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U.S. Department of the Interior

Bryce Canyon National Park

May 2002

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## Bryce Canyon National Park Fire Management



### Bryce Canyon Completes Spring Prescribed Burns

Bryce Canyon National Park Fire Management personnel recently completed a series of prescribed burns (RX) totaling 663 acres as part of their ongoing fire management program. These burns were part of the federal government's Wildland-Urban Interface program as directed by the National Fire Plan of 2000. Project goals include the protection of communities and structures located near public lands from the impacts of wildfire and the restoration of fire as a natural process to ponderosa pine and grassland communities. Bryce Canyon fire personnel are planning other similar burns in the future under the guidance of Bryce Canyon's Fire Management Plan.

The 445-acre Fairyland 2 RX, conducted in April 2002, was designed to reduce the wildfire hazard to Ruby's Inn (located just outside the park entrance), the Bryce Canyon Visitor Center, and other developments in or near the northern portion of the park. The area has been identified by state and federal land management agency administrators as one of six wildland-urban interface focus areas requiring priority fuels treatments in this part of Utah. This area, bordering private lands owned by Ruby's Inn Inc. and lands managed by the Dixie National Forest, was treated once before in 1994. The remaining 415 acres in the Fairyland 2 RX project are scheduled for treatment in the fall of 2002.

Two more prescribed burns totaling 148 acres were successfully completed in April 2002 in the Loop Hazard Fuels Reduction Project area. This project, located in the historic district of the park, was designed to reduce hazardous fuels accumulations around the historic buildings and other park structures. These burns bring the total treated acres on this project to 173. The remaining area of this 297-acre project will be mechanically treated in the summer of 2002.

The East Creek Ridge Prescribed Fire project was also completed this spring. The final 70 acres of the 1,451-acre ponderosa pine and meadow restoration project were burned in March 2002. The initial firing operation, conducted in June of 2001, was the first broadcast prescribed fire conducted west of the 100<sup>th</sup> Meridian after the lifting of the NPS prescribed fire moratorium.

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These RX's were a cooperative effort between state, local and federal agencies and were carried out over a period of four weeks. Bryce Canyon Fire Management personnel utilized the assistance of over 40 individuals and associated equipment including two Fire Use Training Academy Modules, BLM smokejumpers, fire personnel from other national parks, federal, state, and local wildland engine crews, and a helicopter operations module.

Much of the pre-burn preparation on these units had been completed in previous seasons. This included mechanical thinning of excess vegetation in areas around park structures and the subsequent winter burning of this debris in piles. Monitoring plots were established in the burn units and will be evaluated in the future to measure the fire's effects and determine if pre-burn goals and objectives were met.

Once all the conditions were within predetermined prescription levels, ignition of the units began. Initial burnout and blacklining around sections of the unit boundaries were done by hand ignition using drip torches. The interiors of the smaller units were also ignited by drip torches, while the larger areas were ignited (whenever safely possible) by aerial ignition from a helicopter utilizing a Plastic Sphere Dispenser machine. Holding crews and engines were stationed at critical points along the burn units' boundaries to ensure the fire stayed within the planned units.

The dispersal of information before, during, and after the RX's was critical to their success. Local citizens and business owners were contacted and made aware of the park's proposed burns through a public meeting, press releases, phone calls and personal visits. Public input concerning smoke issues and the burns' effects on visitation were utilized in the formation of the final planning documents for the burns. In addition, information officers roved throughout the park and local area during the burns, and information sites were established and staffed where park visitors could stop and safely observe the burns.

The lack of fire in Bryce Canyon (due mainly to past suppression efforts) has contributed to high fuel loadings and a change in forest structure. Prescribed fire is a treatment to reverse these changes brought on by fire exclusion. The policy of using fire as a tool will help decrease risks to life, property and resources and will help perpetuate the values for which Bryce Canyon National Park was established.

