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Successful BLM Hazardous Fuels Projects...

Arizona

Tucson Field Office, Safford/Tucson Fire Management Zone

Firewise cooperation in action

An interagency team from the Forest Service, Arizona State Land Department and the BLM recently held a Firewise workshop in cooperation with the National Audubon Society and the Sonoita/Elgin Emergency Services, Inc. More than 40 people attended this indoor workshop at the emergency services station in Sonoita, in southeastern Arizona. Numerous specialists made presentations during the half-day workshop.

Forest Service Fire Prevention Officers and BLM's Assistant Fire Management Officer brought various messages to the group. These covered what homeowners can do to protect their homes and other structures from wildfires, how environmental factors influence firefighting procedures when wildfire reaches an interface area, why the "triage" method is used to allocate resources most effectively and a variety of traditional Smokey Bear fire prevention messages. A Forester/Fire Management Officer from the Arizona State Land Department also discussed situations experienced by fire professionals, which make it difficult or dangerous for fire crews to defend structures. Ideas were shared with the group on practical ways landowners and communities can improve the survivability of their homes without sacrificing the beauty of the landscape. The Firewise participants were also given instructions on what to do if a wildfire threatens their homes.



The local community learns to better prepare homes from wildland fire.

A BLM Fire Mitigation Specialist covered topics such as the historical, ecological and cultural roles of fire, fire elements, behavior and the inherent risks, fire as a management tool and why landowners in wildland urban interface areas need to be proactive in protecting their property from wildfires. The Assistant Director from the National Audubon Society introduced the cadre and told people why the workshop was organized. The Chief of Sonoita/Elgin Emergency Services also spoke to the local group about their emergency services and limitations.

The Firewise team placed special emphasis on encouraging participants to develop their own grassroots effort to protect homes and property from wildfire. People

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learned ways to prepare their land so interface structures would be more likely to survive wildfires. The group was asked to envision a worst-case scenario, where a wildfire passes through their property when they are away from home, or when firefighters were unable to extend limited suppression resources to protect their property. They were asked to think about what they had learned which might help them better prepare their home and property for a wildfire.

The fire management team also offered expertise on future workshops the group might be interested in sponsoring in their community. The team gave the class examples of potential future workshops, such as fire-resistant vegetation and constructing homes using Firewise principles, as well as how communities can apply for and receive financial assistance to implement projects.

The three agencies distributed materials including Firewise information, brochures on fire ecology, prescribed fire, traditional prevention messages, home hazard assessment forms and booklets on the methodology of preparing a fire hazard assessments.

Audubon ranch success

In April 2002 the Ryan Fire swept over 38,000 acres about 45 miles south of Tucson in a dramatic and rapid burn that covered the Audubon Ranch, owned and operated by the Audubon Society. The ranch headquarters complex, in a direct line of the fire, was saved because of work that had earlier been accomplished through cooperative prescribed fire projects with BLM, and as a result of actions taken by ranch managers to protect the buildings after they had been briefed with Firewise educational materials.



Audubon Ranch headquarters complex, surrounded by burned acreage from the Ryan Fire. Cooperative prescribed fires and following Firewise guidelines paid off!

Firewise soldiers

More than 8,000 soldiers and personnel from Arizona's Fort Huachuca Military Reservation attended the annual Safety Day program in May. The BLM set up a booth with Firewise literature and presented the video: "Wildfire Defense, Fire Free, Get in the Zone," a production of Safeco Insurance Company. The 10-minute video reached a broad audience, educating the public on reducing the risk of wildfire to their home. The video shows 10 common sense steps used to create defensible space

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around structures. The BLM's display table was adjacent to Tucson's National Weather Service display, giving the two agencies an opportunity to share ideas while showing the public how agencies work together in prescribed and wildland fire management.

Contact: David N. Peters, Tucson Field Office (520) 258-7207)



BLM introduces soldiers to Firewise education tools.

Phoenix Field Office, Kingman/Phoenix Fire Management Zone

Education is the key to wildfire prevention

The Department of Interior's National Fire Plan, Rural Fire Assistance Program provides grants to rural fire departments to enhance their fire protection capabilities.



In 2001, fire staff from the BLM's Phoenix Field Office, in cooperation with the Black Canyon City Fire Department began a wildland urban interface survey of Black Canyon City. The survey identified homes at risk based on the amount of defensible space and hazardous fuel accumulation within the town.

