

Snapshots 2004



Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.

March 26

Arizona

Reducing Wildfire Risk in Pinion Pine, Arizona

The small residential community of Pinion Pine is located about six miles southeast of Kingman, Arizona. Approximately 160 homes have been built in a canyon at the north end of the Hualapai Mountains at the 5,000 foot elevation level. Pinyon pine, juniper forest and scrub oak encompass the area, including adjacent BLM and state lands, creating high potential for wildfire.

In 2002, the Kingman BLM office, in cooperation with the Arizona State Land Department, approached the community asking residents and the Pinion Pine Fire Department how the BLM could better serve the community with fire prevention and community assistance. As a result,

a decision was made to construct a three mile fuel break around the community, in some places within 50 yards of homes. The work initiated questions from residents to BLM fuels crew members about the project and its implementation.

When appropriate weather conditions arrived in January 2004, crews burned brush piles that resulted from construction of the fuel break to further prevent wildfire from entering the community. It also established defensible space for firefighters to work in the event of wildfire. As piles were burned, residents expressed confidence in BLM's ability to control the prescribed fire and appreciation for the work being done.

So far fully one-third of the three mile fuel break has been completed. As BLM fuels crews continue to make progress, residents are also working to reduce hazard fuels on private property, making homes safer from wildfire. Once the fuel break is complete and homeowners have improved their properties, residents will rest easier knowing that collaboration, cooperation and citizen-driven solutions have helped



After the fuel break was constructed, brush piles were burned. Several of the piles were near homes in Pinion Pine.

to greatly reduce the risk from wildfire to their community.

Contact: Michael Trent, Fire Prevention Officer, Kingman Field Office, (928) 692-4451

Weaver Mountain Fuels Project

Phoenix-Kingman Zone Fire and Fuels crews completed a 1,000 acre prescribed burn in early December 2003 as part of the Weaver Mountain



Helitorch commences firing. The Weaver Mountain Prescribed burn begins.



Creating defensible space along the west side of Pinion Pine. BLM firefighters burning along the fuel break.

Snapshots 2004



Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.

March 26



Example of the mosaic patterns within the burn block.

Project. Developed with the assistance of the Arizona State Land Department and in cooperation with private landowners, the burn is one piece of a 14,000-acre fuels treatment project selected for the President's "Healthy Forest Initiative." It is intended to increase firefighter and public safety through reduction of hazardous fuels, preventing the occurrence of a catastrophic wildfire.

Additional benefits include increasing forage for wildlife and creating a more diverse vegetation age class. This project was designed to be carried out over a five-to-ten-year period to create a mosaic pattern in closed chaparral. Creating mosaic openings in the chaparral mimics the historical pattern of fire occurrence and will ensure adequate vegetation for livestock grazing and wildlife. The area will be treated, as practical, for the next five to ten years to achieve these objectives over the entire project area.

Contact: Mike Trent, Fire Prevention Officer, Kingman Field Office (928) 692-4451

Community firebreaks put on the ground

BLM fire staff met with community leaders and concerned homeowners last summer in St. David, Arizona to discuss firebreaks recommended in the recently completed community wildfire hazard assessment and mitigation plan. One of the landowners wanted permission from the BLM to reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to their home, located only 20 feet from public land.



BLM employees meet with concerned homeowners regarding hazardous fuels around their homes.

Only a month after completing hazardous fuels reduction categorical exclusions for two landowners adjacent to BLM lands this winter, a firebreak was established by the Safford-Tucson Fire Management Zone fire crews.

As recommended in four separate community mitigation plans, a programmatic categorical exclusion that will cover eight additional fire breaks has been completed. It is currently being reviewed by the Tucson National Environmental Policy Act team before implementation by contractors and BLM crews begins.

Contact: Dave Peters, Zone Fire Mitigation Specialist, Tucson Field Office (520) 258-7207

Mittry Lake Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation Project

On March 12, 2003, the Mittry Lake wildfire burned 1,300 acres 20 miles northwest of Yuma, Arizona. This area along the Lower Colorado River is cooperatively managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

Although the wildfire destroyed valuable wildlife habitat and native vegetation, it was a prime opportunity to gain some ground against salt cedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*), an invasive species. A Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation team was requested to develop a rehabilitation plan. After it was written, it was initiated with mechanical treatment to shred above ground vegetation with a Bullhog, and root knifing the tamarisk to reduce its ability to use energy reserves for re-growth. Additional treatments will follow to catch any invasive plants that

Snapshots 2004



Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.

