

Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



June 18

California

Volunteers Help San Diego and Riverside County Fire Education and Readiness

The Bureau of Land Management's California Desert District conducts a variety of fire mitigation activities across Southern California. The Palm Springs South Coast and El Centro field offices administer public lands in San Diego, Imperial, and Riverside counties. To help kick-off new and expanding outreach efforts and interagency cooperation BLM recruited two Student Conservation Association teams in 2004.

Each Student Conservation Association team leader will work throughout a 12-month period to establish relationships with stakeholders and communities in the wildland urban interface. The target area of these efforts will include high risk areas (mutual threat zone) adjacent to the Palm Springs South Coast, and El Centro, field office lands.



BLM Fire Prevention Truck in front of private home surrounded by flammable vegetation in San Diego County. This was a target area for Student Conservation Association outreach.

Beginning in early June, a three person crew will build on the established relationships over the summer to enhance homeowner fire safety and community awareness. The teams will actively engage communities by offering home assessments and promoting fire safety at public events. Their goals are to educate communities about fire safety, prevention, and preparedness and how to implement these activities in a collaborative manner with local government and fire service agencies.

A Geographic Information System specialist will work hand-in-hand with the teams to create a computerized map that will assist fire service personnel across San Diego and Riverside counties. The map will show fire hazards, access routes, addresses, and fuel loading in the mutual threat zone. All of this data will be collected in the field using Global Positioning System technology and Student Conservation Association labor. The end result will be a highly valuable planning tool for the prevention and mitigation of wildland fire and will be shared with the California Department of Forestry and local volunteer fire departments.

Contact: Clayton Howe, BLM Fire Education/Mitigation Specialist (858-676-0894) or Siobhan Girling, SCA Team Leader (208-860-7825)

Wildfire Fuel Breaks- A Lengthy and Dangerous Chess Game for the Town of Julian

In a checkerboard pattern of homes and wildland vegetation, fuel breaks are placed at strategic locations to oppose the challenge of wildfire.

In the 1960's, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection began removing dead trees and brush to create a wildfire fuel break along the ridgeline east of the town of Julian. Creating and maintaining the Sunrise Fuel Break included the use of mechanical equipment, hand crews, and herbicides. Over the last 20 years, budget and other constraints had slowed efforts. That is, until wildfire made its move.

In 2002, the Pines Fire burned approximately 62,000 acres, and in 2003, the Cedar Fire destroyed up to



Without wildfire mitigation activities, many homes were lost during southern California fire siege of 2003.

Snapshots 2004

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June 18



Sunrise Fuel Break.



Sunrise Fuel Break with BLM fuels crew working through trees.



Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office Fuels Crew.

collaboration. The local newspaper printed an article after the Cedar Fire that recognized the great effort BLM has made in protecting their

community. BLM plans to continue collaborative efforts with the community to maintain and expand the Sunrise Fuel Break as necessary to reduce the risk and loss to wildfire.

Contact: Ron Woychak, Fire Management Officer, Palm Springs- South Coast Field Office (858) 451-1705

Student Conservation Association Work Pays Off for Shelter Cove

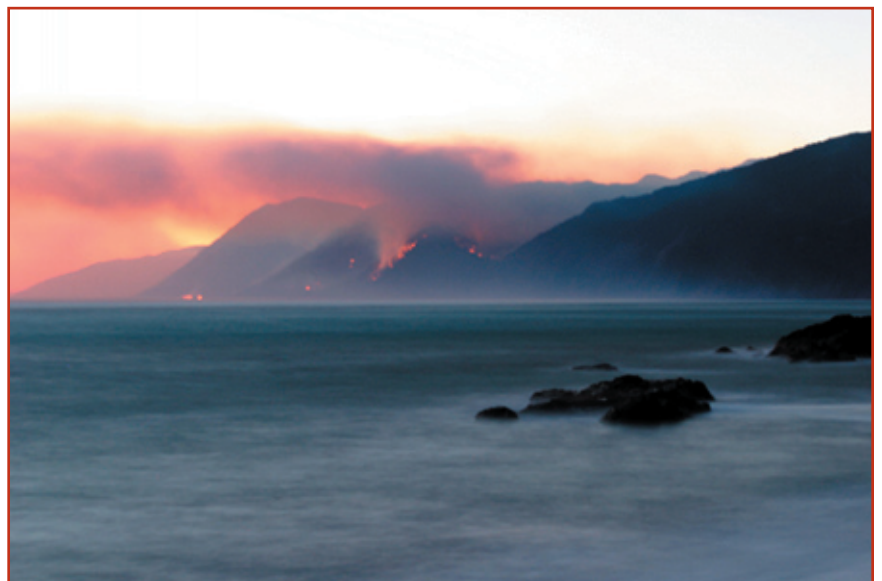
During the summer of 2003, the King Range National Conservation Area, managed by the Bureau of Land Management's Aracta Field Office, hosted a Fire Prevention and Education Team from the Student Conservation Association, which we called "Team Lost Coast". Among their many duties, Team Lost Coast collected Global Positioning System data consisting of structure, road, and fire hydrant locations in the town of Shelter Cove, California. Shelter Cove is a federally listed community at risk, with approximately 400 homes built within the scar of the 1973 Finley Creek Fire. The team created detailed maps using Geographic Information Systems software for pre-suppression planning purposes and of which would soon be of high value to the community.

