190 residences, most of which are in 12 localized areas.

An environmental assessment was completed for the entire project area in October 2003. Subsequent categorical exclusions for neighborhood plans are being prepared. The BLM Medford District Office anticipates completion of 20 to 30 neighborhood plans within the 8,000 acre corridor over the next two years.



The Rand neighborhood project involved clearing brush and small diameter trees, hand piling, and burning next fall as part of the Rogue River Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project.



Planning work on the first neighborhood community plan at Rand, Oregon was completed in September 2004. BLM began on-the-ground work for 150 acres this fall and winter. An Oregon Department of Forestry 10-person crew has completed work on approximately one-third of the Rand neighborhood. Treatment consists of clearing understory brush and small diameter trees and hand piling the slash. The

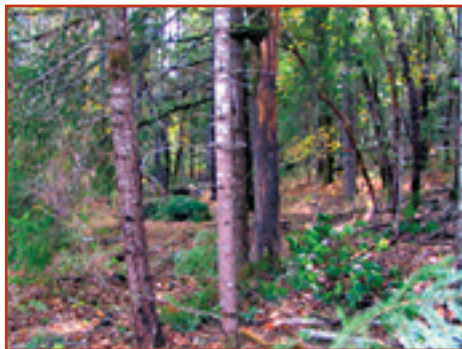
piles will be burned next fall. This treatment is focusing on residential structural protection by treating most heavily in the areas around home ignition and defense zones.

Approximately five additional neighborhood plans for a total of 1,704 acres will be completed in calendar year 2005. The next neighborhood, Paradise-Greentree South, is in the planning stages with plan completion in January 2005.

BLM's Medford District will continue to work closely with river user groups, Oregon Department of Forestry, Josephine County, residents and private landowners within the project area. Because Oregon's Department of Forestry has fire prevention and suppression responsibilities for the lands in the project area, BLM anticipates extensive involvement with them during neighborhood planning and project implementation. For information on this project, please visit the BLM Medford District website on this project at:

http://www.or.blm.gov/medford/rr_fuel_project/fuel_home.htm

Contacts: Abbie Jossie, Grants Pass Field Manager (541) 618-2303 or Doug Henry, Environmental Planner (541) 618-2276; or Jeanne Klein, Information Officer (541) 618-2220



The goal of the project is to reduce wildland fire hazards to protect property and improve the health of the forest near the Rogue River.

Arizona

Community Helps Establish Firebreak

Local residents from Palominas, Arizona, and Boy Scouts from Tucson joined forces to build a firebreak along the San Pedro River that will help protect public and private property from wildfires. Volunteers used a large, heavy combination hoe and rack

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to rip out unwanted vegetation and to prepare bare soil for low-growing native grass species. The project was completed on both sides of the Arizona Highway 92 bridge crossing the river on the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area about 90 miles southeast of Tucson.

This project was one of the first steps necessary for the Palominas Firewise Community group to reach the dual goals of reducing fire risks and reclaiming an overgrown area along the river. By tying the firebreak to the bridge, the width of the firebreak is increased by 75 feet. The Firewise group is also working to achieve Firewise USA status in 2004.

An Eagle Scout candidate from Tucson organized the community service project. Eagle Scout is the highest achievement in Scouting, with only one in 50 scouts reaching this rank.

The scout spent six months working with BLM staff to prepare for the day-long project.

Fires occur along the San Pedro River each year, many started by undocumented immigrants who use the river course as their road north. The area north of the highway bridge is an area of concern to private land owners living near this section of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. If a wildfire were to move north of BLM land, it would run onto private land. This wildland urban interface area is considered an “area of concern”, based upon the wildfire hazard assessment and mitigation plan completed for the Palominas community 15 months ago.

To complement annual mowing of the firebreak to protect the community from wildfire, fire staff consulted with the Natural Resources Conservation



Volunteers work together to create a firebreak.

Service Plant Materials Center in Tucson. Plant specialists helped determine the best species to plant to reduce flame lengths in the event of wildfire. Such species will slow the spread of wildfires while reducing the risk to firefighters. Noxious weeds and taller growing grasses will eventually be replaced by shorter growing native species, which were planted by the volunteers.



