

Snapshots

May 2008

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Arizona

BLM Working with Community Partners to Create Home Ignition Zone Firebreaks

The BLM Gila District, along with the Arizona State Division of Forestry and the Banning Creek Firewise Community Working Group, worked closely with the town of Bisbee to complete the Bisbee Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). One of the mitigation measures identified within the CWPP was the creation of Home Ignition Zone firebreaks (HIZ) around the neighborhoods closest to wildland interface areas.

After the creation of the CWPP, Banning Creek installed 18 HIZ firebreaks for homes within a quarter mile of BLM public lands. This became very important when the Moon Canyon Fire broke out on March 20, 2008, within 100 feet of homes. The fire caused the evacuation of 100 residents, and took 200 of firefighters three days to contain.

BLM is able to provide funding assistance to complete the HIZ firebreaks. For homeowners to be eligible to



Moon Canyon Fire above the town of Bisbee, Arizona.

participate, there must be a completed and approved CWPP for their area, and the home must be within a quarter mile of BLM public lands. Homeowners interested in obtaining funds to construct a HIZ firebreak must also complete a release form, and submit a two page letter describing the HIZ project. BLM has funding to assist 25 homeowners this year. There are more than 200 homes in the Bisbee area (which is the Gila District's highest risk community from wildfires) that would qualify for this program. This program is only offered to homeowners once,

then after completion of the initial fuel break, the homeowner is responsible for maintaining the firebreak. In the past six months, since the establishment of this firebreak program, BLM has offered and completed HIZ firebreaks in Sonoita, Cascabel, and Bisbee. BLM is also currently offering this program to the communities of Escuplue, St. David, Palominas, Tombstone, and Hereford. After the completion of CWPPs in Pinal, Central Navajo and Southern Gila Counties, the district's fire management program will offer further HIZ firebreak cost sharing. In the long run, this program should save the BLM money, because it will not be necessary to maintain strategic firebreaks near communities, since the communities will be protected with the best firebreaks available to them, HIZ firebreaks.

Contact: Dave Peters, Fire Mitigation/Education Specialist, 520-258-7207

Hazardous Fuels Treatment Hard at Work

On April 3, 2008, the Paradise Cove fire consumed 57 acres of pristine riparian habitat along the Colorado River corridor in the Yuma Field Office. The wildfire



Moon Canyon Fire burning near a subdivision in Bisbee, Arizona.



Single Engine Airtanker on the Moon Canyon Fire.



Paradise Cove Fire in Untreated Area.



burned on the Arizona and California State line adjacent to two resort communities and in close proximity to a third community across the Colorado River.

Thankfully, this area had been identified as a high risk area due to fuel type and high public use. A hazardous fuel treatment was planned and implemented on BLM lands on the west side of the two Arizona communities using a bull hog to mulch and chip the vegetation. Shortly after the implementation, the Cocopah Indian Tribe observed the benefits of creating similar fuels treatments and implemented their own project west of the BLM project.

The Paradise Cove Fire originated between the two hazardous fuels projects and spread to the west, with flame lengths of 40-50 feet and zero chance of control. As the wildfire engaged the bull hog treatment area, it started to lose intensity and flame lengths dropped four to eight feet. With the drop in fire intensity, firefighters were able to safely achieve the upper hand by allowing crews to construct hand line from the Colorado River south to a green farm field.



Fuel break treatment utilizing a bullhog.



Firefighters conducting suppression action along the fuel break.

Although the fuel treatment did not stop the fire, the end result was accomplished by reducing and slowing the spread and intensity of the wildfire.

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Montana

Cooperative Timber Salvage

The BLM Miles City Field Office, Montana Department of Natural Resources, and the Padlock Ranch cooperated in a salvage sale on private, state, and federal land near the Wyoming-Montana border. The ranch was logging salvage timber after the 2006 Buffalo Creek Fire burned the area. The logger suggested that BLM and DNRC also allow the merchantable timber on the intermingled agencies' land be salvaged. The ranch permitted the logger



The crew prepares to light one of the slash piles.

access to the state and federal lands through ranch property. The partners also cooperated in the burning of slash piles in January of 2008. As a result of the salvage logging, the ranch and agencies have reduced hazardous fuels which will help to prevent and/or reduce the effects of future wildland fires.



Burning piles dot the hills



New Mexico

Knickerbocker Watershed Project Gears Up

When firefighters for the Farmington District Office resume the Knickerbocker Watershed Project this month (April), residents of the Knickerbocker community will sleep easier this summer and be plenty warm come winter.

This year's work on the project is to thin pinyon/juniper trees encroaching on what once was open prairie – to prevent the threat of catastrophic fire in the growing Knickerbocker community about five miles northeast of Aztec, NM. The pinyon/juniper thinning will provide residents of the community and others plenty of firewood for the winter.

The Farmington District Office began selling 2008 firewood permits April 1. Firewood permits can be purchased until December 31.

After the juniper is thinned and the area gone over for firewood, slash will be burned and native grass planted for the benefit of wildlife.



Before (above) and after (right) photos of the treatment area.

“This is just one project of the many projects that make up the Knickerbocker Watershed Project,” said Carlos Murillo, Fuels Module Leader for the Farmington Field Office.

The Farmington District Office of northern New Mexico is comprised of the Farmington Field Office and the Taos Field Office. Fifteen firefighters assigned to the Farmington and Taos offices will participate in the Knickerbocker Watershed Project.