March 26



Some of the 50,000 trees to be planted replacing those lost in the Mittery Lake Fire.

may become established in the area disturbed by the wildfire.

The largest treatments are in progress right now. From February to April, 50,000 trees will be planted to replace those lost in the fire and to stop the establishment of salt cedar. The species planted are cottonwood, willow, mesquite, and three shrubs common to the Lower Colorado River. Complementing the tree planting effort, the burned area is also receiving a seed treatment. Four species of salt tolerant and fire resistant shrubs have been selected for seeding. The next steps in the project are to prepare the plantings for the heat of a



Workers drilling holes for pole plantings.

southern Arizona summer. In coordination with the Bureau of Reclamation and Arizona Game and Fish Department, the irrigation plan has been outlined for the plantings. This will help the new trees to become established within their first year at Mittery Lake. This project has put forth a great effort to combat invasive species, while in turn providing for the recovery of endangered species.

Prescribed Burns Along the Lower Colorado River

During February and March this year, the Bureau of Land Management Yuma Field Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs Fort Yuma Agency, and the Arizona Fire District of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cooperatively conducted three prescribed fires at the Imperial and Havasu National Wildlife Refuges. The three burns totaled 1,044 acres.

The interagency cooperation was very important for these critical habitat management burns. Valuable resources were shared and it also provided opportunities for staff from all three agencies to gain experience and training in a variety of assignments associated with prescribed fire.

The burns, based on research done by Dr. Courtney Conway, were conducted to improve the habitat for the federally endangered Yuma Clapper Rail. Dr. Conway is a research biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey and also a professor at the University of Arizona.

The burns are designed to create a positive benefit by utilizing fire as a substitute disturbance mechanism in place of regular flooding. At this point, regular floods no longer remove decadent buildup in cattail and bulrush marshes, which are the preferred habitat of the Yuma Clapper Rail. The burns also had a side benefit of breaking up the continuity of hazardous fuels within the Havasu and Imperial National Wildlife Refuges, thus making suppression effort along the lower Colorado River more effective.



Prescribed fire in use to protect endangered Clapper Rail.

Snapshots 2004



Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.

March 26

Idaho

Placer Creek Project, Shoshone County

Shoshone County, located in the Panhandle area of northern Idaho, has been on the cutting edge in developing and implementing courses of action to mitigate the potentially devastating effects of wildfire in the wildland-urban interface. A partnership involving the Idaho Department of Lands, U.S. Forest Service Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Program, Shoshone County Fire Districts, Shoshone County Disaster Services and BLM Coeur d'Alene Field

Office was formed to plan and implement fuel reduction and forest health projects within the interface.

Wallace was identified as the number one priority wildland-urban community at risk within Shoshone County. Additionally, the Placer Creek watershed has been the recent focus of intense scrutiny because it contains the source of the community's municipal water supply. Modeling efforts also indicate that history could repeat itself; wildfires would move through the Placer Creek watershed prior to burning the city of Wallace. It has been nearly 100 years since the catastrophic 1910 wildfire and this area of Shoshone County is again ripe for another extensive stand-replacing wildfire. Build-up

of fuels due to exclusion of natural fire, long-term drought and the encroachment of people and homes into the wildland-urban interface make it incumbent on the partners to quickly implement projects on the ground.

The multi-jurisdictional partners are evaluating various projects in the Placer Creek drainage to reduce hazardous fuels, improve forest health, enhance the protection of the municipal watershed, and improve wildlife habitat.

Many of the proposed projects cross political boundaries due to the intermixed character of the land ownership. Increased coordination amongst the partners will be required to successfully identify and complete the projects.

The Placer Creek Watershed Project is the start of several watershed-wide projects in Shoshone County that will aggressively target at-risk communities.

