

Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



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Colorado

San Miguel County Uses Grants to Build Wildland Fire Program

San Miguel County and the Telluride Fire Protection District in western Colorado received BLM Community Assistance and Rural Fire Assistance grant funds for a second year. The funding has been critical in helping the county build capacity to work collaboratively with state and federal fire management agencies to develop and manage a wildland fire and fuels program.

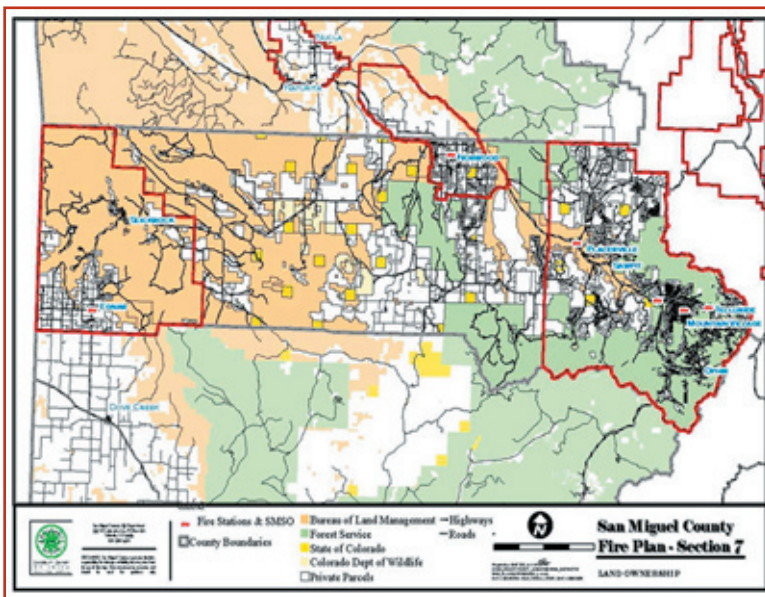
San Miguel County is comprised of 60 percent BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands, two percent state lands, and 38 percent private lands. The ownership pattern is largely interspersed parcels. The east end of the county, including the town of Telluride, has seen an exponential growth in wildland-urban interface over the last ten years, a trend which will likely continue.

In addition, over the last century an increase in vegetation densities in some fuel types, such as Ponderosa pine and pinyon pine-juniper mix has taken place. As a result, the size and complexity of wildfires in the county has increased dramatically over the last decade, compromising the ability to manage wildland fires. In recent history, San Miguel County has had several multi-jurisdictional Type III fires, ranging from roughly forty to 2,500 acres. These included the Alta Lakes, West Beaver, Braimers, and Hamilton fires. Burn Canyon was a Type II fire that burned over 30,000 acres.

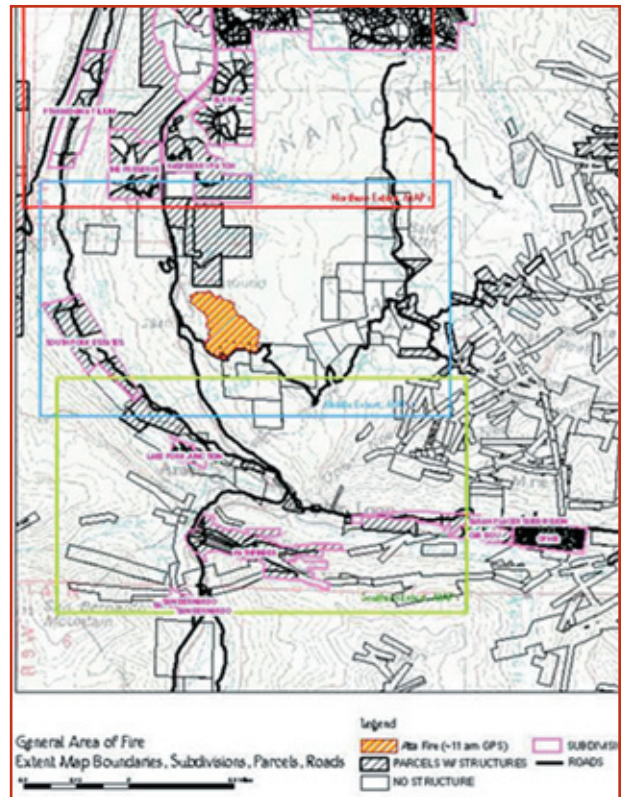
In the state of Colorado, the county sheriff has responsibility for fires on state and private lands outside of fire protection districts, so San Miguel County has been keenly aware of the need to improve its ability to manage wildland fires.