Early last September, 72 lightning fires were burning along California's north coast within the California

281,000 acres. Julian lost over 600 structures during that 2 year period. Strategies to protect the community have been an ongoing challenge with its growing urban-wildland interface and an aggressive fire history.

In 2003, the Bureau of Land Management and California Department of Forestry proposed re-establishment of the Sunrise Fuel Break. The north end of the fuel break was the first priority where new homes had been developed. California fire officials worked with landowners to reduce fuels on the private lands, while BLM used their fuels crew and a dozer with a brush rake to thin a public land portion of the fuel break.

Fuel reduction and wildfire mitigation activities are not a game. It is an ongoing challenge that requires



The Honeydew fire during daytime.

Snapshots 2004

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June 18



Same view during night hours.

Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's Humboldt-Del Norte Ranger Unit. Within 48 hours, seventy of the wildfires were contained, the remaining two were located on the King Range National Conservation Area and Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

In the early morning hours of September 17th, the Honeydew Fire had grown from 400 acres to over 1,500 acres. On September 18th, the California Department of Forestry Humboldt-Del Norte Ranger Unit ordered a Type One Incident Command Team to take over management of the fire, which within a day, grew to over 9,000 acres and was posing a significant threat to the community of Shelter Cove. Residents witnessed smoke columns rising to 12,000 feet above sea level during the day and 200 foot flames within miles of their community at night. The incident command team immediately began work on structure protection and evacuation plan for Shelter Cove.

Jenny Sharp, leader of Team Lost Coast, provided the maps and data collected earlier in the season, and it proved invaluable to the planning efforts. The data was utilized by the

structure protection and evacuation planning group to quickly create operational maps.

The Honeydew Fire was contained on October 3, 2003, after burning a total of 13,778 acres. Fortunately, the structure protection and evacuation plan for Shelter Cove never had to be enacted, but the

residents slept easier knowing that all of the pre-suppression planning had prepared them for just such a scenario.

Contact: Tim Jones, Fire Management Officer, Arcata Field Office (707) 825-2306

Rural Fire Assistance Funding Helps Volunteer Fire Department Save the Day

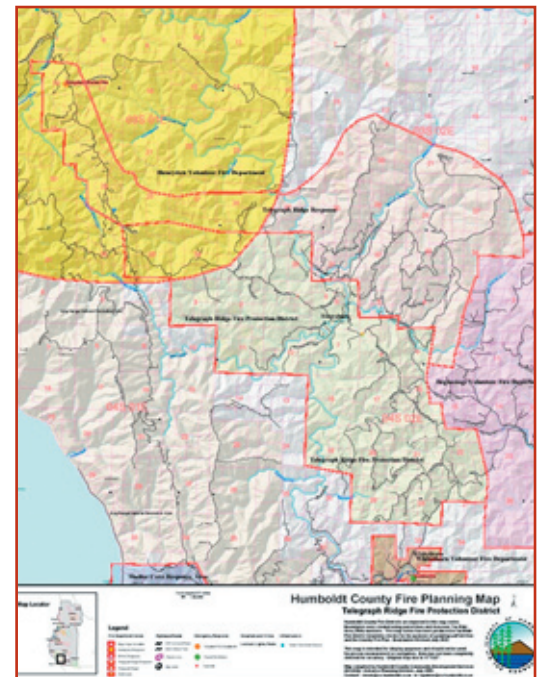
In 2003, the Telegraphy Ridge Volunteer Fire Department located in Humboldt County, California, received Rural Fire Assistance funding from the Bureau of Land Management for a "slip-on" unit that would upgrade their light fire engine with a pump, tank, and hose reel.