Before and after pictures of interagency fuel reduction projects at Black Canyon City, Arizona.



On May 11 and 12 this year BLM, the Black Canyon City Fire Department and interested citizens began the second phase of the "urban interface fire prevention education

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project” to reduce hazardous fuels on private property. Approximately 100 residents, property owners and concerned citizens attended presentations on reducing fire risks in the community and creating defensible space around homes. Fire crews enlisted the assistance of the community on a small brush and light fuels clearing project — a hands-on experience. Future assistance in this project will include continued patrols to determine threat assessment for homeowners and visits to local schools to provide preventive education to community youth.

With what has been described as a “high danger” fire season throughout most of Arizona, prevention is key. This project follows a collaborative approach for reducing wildland fire risks to communities and the environment, a focused strategy to improve prevention and suppression, reduce hazardous fuels and promote community assistance. This helps both the community and the BLM reduce risks for private landowners.

Contact: Bruce Olsen, Phoenix Field Office (623) 580-5500

Arizona Strip Field Office

Mt. Trumbull ponderosa pine ecosystem restoration

BLM, in partnership with Northern Arizona University, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and a steering committee of diverse interests, is engaged in a long-term cooperative project to restore the Mt. Trumbull ponderosa pine ecosystem on the Arizona Strip. The Mt. Trumbull area was designated in the Arizona Strip Resource Management Plan in 1992 as a Resource Conservation Area. The management plan carries a commitment to do further planning to resolve ponderosa pine, wildlife and recreation issues within the Mt. Trumbull area. An interdisciplinary team, by consensus, has set a goal to maintain a healthy ecosystem and increase biodiversity while meeting human needs. The team also identified issues and objectives for the area.

Researchers, prior to treatments, completed data collection on current wildlife populations, forest density and age structure, herbaceous diversity, fuel loading, as well as dendrochronological data



Fire crews burn understory to mimic historical conditions.

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to reconstruct what this forest and others similar to it looked like prior to fire exclusion. Current work involves applying this knowledge to the landscape to reconstruct forest characteristics before disruption of the fire regime followed by monitoring.

Adaptive management is being utilized so treatments are adjusted as knowledge is gained. The project is now in its sixth year. Treatments include harvesting trees for wood products, thinning of smaller trees, prescribed burning and reseeded will be applied to twenty distinct units encompassing approximately 1,900 acres. BLM is responsible for implementing treatments.

The university, Arizona Fish and Game Department and BLM are conducting studies to analyze changes in forest structure since disruption of the natural fire regime, and to determine effects of restoration treatments on ecosystem components including vegetation, insect, reptile, bird and mammal communities. Local environmental groups such as the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity and the Grand Canyon Trust support this restoration work.

Recently, the Mt. Trumbull project area was included in the Grand Canyon - Parashant National Monument in January 2000. BLM will continue to work cooperatively in studies and research within the Grand Canyon - Parashant National Monument to learn more about the restoration of ponderosa pine ecosystems to healthy, sustainable conditions. BLM is also exploring potential ecosystem restoration in the Mt. Trumbull and Mt. Logan wildernesses with a steering committee and the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute.

Contact: Jessica Wade, Arizona Strip Field Office (435) 688-3292

Arizona State Office

Interagency group selects Rural Fire Assistance grant recipients

In early April, an interagency panel from the BLM, Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Arizona State Land Department (Fire Management), Arizona Fire District Association and the Arizona State Fire Chief Association met to review grant proposals under the Rural Fire Assistance program.

The interagency panel approach is being used in awarding rural fire grants. By including



Interagency group meets to select grant recipients.

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interested parties from the state and federal governments and the rural fire departments, Arizona is able to maximize the grant monies to rural fire from the departments of interior and agriculture.

This year, 37 rural fire departments were awarded grants totaling \$415,000 from the BLM, primarily for radios, wildland fire equipment and firefighter personal protective gear. Now in its second year, the program continues to have a very positive effect on improving firefighter safety for rural fire departments capabilities to suppress unwanted wildland fires.

Contact: Mike Fisher, Arizona State Office, BLM, (602) 417-9307

Alaska

Anchorage District Office

Fuel reduction work continues on Campbell Tract in Anchorage

Fire mitigation efforts on the 730-acre Campbell Tract continues this year as BLM completes the last half of its two-year hazardous fuel reduction plan. The fuel break around the Tract will eventually connect with a similar break created by the Municipality of Anchorage on municipal parklands that surround Campbell Tract.