Contact: Kurt Pavlat, Program Manager, Coeur d'Alene Field Office, (208)-769-5038



In 1910, almost half of the city of Wallace was burned over by a wildfire that struck the city from Placer Creek, a drainage located south of the city. The devastating aftermath has not been erased from the memories of people living in the area. (USFS photo)

Snapshots 2004



Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.

March 26

Oregon

Vale District Communities-at-Risk Program

As a result of the National Fire Plan, the Vale District BLM implemented the Communities-at-Risk Wildland-Urban Interface Program. The goal of the program is to reduce the hazard of wildland fires to communities through public outreach, reduction and prevention of hazardous fuel build-up, and increasing fire protection capabilities of at-risk communities. As part of this program, the district conducted eight assessments of communities-at-risk to wildland fire. The eight assessments covered 15 individual communities in eastern Oregon. Dynamac Corporation was contracted to support the BLM in their assessment of the communities in the wildland-urban interface.

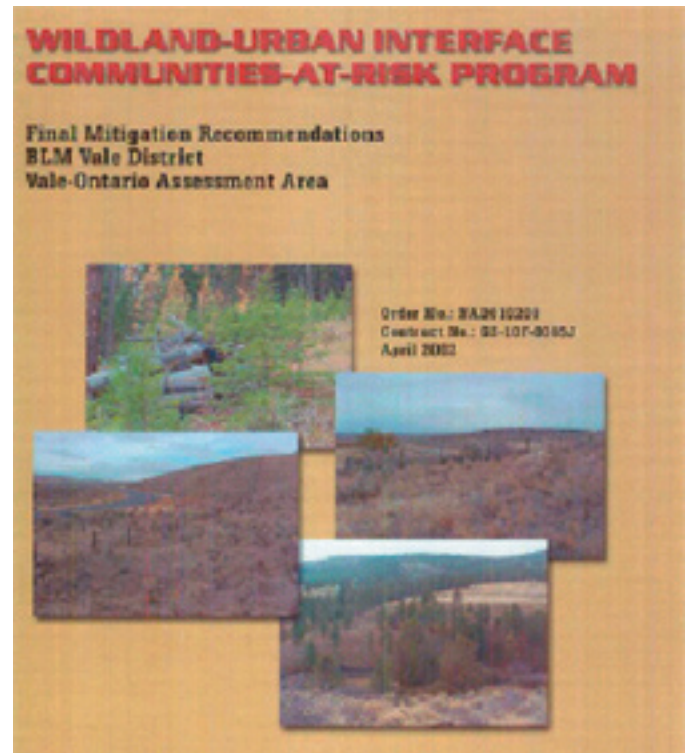
The assessments categorized hazardous fuels by vegetation, slope, and aspect of the land in the assessment area. Additionally, the risk of wildland fires to homes, structures, and cultural resources on private lands was evaluated based on building materials, the presence of defensible space, road access, and response time of the local fire department. An assessment of each community's road, water, and fire fighting equipment infrastructure was conducted. As part of the assessments, community meetings provided residents the opportunity to identify resources that could reduce the risk of wildland fire to their community.

In the McDermitt Assessment area, which includes the town of McDermitt on the Oregon and Nevada border,

the BLM and the public identified multi-year projects to treat 24,000 acres reducing fuel loading adjacent to the community and private lands, and converting and restoring highly flammable annual rangeland vegetation to more diverse perennial rangeland vegetation. In cooperation with local landowners and grazing permittees, the BLM conducted prescribed burns on 2,270 acres in 2002. In 2003 within the assessment area, BLM mowed 2,300 acres, sprayed 4,300 acres, and conducted prescribed burning on 900 acres. In 2004, BLM seeded 4,300 acres, and is planning to conduct prescribed burning and spraying on an additional 2,500 acres. Private cooperators constructed prescribed burning control lines and conducted seeding using seed and rangeland drills provided by the BLM Vale District.

The Final Mitigation Recommendations and Assessment Reports for the eight assessment areas in the BLM Vale District can be found at: http://www.or.blm.gov/Vale/Fire/communities_at_risk.htm

Contact: Mike Hartwell, Fire Management Officer, BLM Vale District (541) 473-3144



Dave Vickery, Snapshots editor
Sheri Ascherfeld, layout and design