With the funding made available through the National Fire Plan, the county has been able to significantly improve its wildland fire program. In 2003, Phase I of the San Miguel County Fire Plan was completed. The objective was to develop a comprehensive fire plan that integrated all aspects of fire and fuels management among the multiple federal, state, and local fire and emergency management entities, including the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Natural Resource and Conservation Service, and American Red Cross.

The 2003 BLM grant money was used to initiate Phase II of the fire plan. This entailed developing a



San Miguel County map showing land ownership, parcel data, and three fire protection district boundaries. Districts from left to right are Egnar, Norwood and Telluride.



A map display using Red Zone software showing parcel structure, access and address information in relation to the Alta Lakes fire.

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An interagency group working on Phase One of the San Miguel County Fire Plan.

countywide mitigation outreach and education program called the Wildfire Safety Program. The program goals included mapping structures and access in wildfire prone areas of the county, assessing structures with respect to access, materials, and vegetation; providing homeowners with specific information about how to make their homes less susceptible to wildfire; improving the County GIS department's risk assessment/risk management capability; and making fire fighting safer for emergency personnel.

Surveys on just over 1,500 structures in the county were completed. Grant funds in 2004 will be used to complete surveys on the remaining 1,300 structures and mail out survey results to homeowners. Geographic information system data collected has vastly improved county ability to respond to all risks because through display parcel, structure, access, and address information in relation to the incident at the dispatch office and at the fire stations.

The Telluride Fire Protection District used the BLM Rural Fire Assistance grant money to equip and train seasoned fire fighters to the level where they can participate in the Incident Command System. The district was able to provide them with tools, fire shelters, personal

protective equipment and primary and advanced training in wildland fire fighting. Over the last few years 33 volunteers have been equipped and trained as basic fire fighters and 11 as advanced fire fighters. The exposure some fire fighters have had at the local and regional level has improved the local department's ability to fight wildland fire and strengthened relationships with other structural fire departments across the region.

One of the goals of the National Fire Plan has been to improve capacity at the local level to effectively manage all aspects of wildland fire and fuels management. San Miguel County has benefited from the BLM funding provided to achieve this goal and has been successful at initiating the needed changes to its wildland fire program.

Completion of county risk assessment and additional joint work with the federal and state fire management agencies to plan and implement hazardous fuel reduction treatments in high priority areas need to be done to fully achieve the goals of the National Fire Plan.

The Telluride Fire Protection District also plans to equip and train 16 additional fire fighters, at the minimum, as basic fire fighters, and train three to four of advanced fire fighters to the level where they can participate on a local Type III fire management team. The financial support provided by the BLM will continue to be crucial in helping achieve these goals.

Contact: Jennifer Smith, Sheriff's Assistant, (970) 728-4442, Ed Loesche, San Miguel County Emergency

Management Coordinator, (970) 728-9546, or Gary Whitfield, Fire Chief, Telluride Fire Protection District, (970) 728-3801

New Video on Wildfire Protection Available

A new video, First Line of Defense: Homeowners Stand Up To Wildfire, is now available from the San Juan Public Lands Center. It is a locally produced 30-minute documentary about how southwest Colorado residents worked to lessen the risk of losing their homes to wildfire.

The video highlights an actual "defensible space" project conducted near Durango at one woman's home in a ponderosa pine forest. The forest was partially burned during the Missionary Ridge Fire in 2002.



