

Wildfire Protection

Wildland Urban Interface
creates special challenges in California

BLM



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Director

As the head of the agency responsible for managing the public lands in California, my number one priority is protecting public health and safety. As State Director for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that means working with "communities at risk" and "communities of interest" to help protect them from the catastrophic wildland fires that often occur in California.

The National Fire Plan directed States and Federal

agencies to identify communities at high risk from wildfire adjacent to Federal lands, as well as other communities of interest where wildfire danger is a threat. The response has been significant, with 1,332 California "communities at risk" identified to date, along with 1,268 "communities of interest."

These designations are critical as these communities combine their efforts to form "Fire Safe Councils" to apply for Federal grants from BLM and other agencies to match their own funds and labor to complete projects designed to reduce their fire risk. These projects range from fuels reduction to building firebreaks to fire evacuation plans and other important measures.

BLM is proud to be able to assist many of California's 170 Fire Safe Councils chartered to date. While we cannot meet all the requests based on limited funding, we are encouraged by the willingness of these communities to match these funds or contribute labor.

Why is this important? In 2007, California suffered one of its worst fire seasons in history – 1.6 million acres burned, 8,881 individual fires, 3,830 homes and structures burned, and lives lost. Many factors are involved: dry conditions, winds, fuels, wildland-urban interface, and others.

While we can't control the natural systems involved in fire, we can do more to reduce these risks by working together on projects such as those described in this publication. BLM, along with other Federal, State, and local agency partners, are committed to expanding these efforts to better protect the people of California and the public land resources.

"BLM is proud to be able to assist many of California's 170 Fire Safe Councils..."

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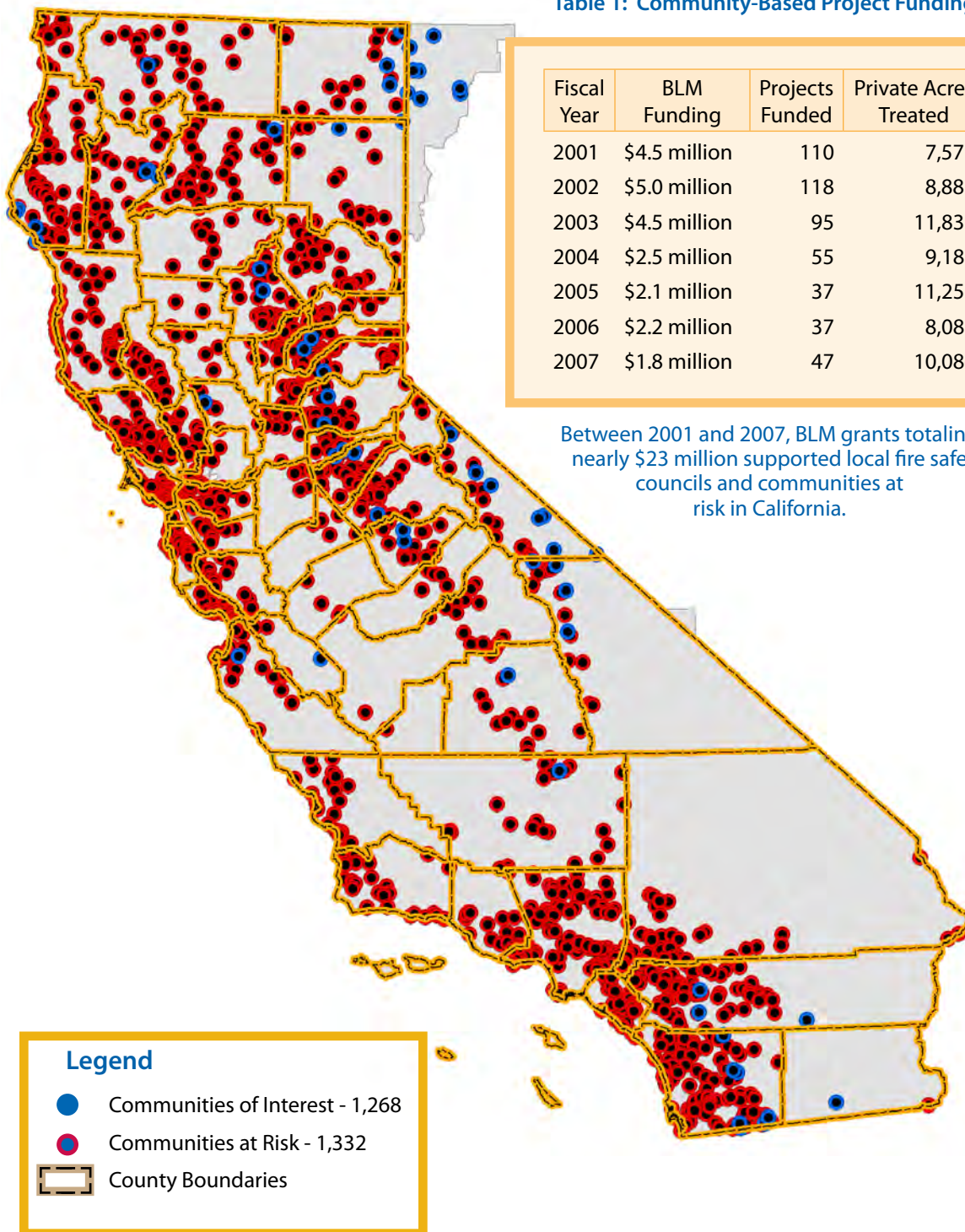
BLM has assisted over 400 communities at-risk to wildfire in 47 of the 58 counties across the state and helped treat nearly 67,000 acres of hazardous fuels on private lands.

