

Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



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Montana

Lewis & Clark and the Changing Landscape

The Montana-Dakota's BLM fire program recently participated in the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial National Signature Event in Bismarck, North Dakota. The Community Assistance Program staff provided a fire education trailer as a tool to explain how BLM is working to restore healthy conditions to ecosystems entrusted to federal land managers. The main goal of the trailer is to describe how the western landscape has changed and how various social impacts have led to that change.

Titled "Our Changing Landscape," the trailer includes eight static educational displays and two



"Our Changing Landscape" traveling fire education trailer developed by the Montana-Dakotas BLM fire staff. (Photo by Terina Mullen)



Andy Drobeck explains how the landscape has changed since the days of Lewis and Clark to schoolchildren from Bismarck area schools. (Photo by Terina Mullen)

video loops. BLM personnel were on hand to give presentations on a myriad of fire topics—fire ecology, fire behavior, the changing landscape, using fire as a tool, the role of fire in nature, historical use of fire, wildland-urban interface issues, and others. Thousands of Bismarck-area students visiting the event listened to presentations about how the landscape has changed since the days of Lewis and Clark.

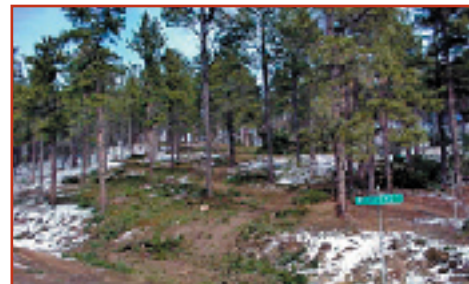
BLM personnel plan to attend the other Lewis and Clark Bicentennial National Signature Events through 2006, so look for the trailer on our nation's highways.

For more information about the "Our Changing Landscape" traveling fire education trailer, contact Mike Dannenberg at 406-896-2913. More information on Lewis and Clark Bicentennial National Signature Events can be found at: www.lewisandclark200.org.

South Dakota Sheeptail and Mount Roosevelt Stewardship Projects

BLM's South Dakota Field Office and Fort Meade Fuels Module have been busy laying out four new stewardship projects. Of the four projects, the first ever in South Dakota was the Sheeptail fire containment zone project. This 31 acre project was proposed to develop a fire containment zone on BLM land in the exemption area near the communities of Deadwood, Lead and Central City.

Fire containment zones consist of 100 to 300 foot wide fuel breaks located along existing roads. They reduce forest density and hazardous fuel loads and allow fire suppression crews a defensible space in the event of a wildfire. The contractor completed the logging, thinning, and piling in November of 2004. The South Dakota Field Office is working with the State of South Dakota on completing the zones through private and state lands to make the fuel breaks more effective.



A part of the fire containment zone on Mount Roosevelt near Deadwood, South Dakota.

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More acres are being treated with funds available because of the way the contracts are written. The Sheeptail stewardship project cost was \$20,850 to complete the fire containment zone. Had it been bid only as a service contract the price per acre would have been \$673 per treated acre. Since the contractor was able to retain the merchantable timber from the work, worth \$14,835, the amount of funds from BLM was only \$6,015 for a total of \$194 per treated acre. The stewardship project approach was a much more cost-effective solution to hazardous fuels problems.

Use of stewardship funding is new both to BLM and local contractors. Prior to stewardship contracting, crews were specialized in different types of work such as logging or fuels reduction. With stewardship they do all elements of work including logging, thinning, and pile construction. While it has been a learning process for contractors, they have been happy with the results. Two additional stewardship projects are in preparation for the spring of 2005.



Hardwoods were left standing in the fire containment zone since they are less susceptible to fire. Pines were cut and piled for later burning.

Eastern Montana County Assist Team

A project underway near Deadwood, South Dakota is the Mount Roosevelt fire containment zone. It will treat approximately 35 acres and is similar to the Sheeptail project. The same contractor will do the work.



Before and after pictures at the Sheeptail fire containment zone.