Cover design for the new video production.

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The camera follows the homeowner, a Colorado State Forest Service forester, and mitigation crew as they discuss the risks, needs, and choices and then details their efforts to thin and trim brush and trees around the home, ultimately making it safer from wildfire.

“Many people understand the concept of defensible space, but sometimes they just don’t know where to begin,” says Allen Farnsworth, Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist. “We wanted to create a tool that would help them understand how the State Forest Service can help and give them some tips on how to work with a mitigation contractor.”

The film is a partnership production of the Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College and Durango Community Access Television, Cable Channel 22. It was funded and supported by the San Juan Public Lands Center and the Colorado State Forest Service.

The video premiered on April 13 at the Abbey Theatre in Durango as part of Fire Prevention and Education Month. During the remainder of April the video was shown on community cable channel 22.

The video is available in both DVD and VHS format.

Contact Pam Wilson, (970) 385-1230 or Allen Farnsworth, (970) 385-1207

All Aboard for the Mountain Express

Smokey Bear and environmental education have taken a new track in Durango, this summer. The San Juan Public Lands Center partnered with the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad and the San Juan Mountains Association to provide a new educational train slated to run Mondays through Thursdays from June 21 to August 5.

The train, called the “Mountain Express – a Cascade family adventure train,” is a half-day adventure that gives passengers the opportunity to learn about fire ecology, native plants and wildlife, and Leave No Trace ethics.

Volunteer educators will ride the train, hand out activity books and Smokey goodie bags to kids, and talk with passengers while traveling to Cascade Canyon. At Cascade Canyon the train will stop for



Father and daughter enjoy the train ride to Cascade Canyon.



A volunteer educator asks children what they heard when they sat quietly for a short time.

an hour, allowing guests to meet with Smokey Bear, participate in guided environmental education activities, look over items at the discovery table or enjoy a self-guided nature trail.

“Guests will enjoy the ‘Discovery

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Smokey Bear meets and greets his fans.

Nature Trail' at Cascade Canyon, which is deep in the heart of the San Juan National Forest by the banks of the Animas River," said Pam Ramsey, Reservations Manager for railroad. "This is truly a remarkable and remote setting for such a creative project."

Partners involved in this educational project hope it appeals to families with children and also to adults interested in learning more about the local flora and fauna and the San Juan National Forest.

Contact: Laurie Robison, (970) 385-1225

Uncompahgre Plateau 2004 Fuels Treatments Complete

In late May 2004, Montrose interagency fire crews completed a prescribed burn in the Government Springs area in two units that were roller chopped in 2001. The purpose of the burn was to set back succession and create more of a mosaic in the fuels. This prescribed burn is part of a series of treatments being conducted

under the auspices of the Uncompahgre Plateau Project to benefit all the project partners.

Included as partners are Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and Public Lands Partnership, a citizen group representing diverse interest groups from Ouray, Montrose, Delta, and San Miguel counties in Colorado.