BLM Funds to Protect California Communities

Table 1: Community-Based Project Funding

Fiscal Year	BLM Funding	Projects Funded	Private Acres Treated
2001	\$4.5 million	110	7,579
2002	\$5.0 million	118	8,882
2003	\$4.5 million	95	11,839
2004	\$2.5 million	55	9,185
2005	\$2.1 million	37	11,253
2006	\$2.2 million	37	8,081
2007	\$1.8 million	47	10,086

Between 2001 and 2007, BLM grants totaling nearly \$23 million supported local fire safe councils and communities at risk in California.



California is uniquely involved in fire activities with the support of 170 Fire Safe Councils who work with the California Fire Alliance and local partners to reduce the risk of wildfire to California communities. Each year more than 400 funding requests (\$27 to \$29 million) are made to the BLM and Forest Service for National Fire Plan efforts in California. On average, community groups provide a 30 to 40 percent match of the total project funding.

Fire Safe Projects that Work

Border Project

Along the U.S. Mexico border, east of San Diego, an interagency coalition including BLM has started a multi-year effort to build and expand the International Fuel Break. Stretching 35 miles long and 200-300 feet wide, the break will cover 1,500 acres when completed. The partially completed project has already delivered – in the fire siege of 2007, about 1.5 miles of fuel break saved hundreds of homes in Tecate, proving the project is not only a viable tool for the protection of homes in the U.S., but also in Mexico. When completed, the fuel break will stretch from Otay Mesa on the west end, and up and over Otay Mountain to protect the communities of Dulzura, Tecate, Potrero, Campo, and Tierra del Sol in San Diego County.

Poppet Flats Project

BLM has been working for several years as part of an interagency effort to build a large community fuel break to protect the communities of Poppet Flat and Rancho Encino in Riverside County. During a wildfire in 2006, a completed portion of the fuel break protected these communities by slowing the fire's progress, giving suppression resources ample time to set up defenses and allowing the residents the ability to "shelter in place" while the fire burned past. This saved residents from needing to evacuate through the fire and taking unnecessary life-threatening risk. When the overall project is completed, the North Mountain Fuel Break will protect the communities of Idyllwild, Pine Cove, Soboba, Poppet Flats, Rancho Encino, Twin Pines, San Jacinto, and Banning in Riverside County.



Poppet Flats: Dense 10 foot high chaparral promotes high heat and flame lengths



Poppet Flats completed fuel break

Alpine Fire Protection Plan

In the scenic foothills of San Diego County, Alpine and surrounding communities are nestled in dense, volatile chaparral prone to strong Santa Ana winds. In a 2001 wildfire, these communities lost 83 structures, and in a 2003 fire, 91 structures were lost. The Alpine Community Wildland Fire Protection Plan was initiated, combining the resources of Federal, State, and local agencies to help these communities develop a "defensible neighborhoods" project consisting of 75 acres of fuels reduction and a community education plan. This project, using community assistance grant funds, consists of a homeowner clearance/chipping program, a multi-landowner fuel break, and public education events. The goal is to help make these vulnerable communities as "fire-safe" as possible.