Lands in eastern Montana are better protected from wildfire with the formation of a Type 3 Incident Management Team called a County Assist Team. The County Assist Team was initially formed to help rural and volunteer fire departments with wildfires. Over time the team, currently hosted by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, has become vital to local, state, and federal agencies in assisting with wildfires that are too complex or large for the local initial attack forces to manage.

Team members are rural fire department volunteers in their counties of residence who wear not only two hats, but sometimes three or four. This team is unique because core members are local eastern Montana residents from a variety of professions.

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Firefighters learn to deploy shelters in the black during training.

The team includes a county extension agent with the Montana State University system, county sheriff, foreman of a pipeline and well company, mechanic-plumber, electrical shop owner, appraisal serviceman for farms and ranches, state fire marshal, school employees, ranchers, farmers, and county fire wardens, along with employees from state and federal agencies. All dedicate a lot of time and effort to help fight wildfires in a safe and efficient manner.

The importance of the team to eastern Montana is significant. Being composed of local residents, members' response times to incidents is much quicker than that of a Type 1 or Type 2 Incident Management Team. The County Assist Team strives to adhere to local jurisdictional policy and has an amazing ability to bring together leaders from communities and management from different

agencies. Local government, volunteer fire departments, and landowners are comfortable working with this team since they know its members as neighbors, friends, or even family members.

The Community Assist Team is working to continue "interagency" with the addition of additional BLM and U.S. Forest Service employees. According to Randy Sanders, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Fire



The team logo is on both sides of the cache

Program Manager, "The more we federal, state, and local agencies communicate and collaborate, the better we work together

and build trust." Because of its importance to eastern Montana, Randy hopes similar teams can be created in the state.

Rural fire department members are key components of the team who maintain National Wildfire Coordinating Group certification qualification and standards. In 2002 core members attended the Complex Incident Management Course in Redding, California. This course was a competitive and intense nine-day classroom simulation which developed and enhanced the knowledge and skills of the Type 3 Incident Management Team.

The Rural Fire Assistance program adds to the Community Assist Team by helping rural department volunteers get the proper training to stay qualified and improve their capabilities. Rural Fire Assistance money has allowed the team to host a weekend "CAT Camp" or training camp. This annual camp



Firefighters get on-the-job training at the training camp.

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Doug Williams, Community Assist Team Incident Commander talks to firefighters during the annual training camp.

trains new firefighters in wildland firefighting techniques and provides the required annual safety refresher such as shelter deployment. The camp depends on the Rural Fire Assistance funding in order to operate.

Contact: Dena Lang, Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist, BLM – Miles City Field Office, 406-233-2907

protection district and highlight surveying and mapping fire risk work to promote homeowner preparedness. In September, over 120 people attended a community fire fair hosted by the Hotchkiss district at the Redlands Fire Station.

To accommodate their constituent's needs, the open house was held on Tuesday night to allow people to come by at their convenience on their way home from work or from picking up their kids after school and sports.

The district worked with Painted Sky Resource, Conservation and Development Council to send out mailings with invitations to all residents in the Hotchkiss area. In addition, a local paper published feature articles on the fire fair and



Hotchkiss fire protection district fire truck driving down a rural driveway to deliver a survey to a local homeowner.

the work of the fire protection district in the week preceding the open house. As an extra attraction, Smokey Bear was on hand to greet the kids – young and old. In conjunction with local businesses, they handed out door prizes. The American Red Cross provided refreshments and brochures.

To capitalize on people's interest, six local mitigation contractors set up displays to highlight work and answer questions. A representative from the Colorado State Forest Service was present to answer questions about mitigation. Fire protection district staff answered questions about the results of the survey and talked about firewise methods and standards. A table was set up to assist landowners applying for mitigation grant funds from their 50-50 cost-share program,

Colorado

Hotchkiss Fire Protection District Hosts Fire Fair

In 2003, Hotchkiss Fire Protection District in Delta County, Colorado received BLM Community Assistance grant funds to complete geographic information system mapping of structures in their district and conduct firewise surveys to rate the structures.