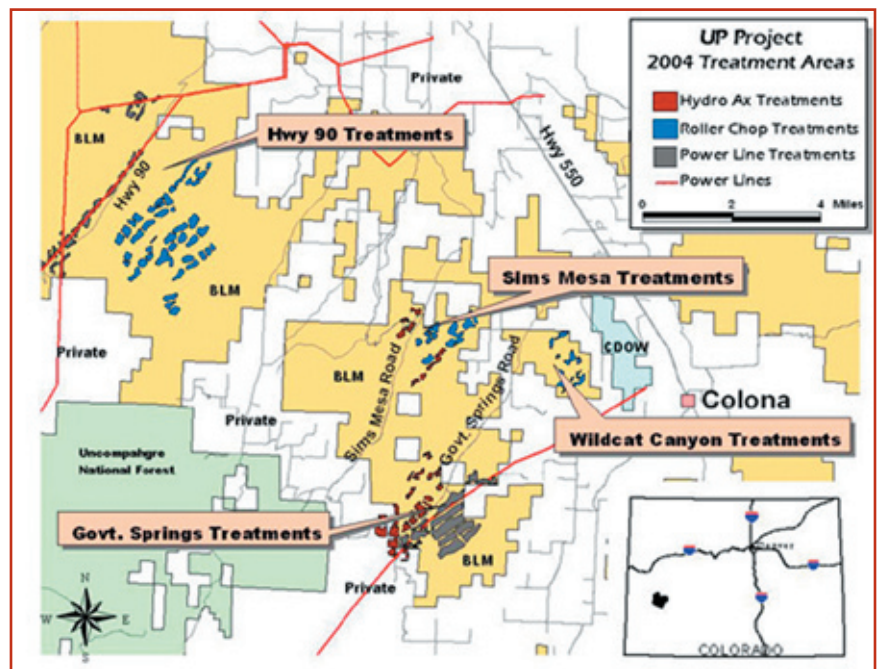
The coalition was formed about three years ago to coordinate planning and management on roughly 1.5 million acres on the Uncompahgre Plateau. In 2002, Western Area Power Association and Tri State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. joined the coalition

to share resources to reduce fuels along their respective 230 and 345 kV and 115 kV power lines as well as to accomplish the coalition's goals of ecosystem restoration.

In 2003, a group of specialists from each of the partner organizations



Montrose interagency fire crews doing prescribed burning in a unit roller chopped in 2001.



A map showing the 2004 Uncompahgre Plateau treatment areas.

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An aerial view facing southwest of the Highway 90 power line treatment.

worked together to complete the Dry Creek-Spring Creek Vegetation Management Strategy, a coordinated, interagency plan to guide land management at the watershed scale. Based on the plan, in the spring of 2004, treatments were applied by interagency crews in four different areas in the Dry Creek-Spring Creek watersheds on the Uncompahgre Plateau. The combined treatments were designed to enhance the fire survivability of the power lines and aesthetic impact of the utility corridor to eliminate the look of “clearcut” corridors across the landscape as well as accomplish objectives for wildlife and overall land health. Approximately 1,950 acres in total were treated.

In the Highway 90 area, a total of about 1,000 acres on BLM land were treated to reduce the hazard along the power line and improve mule deer habitat. The BLM hydro-axed 300 acres along the power line and CDOW roller-chopped 691 acres in the same general area. The Colorado Division of Wildlife treatments were in old chaining areas that were treated in the 1960’s and 1970’s to create big game habitat. The goal of the

current treatment was to improve mule deer habitat by reducing the overall pinyon pine and juniper canopy and increasing the amount of mountain shrub such as mountain mahogany, bitterbrush, and 4-wing saltbrush in the community.

In the Sims Mesa area, the Colorado Division of Wildlife treated a total of 267 acres on BLM land. Of this total, 87 acres were hydro-axed and 180 acres were roller chopped. The primary goal was to improve mule deer and Gunnison sage-grouse habitat by reducing pinyon pine and juniper encroachment into the sagebrush parks, increasing the amount and diversity of shrubs, and restoring a native grass-forb understory in the sagebrush stands.

The wildlife division roller chopped an additional 97 acres of BLM land in the Wildcat Canyon area to accomplish similar objectives. In all of the treatment areas that were roller chopped, the contractor used a conventional electric broadcast seeder for a grass-forb mix and a separate mechanical “seed dribbler” for a shrub mix. Providing additional browse in these areas was a high priority, and a great deal of extra money and effort went into accomplishing this aspect of the project.

In the Government Springs Road area, 145 acres of private land and about 450 acres of BLM land were treated. The BLM hydro-axed 200 acres along the power line to reduce the fire hazard and to improve the aesthetic impact of the corridor. In addition, they prescribed burned 83 acres in two units near the power lines that were roller chopped in 2001. An additional 150 acres in the general vicinity of



Northeast view of Government Springs treatments. To the right of the power line are three of the six units roller chopped in 2001. In the foreground are the current BLM treatments to reduce fuels along the power lines. To the left on both sides of the road are the Colorado Division of Wildlife treatments on private and BLM lands.