In September, the northern California coastal range experienced a significant lightning event that led to 72 wildfires. An occurrence that is unexpected in Humboldt County, which sees this scale of lightening activity only once every fifteen years.

The lightning started in Sonoma County and moved slowly up to coast. By the time it reached Humboldt County, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection was spread thin. The bulk of fire suppression resources had been assigned to other counties, leaving Humboldt County feeling vulnerable. But, with the newly upgraded fire engine, the Telegraph Ridge Volunteer Fire Department was able to respond to six different fires and contain them within the first operational period.

Chief Peter Lawskey of the Telegraph Ridge Volunteer Fire Department asserted "The new apparatus worked flawlessly, giving us the ability to safely and successfully engage and suppress these fires."

All of these fires were located within the wildland urban Interface. One was located on BLM land and the remaining five had the potential to spread onto other public lands.



Map of Telegraph Ridge Fire Protection District.

Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



June 18

The small amount of Rural Fire Assistance money that funded this fire department's engine upgrade has proven to be worthy investment for BLM and the community.

Contact: Tim Jones, Arcata Field Office
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Eastern States

Jackson Hotshots Making a Difference

When the Jackson Hotshots reported on board in May 2004, not only did they stay busy completing their 80 hours of required training, they found time to perform some outreach to people in three local communities.

First, they spent the day in Jackson, Mississippi at the Baptist Children's Hospital cancer wing. They talked to the children about life as a firefighter and just spent time with them to play video games, watch television, and talk. Children's smiles made this day worthwhile.

Next, they spent a day with second graders at the St. Francis Catholic School in Greenwood, Mississippi. They started the day with a presentation about Firewise for homes, and what it takes to be wildland firefighter. The balance of the afternoon the hotshots did tasks ranging from help with schoolwork to working in the kitchens.

They also spent an afternoon building new wheelchair ramps for a local hospice care facility in Brandon, Mississippi.

Eastern States views community outreach as an important part of being a Jackson Hotshot crew member. It is important to not only disseminate information about fire prevention but to show that we are part of the community and that we are stakeholders in its future.



A young cancer patient and crew member concentrate on a video game.



Jackson Hotshot crew members taking part in activities.



St. Francis Catholic School second graders with hotshot crew members.



Jackson Hotshots get some kitchen duty time.

Snapshots 2004

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June 18

Hotshots Provide Training

As the final touches are put on the new Southern Regional Fire Training Facility, Jackson Hotshots are already taking advantage of possibilities. In May, several crew members taught a three day power saw operations course. Over 25 individuals from all over Mississippi attended a day of classroom studies and two days of hands-on training. Individuals from the Mississippi State Forestry Commission, U. S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service attended.



Jackson Hotshots showing correct power saw procedures.

New Mexico

Interagency Approach to Treating Hazardous Fuels

The Carlsbad Interagency Fire Organization was established by BLM's Carlsbad Field Office and the U.S. Forest Service's Guadalupe Ranger District to work together as one unit. As a result, projects designed to decrease fire risk and improve the health of public lands are accomplished with blended BLM and U.S. Forest Service crews. Crews benefit through exposure to a wider variety of fire management objectives, get to work with different fuels and treatments, and observe fire behavior in various settings. By working as one unit, both agencies increase experience for fire staffs while accomplishing fuel management objectives.

Several recent fuel reduction projects illustrate these collaborative efforts.

Black River Special Management Area This BLM hazardous fuels project was designed to improve wildlife habitat in the Black River Draw area near Carlsbad. The project location is important locally as it serves as a release site for rehabilitated wildlife. The first two components of the project are now complete. An existing



Crew members chipping tamarisk in preparation for future prescribed burn at Black River Draw.



Existing trail widened to serve as a fuel break for the prescribed burn at the draw.

trail has been widened and improved to serve as a fuel break for a prescribed fire that is scheduled for this fall. The interagency crew removed tamarisk and Russian olive using chainsaws and chippers. Fuel reduction is necessary to reduce the risk of damage to the native cottonwoods and willows during the prescribed fire phase of the project. When proper burn conditions are met later this fall, the project area will be burned to further remove the accumulated fuels, encourage re-growth of native species, and hinder the re-establishment of the exotic species.