With the mapping and surveys completed, they are now doing community outreach to raise awareness about the fire



Contractors, fire district officials and agencies teamed up to ensure residents could obtain accurate information during the fire fair.

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Popular as ever, Smokey was a key attraction!

funded by a Western States Fire Manager Competitive Grant award the department received in 2004.

The fair was very successful according to Fire Chief Doug Fritz. Many people came prepared to discuss survey results and ask questions about improving ratings and reducing risks. They appreciated the 'one-stop shopping' with contractors to discuss work along with a representative to discuss the cost-share program in the same location.

The event is part of an ongoing community outreach program by the district to maintain a high level of visibility in the community. For example, firefighters have gone door-to-door in wildland-urban interface areas with fire engines to give landowners the results of their home survey and show them the mapping project, as well as pass out literature to promote firewise awareness.

As Doug Fritz explains, it is part of a holistic three-pronged approach toward community protection. The

Of course, Smokey Bear was a bonus, and door prizes were a very big hit. "What sticks in my mind about the fire fair was that the meeting hall was buzzing and bustling with activity, which seems sort of unusual for a community Firewise meeting," said Fritz.

three elements are maintaining a top-notch department, with good equipment, protective gear, and training. He publicizes that fact to the community to let them know that their fire protection district is doing their best to provide a high level of protection.

Second, he goes to great lengths to develop a good community firewise program, generating geographic information system data and developing maps to assess the communities' risk from wildland fire to give people good information to make informed decisions.

Third, he puts concerted effort into finding funds to help support mitigation work, understanding that motivation is one part to the equation, but financial incentives make it happen.

The Hotchkiss fire protection district has been an active participant in the creation of the Delta County Wildland Fire Management Plan. This comprehensive fire plan coordinates all aspects of fire and fuels management among the multiple federal, state, and local fire and emergency management entities, including the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Natural Resource and Conservation Service, and American Red Cross. In addition, the district also developed their

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own district fire plan to address wildland fire response and community mitigation.

Contact: Doug Fritz, Fire Chief, Hotchkiss Fire Protection District (970) 872-2145, or Kelly Rogers, District Forester, Colorado State Forest Service, (970) 248-7325

Colorado BLM Awards Community Assistance Grant to Summit Fire Authority

Recently, Colorado BLM's Community Assistance Grant Program awarded \$8,000 to the Summit Fire Authority for the purchase of "Redzone" hazard assessment and mapping software. Summit Fire Authority is an association of all fire districts within Summit County, Colorado. This project will help in their county-wide efforts to identify and prioritize hazard areas for future fuel treatments. The award will enable them to purchase the software, training and licenses needed to complete an inventory in all of the Fire Districts within the county using a uniform standard.

The proposal and the grant request to fund implementation were developed by Summit County's full-time fire mitigation specialist Patti Maguire. The project consists of conducting neighborhood triage surveys using a palm pilot, digital camera, and geographic positioning system unit to document possible wildland and structural fire issues. Redzone software produces several

useful products. Community information may be extracted from the survey data in many different forms. These include individual homeowner reports, subdivision wide risk assessment, access and egress route maps, water supply, and safety zone information.

This information could be made available to the general public and be utilized by fire personnel during a multi-agency wildfire event. Ultimately, personnel could use a laptop and portable printer to produce maps for interagency crews from the hood of a truck at the scene of an incident. In the event of a major wildfire, the data collected could be essential in

operations efforts to minimize loss of life as well as property damage.

The grant award will provide for the software suite, training and licenses needed for all fire districts in Summit County.

For more information on the software and its numerous uses, you may refer to: www.redzonesoftware.com

San Juan Public Lands Center Completes Programmatic Environmental Assessment in Southwest Colorado

It's a universal problem – finding the staff, money, and time to complete an environmental analysis. Projects often take two to three years, sometimes more, to complete. When it comes to projects that may protect homes, property, and forests from a fast-moving crown fire those timelines are unacceptable.