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the power lines were treated by the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

The goal of these treatments was to improve mule deer habitat by reducing the pinyon-pine-juniper canopy enough to allow establishment of additional grasses and forbs and reinvigorate the existing mountain shrub community. The treatments were in previously untreated stands of mixed pinyon pine-juniper, sagebrush, and oakbrush shrubs. This area was thinned to approximately eight to ten trees per acre, leaving a higher percentage of the older trees and removing the youngest trees. The work on private land was done within an old chaining where the young pinyon pine and juniper trees were becoming dense, and the shrub component old and decadent.

To give a flavor of the cooperative nature of this interagency effort, to accomplish the treatments along the power lines in the Government Springs area, Tri-State covered the cost of the cultural clearance for treatments along the right-of-way, Western supplied four linemen for a week to help flag in the treatment units, and BLM supplied funding for the hydro-ax work. The Colorado Division of Wildlife covered the cost of all their treatments on both BLM and private lands.

Additional treatments along the power lines in the Dry Creek/Spring Creek watersheds are planned on BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands. Recently Uncompahgre Plateau partners also prioritized two more watersheds, which are slated for planning in the fall of 2004.

Contact: Dan Huisjen, BLM Fire Ecologist, (970) 240-5339 or Jim Garner, CDOW (970) 252-6016.

(For additional information on the UP Dry Creek/Spring Creek Strategy Plan and EA, see the December 19, 2003 issue of Snapshots and visit the UP website.) www.Upproject.org

Wyoming

Pennock Mountain Prescribed Burn

The Bureau of Land Management along with the U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Wyoming Game and Fish conducted a cooperative prescribed burn on Pennock Mountain this spring. The project area included lands administered by the BLM's Rawlins Field Office, Medicine Bow National Forest, and private lands owned by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Private and BLM lands, which are within the Pennock Mountain Big Game Crucial Winter Range unit, include a mix of year-long and seasonal habitat for elk, mule deer and pronghorn antelope as well as crucial winter range for elk and mule deer.

Funding for the project included \$25,000 in matching funds from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, a BLM hazardous fuels project account,

U.S. Forest Service and Wyoming Game and Fish grant of \$8,000. The National Environmental Policy Act analysis was completed by the staff of the Rawlins BLM and the burn plan was completed jointly by the Rawlins BLM and Medicine Bow National Forest.

The resource objectives for the burn were to treat 50 percent of dense, even aged and structured sagebrush-mixed mountain shrub communities in a mosaic pattern. An additional goal was to increase ground cover by 20 percent or more from current levels in three years on treated sites. The project area encompassed 6,283 acres with an acceptable range of 30-75 percent treated. Approximately 4,000



Firefighters secure corner on perimeter.

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acres were actually treated. The burn was accomplished using resources from the BLM, Forest Service and private contractors.

Benefits of the burn include improving wildlife habitat, reducing fuel loading, breaking up the fuel continuity, diversifying the age-class structure, increasing forage quality and quantity, and improving watershed health. In addition, the treatment should lead to limited benefits in riparian area health and vigor, improved water quality and overall water yield.

Contact: Mary L. Wilson, (307) 328-4329

Utah

Woolsey-Vandenburg Fuels Reduction Project

In late April the Cedar City, Utah BLM began working on the Woolsey-Vandenburg Fuels Reduction Project in south-central Iron County. The 975 acre project area is located adjacent to the communities of Quichapa and Woolsey Ranch and also borders Highway SR-56. By incorporating fire management objectives and resource

objectives, the project serves as a fuel break to neighboring communities while also restoring wildlife habitat for big game.

The project was designed in cooperation with Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, local chapter of Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, and U.S. Forest Service. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and the Southern Utah Chapter of Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife have contributed \$50,000 in conservation permit dollars from the sale of hunting tags and licenses in the local area to cover labor costs associated with the removal of pinyon and juniper.