Looking at the finished product, an improved firebreak next to the bridge.

This firebreak will also benefit a 70-acre prescribed fire planned for this winter. The location of the prescribed fire is within the conservation area, just south of the bridge. This burn will also help to protect homeowners north of the conservation area. Volunteers also pulled woody flood debris away from cottonwoods and willows, so they will be more likely to survive the prescribed burn this winter.

In addition to the hazardous fuels treatment aspect of this project, BLM has been working with The Nature Conservancy and Audubon Society during the past year to prepare seven fire interpretation signs at portals along the conservation area. Signs will be placed at the nearby parking lot for river hikers to inform them about the firebreak projects and partners involved.

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Project partners are the Arizona Department of Transportation, Arizona Firewise Communities, Boy Scouts of America, Home Depot, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Audubon, Palominas Community Alliance, Palominas Fire Department, Palominas Firewise Community, Take Pride in America, The Nature Conservancy, Cochise County Board of Supervisors, and the Bureau of Land Management.

Contact: David Peters, Safford/Tucson Fire Management Zone, Fire Mitigation Specialist, (520) 258-7207

Community Involvement Successes Perpetuate in Pine Lake

The community of Pine Lake, located 12 miles southeast of Kingman, Arizona has accomplished many fire prevention and hazardous fuels reduction steps. The Pine Lake Working Group has been in place since April of 2001 and the level of risk to the community has been significantly reduced. Fire Prevention awareness has taken hold within the community and the proactive approach

of homeowners has been outstanding.

Multiple projects outlined by the working group have been implemented and completed. Included is construction of a fuel break in critical areas around the community, prescribed fire use to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire to Pine Lake, and pile burning to dispose of excess hazardous fuels removed from private residences. Prevention efforts have come in the form of homeowner assessments, assistance in writing grant proposals, homeowner fire prevention education opportunities and fire training for fire department personnel.

Some additional benefits of the work have become evident in recent months. Once home assessments were completed, Rob Taghon, a private contractor using grant funds, offered to remove the identified hazard tree and brush at a greatly reduced cost to the homeowner. He stockpiled the usable logs, purchased a portable sawmill and is cutting the logs into lumber at a site provided by a Pine Lake resident. The lumber is being sold locally to ranchers, construction companies and cabinet makers. The uniqueness of Hualapai Mountain timber is prized by the local community because of the timber's limited availability.



(l to r) Thank you awards presented by Pine Lake to Kingman Fire Staff, Mike Trent, Fire Prevention Officer, Wade Reeves, Fuels Specialist, and Irv Leach, Assistant Fire Management Officer for their commitment and involvement with the community of Pine Lake. Because of their dedication private landowners are now safer from wildfire.

A new \$280,000 state of the art fire engine was jointly purchased using a combination of a BLM grant, Pine Lake Fire Department funds and fund raisers held within the community. Recently, an appreciation dinner was held by the Pine Lake community to express their heartfelt thanks to individuals that have made considerable contributions toward the purchase of the new engine. Key BLM fuels, prevention and fire staff representatives were invited to attend the formal dinner. Awards were given to several individuals for their commitment and dedication to the community. Kingman Field Office's Assistant Fire Management Officer Irv Leach, Fuels Specialist Wade Reeves and Fire Prevention Officer Michael Trent received appreciation awards as well as accolades from the fire chief and several community members.

Many accomplishments within the Pine Lake community have presented themselves in different forms. Receiving appreciation awards from the community where close involvement was the norm clearly showed the high value local



Creating salable material out of homeowner's hazardous fuels.

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people placed on the work by BLM specialists. Such a positive attitude from local stakeholders will continue to motivate individuals in both public and private sectors to achieve even greater benefits.

Many hurdles remain to be overcome in making Pine Lake safe from wildfire and the journey will continue on to the next generation. Future objectives and goals will present challenges but with the cooperation and cohesiveness that is being exhibited in Pine Lake, the journey will be a successful one.

