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## Teton Interagency Fire Management Fencing Project Helping to Achieve Prescribed Fire Objectives



In October 2002, Teton Interagency crews implemented the Wolff Ridge Prescribed Fire, a 1700- acre project planned by resource managers and fire management personnel to stimulate regeneration of quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) stands in the Lower Spread Creek area. Post- burn data collected by fire effects monitors has indicated an increase in the number of aspen suckers compared to pre- burn conditions. Because Wolff Ridge is located in a transitional and winter ungulate range where heavy browsing by moose and elk occurs, fire managers installed a temporary electric fence in the fall of 2003 around 60 selected acres of the project to protect suckers from ungulate browsing. A crew returned to this area again last month to make repairs and prepare the fence for the second migration season.

Reduction of aspen on the landscape is a concern in northwestern Wyoming, in both Grand Teton National Park and the Bridger- Teton National Forest. Fire suppression efforts combined with ungulate densities have contributed to this significant loss of critical habitat. Historically, extensive fires created early seral sprouting of quaking aspen and the growth of palatable grasses, shrubs and herbs. This broadscale regrowth produced a forage supply that sufficiently dispersed browsing ungulates and allowed the aspen to regenerate. The goal of the fencing project is to reduce the amount of browsing in the area until the aspen sprouts attain a height above browseline, or approximately two meters.



The fence consists of four wires, attached to tee posts and trees for support. Three of the wires are high tensile steel, placed at heights of 18, 32, and 68 inches. The fourth, placed at 48" high, utilizes ½" electrical tape. The tee posts are equipped with adjustable fiberglass supports to maintain proper wire heights. The bottom wire has been left as a grounding wire and does not carry a charge.



To increase visibility to wildlife, the fence is marked with two types of flagging. The first is a standard orange plastic flagging, and the second is made from high flash Mylar® tape that reflects light off the shiny red and silver material. The noise made by the crinkly texture of the Mylar® in the wind further deters animal traffic into the enclosure.



*Photo insert: Ungulates investigated the Mylar® flagging last winter and respected the fence.*

Elk begin browsing quaking aspen as soon as they move onto winter ranges in November and continue to use the area through March. Last year's monitoring indicated the critical time to patrol the fenceline and make repairs was the approximate six week period between the end of the park's elk reduction program (early December) and the end of the fall migration (mid- January). Crews checked the fence weekly throughout last winter, accessing the area by snowshoes or touring skis, to ensure the wires were still charged and effective. By June, when ungulates had changed their diet to newly sprouted grasses and forbs, the fence was turned off.



*In mid- December, approximately 25 elk were feeding near this site. The fence was proving successful in keeping moose and elk out of the 60- acre site. Subsequent tracks in January showed small groups of elk were still respecting the fence.*

Educational signs placed along the perimeter give background information on the prescribed fire and describe the fencing project. The flyers also inform visitors to the area that the enclosure remains open for recreational use and hunting. A contact number is for listed for persons interested in learning more about the project.

This winter, crews will continue to make weekly patrols to ensure the equipment is properly working and that animals or snow have not damaged the fence. When the summer field season returns, the interagency fire effects crew will continue to monitor seedling densities, aspen heights, and browsing impacts both inside and outside the fenced area. Together, these efforts on the Wolff Ridge Prescribed Fire project will continue to help achieve the objectives of aspen regeneration and stand improvement.