Spring Pasture RX

Another project is located on BLM land adjacent to Carlsbad Caverns National Park. In an effort to reduce hazardous fuels and improve wildlife habitat, crews have prepared the site for a prescribed fire. The burn window is expected in early June. Once the fire prescription is met, approximately 1,300 acres of juniper and desert scrub and brush will be burned.

Thayer Thinning Project

A wildland urban interface fuel reduction project has been completed with the assistance of BLM's fire suppression crew on the Guadalupe Ranger district of the Lincoln National Forest. A fuel break was created between federal land and private in-

Snapshots 2004

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June 18

holdings. Over 80 acres of dense pinyon juniper was hand-cut and piled to reduce the fuels that could allow a wildfire to travel from federal land onto private or visa versa. During the week of May 21st the piles of vegetation were burned to further reduce fire potential.



BLM and Forest Service members work side by side on prescribed fire.

Red Lake/White Oaks Pasture Rx
BLM's fire crew also assisted with a similar project near the rural community of Queen. Located in the Guadalupe Mountains of southeastern New Mexico, the community is surrounded by federal land. A fuel break was created to provide a buffer between the wildland and the residences. The project was completed in May by use of prescribed fire. Over 5,000 acres were burned to further reduce the hazardous fuels in the area and improve wildlife habitat and forage.

The Carlsbad Interagency Fire Organization is a shining example of how two agencies can live up to the National Fire Plan's emphasis on coordination and cooperation across agency boundaries.

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Sixty Years of Vigilance Honored in Smokey Bear's Hometown

2004 is the 60th "birthday" of the beloved fire prevention icon, Smokey Bear. Capitan, New Mexico is the town that brought the symbol of Smokey Bear to life when a small bear cub was rescued from a wildfire in the Capitan Mountains. So it was only fitting that the community of Capitan would choose to celebrate the occasion with a weekend tribute to America's favorite bear on his 60th birthday.

The Roswell BLM Field Office helped sponsor the event along with civic groups and other state and federal land management agencies. As the weekend approached, the event began to take shape with a number of dignitaries taking personal interest. The Village of Capitan issued a proclamation honoring Smokey Bear Days. Governor Bill Richardson declared May as Smokey Bear Month.

A Statement of Declaration was read by Senator Pete Domenici on the floor of the United States Senate, entering recognition of the bear's birthday into the Congressional Record. With each tribute, the message of fire prevention was reinforced to the public.

Over 7,000 visitors crowded the small village to participate in the weekend's events that combined a festive atmosphere with a serious message – we all need to be diligent in our efforts to prevent unwanted wildland fires. The organizing committee provided something for everyone from a street dance to chainsaw bear carving contests to wildland fire exhibits. Exhibitors, including Roswell's fire crew, covered a wide variety of issues including outdoor fire safety, wildland urban interface fires, forest health, and fire ecology. Organizers were pleased with the public's interest and support of Smokey's message on behalf of wildfire prevention and a good time was had by all.

Contact: Jean Cunningham, BLM Roswell Field Office, 505/627-0209



The large Smokey balloon added to the festive atmosphere of the event.

Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



June 18

Fire Crews Pitch In After Flooding

In a break from their traditional fire and fuel's management duties, BLM fire staff recently answered a call to action from the City of Carlsbad.

Just prior to Easter Sunday, the city experienced severe thunderstorms that resulted in the Pecos River jumping its banks. The popular Lower Tansill Dam and Riverwalk, which runs through town and is a popular location for holiday celebrations, were under a foot of newly deposited mud.

In a gesture of community spirit, the Carlsbad Interagency Fire Organization assisted city crews with pumps, hoses, shovels, and staff to clean over 3 miles of city park along the river in time for the holiday festivities.

The City of Carlsbad publicly acknowledged, and deeply appreciated, the efforts of the interagency organization assisting in their time of need.

Contact: Michael Salmon, 505/885-4181



BLM fire staff assist in the clean up of Carlsbad's popular Riverwalk



Heavy equipment, hand tools, and dedicated staff were needed to fix the damage caused by unprecedented spring flooding.