Debris piles covered with blue tarps waiting for burning.



A late spring snow delayed burning.

Last year, the BLM completed 50 percent of the work thinning branches, clearing dead and dying trees within the break line, and creating defensible space around BLM structures. BLM planned to burn the debris piles in late March, but a late season surprise snowfall of nearly three feet delayed the burn. Brian Sterbenz, Campbell Tract fire specialist, said they needed enough snow to make burning safe, but so much snow fell that burning the debris piles became impossible until late April.

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In addition to the fire fuel break around the Campbell Tract perimeter, crews are on the lookout for beetle-killed, dead or dying trees that pose trail hazards. More than ten miles of multi-use recreational trails crisscross the Tract. Anchorage residents enjoy hiking, dog walking, and horseback riding in the summer, and cross-country skiing and dog mushing in the winter.



Conditions were finally appropriate to complete the debris burning.

The fuel reduction program includes attention to aesthetic values of keeping Campbell Tract beautiful as well as functional while maintaining a healthy forest system and implementing fire mitigation efforts.

Texas

Prescribed burn clears fuels, improves habitat at Crossbar

A collective long-term effort by an interagency group in Texas resulted in dramatic resource improvement benefits across nearly 10,000 acres of Texas high plains ecosystem in April. The Crossbar prescribed fire was planned to reduce hazardous fuels, rejuvenate native grasses, and stimulate the forb community for area wildlife habitat. The land had been severely overgrazed for about 70 years, and was considered to be in poor health because of weed encroachment and decadent vegetation buildup. The Crossbar Fire, on the only BLM lands within the state of Texas, took more than a month for preparation and pre-fire work.



“The state office coordinated it,” said Karen Michaud, fuels manager with the BLM in Santa Fe, New Mexico, “and the Taos field office stepped in to help pull it off. We also had a lot of help from the Park Service and Fish & Wildlife Service.”

Charley Luevano, fire control officer in the Roswell field office, helped with the blacklining. “We’d been plugging away at it since March,” he said. “We were in there several times with several applications of fire, in order to get the perimeters in before we did the actual burn.” Luevano said a dozen or more personnel from Texas Tech University worked on the fire, with a couple of their Type 6 engines and ATVs and an assist from the Park Service.

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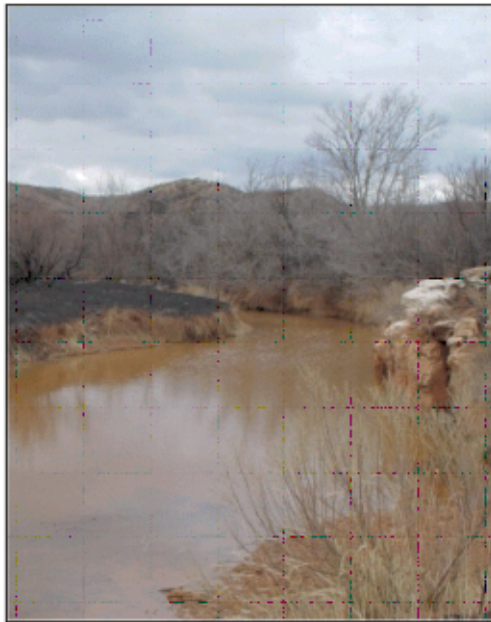
“Texas Tech has a fire program,” explained Leuvano, “and part of the technical study is to go out to the field and do prescribed burns. They contract those services out with private landowners, and it gives the students exposure to live fire training. It was lots of fun; I enjoyed working with them.”

TEXAS TECH T-SHIRT:

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TORCHING 9,760 ACRES IN 3 DAYS: PRICELESS

The Fire Ecology Center at TTU trains resource managers to plan, apply, and evaluate the impacts of prescribed fire. Developed in 1997, it’s a part of the Department of Range, Wildlife, and Fisheries Management at TTU’s College of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources.

Leuvano added that Texas Tech had contracted to conduct this prescribed fire project. “They were basically in charge,” he said. “I was just there as a project inspector to see whether they’d accomplished the objectives of the project. And I was very pleased with what they did and how they did it.”



For the burn itself, several other resources were brought in. Pat Pacheco from the BLM’s Taos office, along with Don Kearney from the Socorro office and several folks from the Fire Use Training Academy (FUTA) were also involved in the project.

