

Snapshots - July 2008

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Nevada

Carson City Field Office Tackles Fuels and Sage Grouse Challenges

Two major issues confronting the Carson City Field Office are wildland fire management and sage grouse habitat management. Both issues are intimately related to vegetation community dynamics and the ways these dynamics have changed over time. Both issues are also driven by national level policies and strategies.

Historic vegetation community dynamics in western Nevada are believed to have been influenced by a fire regime characterized by fairly frequent low and mixed intensity fires that created a mix of sagebrush, grass and woodland habitat across the landscape. This historic dynamic provided an ample supply of high quality habitat for sage grouse and many other species common in the great basin. Changes in vegetation dynamics engendered by historic land uses, alteration of the historic fire regime and perhaps climate change are believed to have caused a shift in the distribution and quality of habitat. The outcome can be characterized by reduced high quality habitat for sage grouse and wildfires that are larger as well as more intense, erratic and difficult to control. Firefighter safety, ecosystem sustainability and sage grouse populations are all compromised by these developments.

The Carson City Field Office is in the process of conducting the Mill Canyon Vegetation Treatment Project on 2,550 acres of public land in the Pine Nut Mountains northeast of Dayton, Nevada to address wildfire and sage grouse habitat concerns. The Mill Canyon project involves altering vegetation structure and composition in order to modify fire behavior, enhance fire suppression capabilities, protect

existing sage grouse habitat characteristics, and improve sage grouse habitat characteristics.

The project is located in a north-south trending valley between two mountainous and heavily forested areas of the Pine Nut Mountains. Singleleaf pinyon pine and Utah juniper trees dominate the mountain slopes as well as the majority of the project area. Fuels in these areas are heavy and would support an intense wildfire under the hot windy conditions common during the summer months.

Pinyon and juniper trees, in the proposed project area, are in the process of forming a horizontally continuous bed of heavy fuels between the mountainous forested areas. If this situation is not addressed fuel loads would increase, understory vegetation would be stressed and depleted, sage grouse



Pinyon-juniper encroachment in the Mill Canyon project area.

habitat quality would be degraded and the stage would be set for a widespread destructive high intensity wildfire. Such a wildfire would be difficult and dangerous to control and could destroy near-by sage grouse habitat including a lek and seasonal habitat.



Overview of portion of Mill Canyon project. Open patches in middle left of picture are treatment in process.

Treatment on the Mill Canyon Vegetation Treatment Project was initiated on May 2, 2008. On May 8, 2008, less than one week after treatment initiation, the Como Fire, a large high intensity human caused wildfire, ran through the heavy pinyon-juniper adjacent to the Mill Canyon project and ran into a portion of the Mill Canyon project area where treatment had been completed. The Como Fire spotted into the Mill Canyon treatment area but did not carry through it with any intensity.

The Mill Canyon Vegetation Treatment Project was developed collaboratively with the Nevada Division of Wildlife, the Pine Nut Sage Grouse Population





Como Fire where it ran and spotted into recently treated portion of Mill Canyon project



Clark Taylor, South Central Mountain RC&D, host of the first meeting in Lincoln's Community Church to provide information about funds available to the community to reduce hazardous fuels on properties in and around Lincoln June 28 2007.



Brush pile of debris a land owner built.

Management Unit working Group, the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada, the Yerington Paiute Tribe and the public.

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New Mexico

Lincoln Fuels Reduction Project (WUI)

The Roswell Field Office is working in the community of Lincoln, NM and surrounding residences located within the Historical District, to reduce hazardous fuels on private lands. The proposed cooperative project (Clark Taylor, South Central RC&D, Bennie Long, Fire Chief Lincoln Volunteer Fire Department, Charles Schmidt, FMO and Allan Wyngaert Fire Management Specialist, Roswell Field Office BLM) estimated at 60 acres, begin in September 2007 and completion slated for September 2008. Lincoln

was settled in 1849 and was known by the Spanish families that settled there as Las Placitas del Rio Bonito (little town on the pretty river). In 1869, the town was renamed Lincoln in honor of President Abraham Lincoln and was designated as the county seat for Lincoln County. The importance of Lincoln and the surrounding community is the significance of the Bonita Valley in the prehistory and history of the Territory of New Mexico. This is interpreted within the historic adobe and stone buildings located in the Lincoln State Monument and that they remain preserved as they were in the late 1800s and represent the factions involved in the Lincoln County War, 1878-1881.

In June of 2007, only 10 local residences participated in the first public meeting and signed up to have their residences assessed for hazardous fuels buildup. Since the first meeting, 30 residences out of the 47 that reside there, have signed up to have hazardous fuels removed from their property according to Bennie Long, Lincoln Volunteer Fire Chief. There are two volunteers that have been working full-time

to clear brush, mowing, and hauling debris; and the crew has added three local student volunteers to help with removal of the fuel for the summer. The material taken from the residences are brought to a parking area (BLM acquired lands) and placed into piles which will be chipped at a later date. The residences will be able to use the chipped materials as mulch for flower beds and around trees.



Hazardous fuels built up at local residence.



The Roswell BLM is now working with the Lincoln County RC&D and Lincoln Volunteer Fire Department along with WUI funding through the New Mexico Association of Counties. This will further help reduce hazardous fuels on private lands throughout the Lincoln Historical District. Informal public meetings will be held to educate local residences about FIREWISE practices that can be applied around the structures in the local community.



Project site after mowing to remove flashy fuels that threatened a residence.