The residents of Quichapa and the surrounding area have established an active fire council. They completed writing their community fire plan in May of 2003 and addressed the need for fuel breaks on neighboring BLM lands. Since that time, the council has created two defensible space demonstration lots and has coordinated several community chipping days with National Fire Plan grant money.

When completed, the Woolsey-Vandenburg Fuels Reduction Project will give residents even more protection from wildfire by linking to a fuel break that Utah Forestry, Fire and State Lands has completed along the Vandenburg Road. By reducing hazardous fuels the Vandenburg Road will be more effective as a



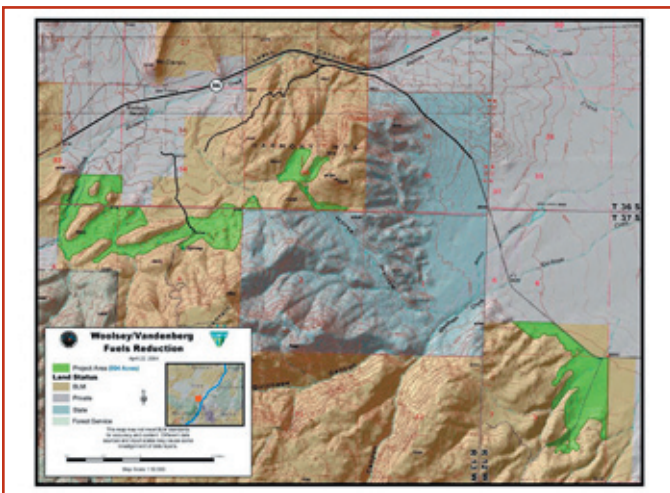
Prior to treatment, this area lies between the communities of Quichapa and Woosley Ranch.



The Bullhog has removed trees along SR56 and the Vandenburg-Bumblebee Road. Approximately 600 acres will be treated using the environmental brushcutter.

potential escape route and tactical fuel break in the event of a wildfire. The project will decrease the likelihood of a catastrophic wildfire moving from BLM lands on to private property and will ensure that future wildfire suppression activities would be less dangerous for fire fighters and more cost effective.

In addition to providing protection from wildfire, the mosaic patterns of treatments will enhance forage conditions and riparian areas by removing pinyon and juniper trees that are currently intercepting ground water and out-competing the riparian



Map of the Woolsey-Vandenburg Project Area.

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This part of the project area was chained in the 1960's; however, pinyon and juniper trees have re-invaded the area.



A contractor has removed trees in this lop and scatter unit adjacent to homes in the Woolsey Ranch area.

In the 1960's, approximately 800 acres of the project area was chained to reduce the encroachment of pinyon and juniper trees. Over the past forty years, however, they have re-invaded areas that were once covered with grasses, forbs, and shrubs.

Currently in the project area, pinyon and juniper trees are being removed manually and mechanically to create a mosaic pattern. BLM personnel and contractors are hand cutting areas, using lop and scatter method and are piling other areas to be burned later in the fall and winter. The "Bull Hog", an

environmental brush cutter is also being used to mechanically remove trees. Work will continue on the project throughout the summer and should be completed by winter.

environmental brush cutter is also being used to mechanically remove trees. Work will continue on the project throughout the summer and should be completed by winter.

Contact: Cedar City BLM (435) 865-3013

Shindy Draw Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

Between the summer of 2001 and the summer of 2002 the Vernal Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management completed a hazardous fuels reduction project at the mouth of Shindy Draw. The project area is located northwest of Vernal up Dry Fork Canyon.

The Shindy Draw project area consisted of 21 acres of basin big sagebrush with an underlying layer of cheatgrass. Most of the sagebrush reached heights over ten feet tall. North of Shindy Draw there are homes which were built on or near the boundary line that divides the public land from the private property. The purpose of the project was to protect the homes by creating a safety buffer between them and the draw.