In southwest Colorado, BLM fuels specialist Randy Lewis decided to do something about that. Lewis was finding a great deal of redundancy in the environmental assessments that he was writing for fuels-reduction projects. With the exception of the high-elevation lands in San Juan County, the BLM lands administered by the San Juan Public Lands Center in Durango are very similar in terrain and vegetation, primarily



Colorado Firewise logo.

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pinyon-juniper with some scattered Gambrel oak and ponderosa pine. Even the treatment methods are similar. So, Lewis proposed writing just one document known as a programmatic environmental assessment, which would cover all BLM fuels-reduction projects in the wildland-urban interface.

Lewis kept it simple. It looked at only two alternatives – the proposed action and no action. It did not address lands within Wilderness areas, Wilderness Study Areas, or the Canyon of the Ancients National Monument. The decision, as well as the mitigating measures, will be reviewed during the upcoming resource management plan revision.

In July of 2003 when the BLM was given the authority to use categorical exclusions for hazardous fuels projects Lewis could have quit working on the programmatic environmental assessment. “But,” he said, “I felt that in order to use the categorical exclusion authority effectively it was important to have a document that addressed the cumulative impacts of proposed hazardous fuels treatments, as well as the mitigation measures that will address those impacts.” Each project categorical exclusion will include the appropriate mitigation measures identified in the programmatic environmental assessment.

Lewis’ idea has paid off. To date, seven National Environmental Policy Act documents have been tiered to this programmatic environmental assessment, considerably reducing staff time and work.

Contact: Randy Lewis at (970) 385-1358 or view the EA on the Web at: www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/fire/fuels/index.shtml

BLM Grant Allows Homeowners Coalition to Make a Difference

The Stillwater Fire Abatement Coalition is an active group of homeowners working to make their environment safer from wildland fires. The Stillwater-Bunte Small Tracts are located outside of Grand Lake, Colorado. This heavily forested area is largely recreational with activities that include camping, off highway vehicle use, snowmobiling and firewood gathering. Add the largest concentration of pine beetle kill in the state to the mix and you have the potential for multiple ignition sources and the fuel to carry a fire. Federal neighbors include Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service.

The need to take some mitigation action was apparent to a number

of area homeowners, but where to start? Mandy Hanifen was one of the residents that recognized the need and as a former U.S. Forest Service employee understands the role of fire in the ecosystem and fuel reduction methods used to reduce the threat of wildland fires. Mandy knew that developing a strategy was the first step.

She and a core group organized public meetings with the support of the local agencies, including the Colorado State Forest Service. These meetings began to educate the landowners on risk assessment, available fire fighting resources, mountain pine beetle and proactive measures they needed to take to protect homes and businesses. In August 2003 the Stillwater Fire Abatement Coalition was officially formed and registered with the Colorado Secretary of State as a not-for-profit organization. A steering committee of six full-time residents was assembled to lead the group of 48 landowners to conduct



Stillwater photo before treatment.

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fuel mitigation on approximately 200 acres of private land bordered by federal lands.

The coalition began weekly meetings in September 2003 and developed a mitigation strategy. The next step was developing partnerships with neighboring agencies and finding financial assistance to reach their mitigation goals. Through their working relationship with BLM and other agencies, the coalition has been at the table to offer input on collaborative hazardous fuel reduction projects. Funding has been obtained through a Community Assistance Grant from BLM and other National Fire Plan sources.

Mandy has also devoted time to participating in research efforts and workshops involving social issues relating to wildland fire.

Under her direction, landowners began the initial stages of their project by marking 10,000 trees for removal. Grant funding enabled the coalition to enter into an agreement with a contractor for the removal of the trees. The project administrator was present daily during the removal process to ensure standards were met and impacts were kept to a minimum. A separate agreement was entered into between the coalition and BLM to establish a temporary collection site on public land for the removed logs. The slash was chipped and redistributed to the forest floor not to exceed 3 inches in depth.

This dynamic group of landowners is continuing with defensible space work on their private property. This coalition and their project has been a model for other large groups in Grand County and Colorado.



Area after treatment.

*Editor, Dave Vickery
Graphics and layout, Sheri Ascherfeld*