The 1,300-acre Mud Canyon project part of the Knickerbocker Watershed Project started last year with 300 acres treated in this high desert landscape of sagebrush and pinon and juniper trees. The project will continue in increments of about 300 acres at a time until its scheduled completion in 2011.

This year's continuation of the project, the Mud Canyon phase, will begin about the end of this month (April) and continue through September.

Contact: Bill Papich in the Farmington Field Office at 575-599-6324.



Northern NM WUI Project Focuses on Reducing Hazardous Fuels Near Small Community

A large portion of the Cerro, New Mexico community has succumbed to the invasion of an overly dense forest near West Guadalupe Mountain.

The Cerro Wildland Urban Interface Project is located in Taos County, New Mexico, twenty-five miles south of the Colorado state line and three miles northwest of the town of Questa in the community of Cerro.

The BLM Taos Field Office Fuels Crew and members of the Taos Pueblo will be working together to provide the handwork for this hazardous fuels project. A fuel break is under construction that interrupts the contiguous vegetation that has built up in the area due to the lack of natural wildfire and hazardous fuels reductions activities.

Local support of the project is evidenced by an agreement with an adjacent landowner to allow the crew to continue their work across his private property. In addition to the fuel break, decadent brush will be removed, pinyon juniper cut back, and trees limbed up to reduce ladder fuels. All cut vegetation will be piled and burned. Fuel wood sales will be implemented for the distribution of the forest product left by the project.

Thus far, 125 acres have been targeted for treatment this spring and more work is planned including expanding the fuel break to improve the health of the forest and protect the community of Cerro.





Many benefits from this project have been identified including the reduced risk of catastrophic fire, protection of natural resources found on both public and private lands, improved habitat, and increased accessibility for firefighting equipment if the need arises.

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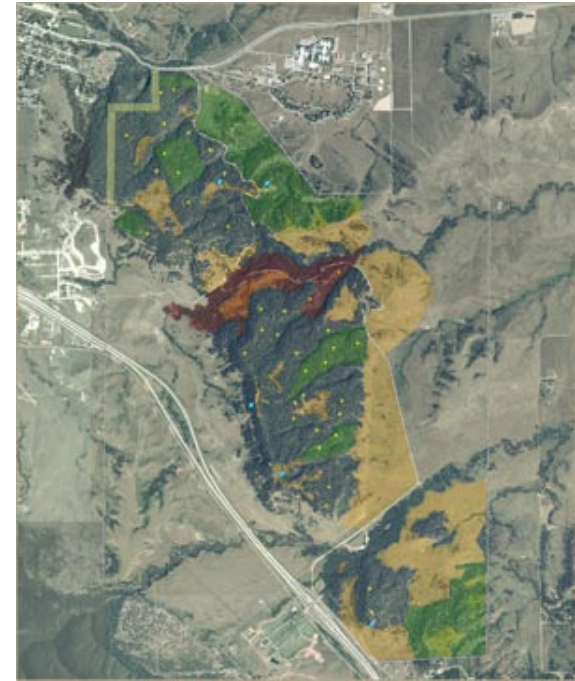
South Dakota

Planning is Leading the Way for Fuels Reduction Projects

During the past winter, the South Dakota Field Office proposed to improve forest and rangeland health at the Fort Meade Recreation Area (FMRA) through various fuels treatments. The plan was developed through a collaborative effort amongst resource specialists within the South Dakota Field Office, South Dakota State Game Fish and Parks, adjacent landowners and the public. This plan will enable the Bureau of Land Management to maintain and enhance the overall quality of the Fort Meade Recreation Area (FMRA).

The FMRA has been identified as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern due to its numerous historical and archeological sites. The area also includes hiking, mountain biking, and horse riding trails, wildlife viewing, and hunting opportunities which bring many people to the area. A loss of wildlife habitat, cultural resources and recreational opportunities in the event of a catastrophic wildfire would be devastating. These resources are irreplaceable to the Bureau of Land Management.

The major goals are to focus on wildlife habitat, insect and disease infestation, rejuvenation of decedent bur oak stands, pine encroachment, and reduce the threat of wildfire. This plan addresses opportunities to create a fuel break between the town of Sturgis, South Dakota and the approximately 2500 forested acres of the FMRA; thinning approximately 360 acres of Ponderosa Pine, 480 acres of hardwood release, and 600 acres of Pine encroachment; and the construction of one to five acre patch cuts throughout the FMRA to provide open areas for wildlife habitat and wildlife viewing within the Ponderosa Pine stands. The projects will also create scenic viewing points along the Centennial Trail which is routed through the FMRA. Benefits from the fuels treatments will go far in accomplishing multiple resource management goals and objectives. These fuels reduction projects will not only reduce the threat of wildfire but increase wildlife habitat for whitetail deer, turkeys, and other animals, and improve the recreational opportunities for visitors within the FMRA. Prescribed fire is also a key management tool in maintaining forest health within the FMRA and has been accepted by adjacent landowners and the public. The Fort Meade Fuels Module currently has prescribed fire units on the FMRA that include lands other than Bureau of Land Management land to perform prescribed fire on and will continue working with cooperators and local landowners in the future.



Map of the area.

While the proposed plan is still in the draft form, there has been good feedback and support from the public and other organizations through public meetings and scoping letters. If approved, treatment activities would commence in the summer of 2009 and continue thereafter through the use of contractors and BLM employees.

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