“Everybody was pleased with the outcome,” said Leuvano. “This was not your typical prescribed fire, mostly because the feds weren’t really running it. The contractor was running it. So it took a lot of flexibility on everyone’s part, and I think it went really well.”

Key objectives on the project including getting rid of most of the decadent fuels — primarily grasses and lighter fuels, brush, and salt cedar.

Grazing and fire suppression contributed to invasive species on the Crossbar, and noxious weeds invaded the lands.

The 11,834 acres of BLM lands known as the Crossbar overlie an active gas field and helium storage dome. The land is surrounded

by private lands, and it was grazed by livestock from 1932 until 1993, when over 8,000 acres were removed from grazing. Since 1999, none of the Crossbar BLM lands have been grazed by livestock.

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Feather dalea is a shrub of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts.

Predominant species include blue grama, little blue stem, big blue stem and buffalo grasses. Interspersed with the grasses are scattered clumps of sand sagebrush, yucca, broom snakeweed, plains prickly pear, feather dalea, and mesquite. Salt cedar has encroached along the Canadian River and West Amarillo Creek.

Grazing and fire suppression have contributed to invasive species; mesquite, Japanese brome, snakeweed, Russian thistle, kochia, tamarisk, and other noxious weeds have heavily invaded the lands, to the detriment of native plant and wildlife species.

Many species of wildlife occur in the area, and these lands support a diverse animal community typical of the Texas High Plains ecological subregion. Species include pronghorn antelope, mule deer, whitetail deer, coyote, desert cottontail, bobcat, raccoon, beaver, porcupine,

skunk, pocket gopher, mole, bat, and plains pocket mouse. Common birds include wild turkey, bobwhite, mourning dove, red winged blackbird, roadrunner, western meadowlark, western kingbird, cedar waxwing, and golden eagle. Several species of reptiles and amphibians, including the Texas horned lizard, are also typical.

The property was severely overgrazed for about 70 years, and it was considered to be in poor health because of weed encroachment and buildup of decadent vegetation. Prescribed fire was used to reduce hazardous fuel, rejuvenate native grasses, and stimulate the forb community.

In preparation for the project, nearly 30 miles of new firelines were cleared. Parallel lines were established 100 feet apart on the north and east sides of isolated sections of BLM lands and along the eastern boundary of the property. The area between these lines was burned off two weeks prior to the main fire in order to create large blacklines between private lands and BLM property.

Waiting for burn conditions to fall within prescription was difficult. After several false starts, the first week in April finally offered hopeful conditions; the Texas Tech crews showed up, along with crews from the National Park Service, the Fire Use Training Academy (FUTA) and BLM.

The fire was started in the northeastern corner of the property using aerial ignition (ping-pong balls) and hand crews with driptorches. Crews continued the burn well into the evening of the first day. The



Pre-burn briefing: Personnel from Texas Tech, the National Park Service, the Fire Use Training Academy and BLM prepare for the burn.

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southern end of West Amarillo Creek was ignited in the afternoon, and when the crews left that evening, the fire in the canyon was slowly heading north. With several miles of blackline between the canyon and private property, no problems were anticipated in leaving the fire until the crews returned the next day. The glow of the fire down in the canyon could be seen that night from several miles away, though, and some residents called the county fire department to report an “out of control” wildfire heading for US Highway 287. The Potter County Fire Department was reassured that the fire was behaving as expected.

The next day the fire personnel were divided into three burn crews for ignition using driptorches. By the end of the second day, the crews had finished the contiguous Crossbar property.

The vegetation, viewed a month after the fire, has changed dramatically. Salt cedar along the Canadian River and West Amarillo Creek was set back significantly. The salt cedar has begun to re-generate from the bases of the plants, and it's planned to spray the sprouts this summer with Garlon4 to kill off most of the plants. Approximately 80 percent of the mesquite trees were top-killed, and it's expected that they, too, will re-sprout from the bases. Aerial application of herbicide targeting the mesquite is planned prior to the next prescribed burn.



Salt cedar in the West Amarillo Creek was set back significantly by the burn; post-burn vegetation improvements have been dramatic.

Cool season grasses appear to be less vigorous, and the warm season grasses are dominating the regrowth.

The remaining 2100 acres of the Crossbar will be burned in the spring of 2003.

For more information:

Texas Tech University:
<http://www.ttu.edu/>

TTU Fire Ecology Center:
<http://www.rw.ttu.edu/fec/>

FUTA:
<http://www.nationalfiretraining.net/sw/futa/>

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