Contact: Michael Trent, Kingman Fire Prevention Officer, (928) 718-3745

Utah

Pack Creek Ranch Fuel Mitigation Project Complete

The Bureau of Land Management in cooperation with Utah State Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands has completed fuel treatments adjoining the community of Pack Creek Ranch.

Pack Creek winds its way down from the LaSal Mountains, meandering through the tucked-away community of Pack Creek and onward into the Moab valley. The creek corridor is



Burning piles along the Pack Creek southwest boundary.

a beautiful riparian zone, with diverse greenbelts dividing the small enclave of houses creating a secluded feeling around each home. The Manti-LaSal National Forest borders the community on the east, with western boundaries adjacent to BLM lands.

The community was slowly being overtaken by the abundant piñon-juniper in southeastern Utah. The creek was also overgrown with Russian olive, salt cedar and old decadent growth. Because the impact of wildfire could destroy this oasis in the desert, fire managers from BLM, U.S. Forest Service, State of Utah and community members recognized the need for fuel mitigation. The National Fire Plan grant program was the answer.

In the spring of 2003, the first work was started by the State of Utah "Flame-in-goes" crew. Goals were to clean and thin-out the riparian areas and to limb and thin the greenbelts. Meanwhile, community members were fast at work writing a community fire plan, coordinating with state fire managers to have their properties assessed for wildfire safety, and reducing fuels on their properties. During the spring of 2004, the state burned the remaining debris piles within the riparian zones.

BLM crews started work along the western boundary in summer of 2003, treating approximately 100 acres. Phase one included hand-cutting invasive species, limbing remaining trees and piling slash for later burning. Phase two began in fall 2003 when a



BLM crews opening up a riparian area on public land below Pack Creek Ranch.

contractor was brought in to hand-cut and pile the remaining 200 acres on the public lands south and west of the community.

This past fall, BLM crews were able to burn all of the remaining piles in two days. Community members were thrilled with the results, and deer that winter each year in the Pack Creek drainage will notice a big improvement in their habitat.



Back Hill slash piles from contractor work.

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Colorado

Ground Breaking for New Grand Junction Interagency Air Center

On Monday, December 13, construction officially began on a 9,200 square foot Interagency Air Center that will give crews an edge in protecting public lands within a five-state region of the western United States. The 1 p.m. ground breaking ceremony included speakers from the National Interagency Fire Center, Mesa County Sheriff's Office, BLM Colorado State Office and U.S. Forest Service. The anticipated completion date for construction is October 2005.



Elected officials, state, local and federal and private representatives helped with the December 13 groundbreaking ceremony.

About 30 years ago a local interagency firefighting facility, consisting of one outbuilding, was established at its present-day location at Walker Field Airport in Grand Junction, Colorado. Air center staff accomplished aviation support for wildfire and resource management missions from a conglomeration of makeshift sheds and trailers.

Today's Grand Junction Interagency Air Center is one of the nation's busiest fire aviation centers, employing six permanent employees with 30 support positions during fire season. The apron has been upgraded and a tank farm was added in 2000. Over five years an average of 605 air tanker missions carried approximately 1,105,090 gallons of retardant. Since 1994, the number of air tanker missions has increased seven-fold, and the need for other fire support activities, such as smoke jumpers and helitack, has grown steadily as well. The facility also serves as the dispatch center for the Upper Colorado River

Interagency Fire Management Unit, which stretches from the Utah border to central Colorado's Continental Divide. A total of 2,000 dispatch resource orders were filled in 2004 alone.

The new building will serve as headquarters for smoke jumpers, helitack crew members, pilots, dispatch and base administration. Facilities will include a briefing room, pilot area, dispatch and conference area, men's and women's locker rooms, center administration, helitack ready room, office, smoke jumpers ready room, and spotters office. The heart of this new facility will be its people, but the collaborative energy of multiple agencies and cooperators in providing a strong fire program will continue to keep our public lands safe for all to enjoy—a fire program that not only this community and state, but the nation, can be proud of.

*Dave Vickery, Editor
Sheri Ascherfeld, Graphics and Layout*