Hank Barela, who is 5'9" tall, uses range pole to show height of basin big sagebrush. This was the typical size of sagebrush in the project area.

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The range pole shows the height of one of the fifty piles of sagebrush created by fire crews.



This overview photo is a before picture of the 21 acres.



This overview after photo was taken two years later from the same overlook.

Throughout the summer of 2001 fire crews spent a number of days cutting and piling the brush. Chainsaws were used to do the cutting while the piling was done by hand.

In February of 2002 a handful of fire personnel burned the 50 piles of sagebrush. The piles were burned very early in the year to take advantage of the presence of snow which kept the fire from spreading beyond the piles.

During the spring, following the fuels reduction project, fire personnel used a native mixture of seeds to reseed the acres. The mixture included fourwing saltbrush, basin wildrye, western wheatgrass and needle and thread. Fire personnel mixed the seed and then used backpack spreaders to spread the seeds over the project area.

Two years later, what was once 21 acres of basin big sagebrush, is now 21 acres of low, light fuels consisting of grasses and small brush. This project will be followed by a 600-acre tree thinning project that will continue up Shindy Draw. The mechanical treatment of the trees will be followed by a prescribed burn to remove the downed fuels.

Communities Write Fire Plans with Moab BLM Help

The BLM Moab District Office in cooperation with Utah State Division of Forestry, Fire and State Land and the Manti-La Sal District of the U.S. Forest Service, coordinated and assisted ten communities in writing and completing community fire plans.

Starting in October 2003, the three agencies combined with community members and county administrators held a series of workshops designed to help communities write the plans.

Canyon Terrace, Castle Valley, East Carbon including Sunnyside and Columbia, Old La Sal and Ray Mesa, Pack Creek, Blanding including White Mesa and Johnson Creek, Eastland, and Montezuma Canyon all attended the workshops and started developing fire councils. In addition to the workshops, each of the communities held “in house” meetings with the various agencies to coordinate efforts and keep “everybody on the same page”.

All of these are communities at risk with the exception of Eastland, Johnson Creek and Montezuma Canyon. However, the latter three should be added to the list by the end of 2004. Many of these communities were already involved as National Fire Plan Grant recipients. The remaining communities saw the need for fire mitigation and simply started the process all on their own with guidance from the cooperating agencies.

The community of Castle Valley has taken fire mitigation a step further. They have also applied for and received a grant through Firewise. Through the grant they were able to acquire resources management

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software that will help them in their mapping and fire mitigation efforts.

The agencies worked with two different contractors to hold the community fire plan writing workshops. Community Solutions is the contractor helping with the creative side of plan development, and forester Lenard Stull contracted to get the mechanics of the plan writing done.

The principal of Grouse Creek School expressed an interest in more presentations for the youth to learn of more opportunities and work in the BLM.



Grouse Creek Students Take to the Field

With only five days left in the school year, the one room schoolhouse in Grouse Creek, Utah was paid a visit by staff from BLM's Salt Lake Field Office to talk to children about wild horses, rangeland management, wildland firefighting and the importance of community fire planning.



Students watch the BLM Bullhog at work.

Youngsters enjoyed the day watching mechanical work getting done.

The Grouse Creek School has 12 students in grades one to ten. The school presentation was a successful in addressing a wide variety of interests and ages. The "little school" enjoyed hearing about the wild horses that roam public lands. Their teacher divulged that this pack of children pretend to be wild horses at recess. Meanwhile, the "big school" was captivated by the fact that they could fight fire someday if they were in good shape and did well in school.

Both grades were treated to a field trip visiting the Bullhog that has been working nearby in Cook Canyon on a hazardous fuels reduction project to thin a thick stand of juniper trees. The operator of the Bullhog spoke with the youngsters of Grouse Creek about Bullhog operation. Considering that many of these children are from ranching backgrounds they were fascinated by the tractor-like machine.



Bullhog operator gives the students some up close information about its operation.