

Snapshots 2004



Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.

February 27

Utah

Richfield Field Office Skyline Mountain Resort, Sanpete County, Utah

Skyline Mountain Resort in central Utah is a wildland urban interface community situated in a dangerous geographic bottleneck. Its location could potentially lead to trapping literally hundreds of people if a fire compromises the main access roadway.

The 1,500 acre community contains 969 individual lots ranging from one-half acre to two acres in size and located at elevations from 6,100 to over 8,400 feet. Approximately 325 structures ranging from recreational vehicle pads to elaborate homes are present. Occupancy includes both permanent and part-time residents. The area has a history of threatening fires occurring in sage brush, pinyon-juniper and oak brush.

Community residents recognized the serious bottleneck problem, and are working to establish an alternate escape route by acquiring an easement from private land owners up to national forest land. Negotiations with the Forest Service for a 1,300 foot easement have taken nearly two years and are nearing conclusion. By spring of 2004, construction should start on this alternate roadway. An engineering firm has



Part of the brush pile resulting from work done by residents to reduce fuel around their homes.

surveyed and designed the road to forest specifications, meeting several design changes imposed by the forest at a cost to the community of nearly \$14,000.

In 2001 Skyline Mountain Resort was awarded a National Fire Plan grant of \$325,000 to assist with managing vegetation and improving fire safety in the community. There was an initial effort to inform and educate the community about the grant and the benefits and requirements of good defensible space around their homes. The community soon caught the vision of the National Fire Plan and a fire committee was formed to take the lead. This committee has met monthly for nearly three years, providing direction, and making assignments and fulfilling responsibilities.

One of the most impressive accomplishments is in education. For years, the attitude has been, "The closer my home to the vegetation, and the more crowded the trees, the better." Defensible space education in years past has been largely ignored. People were willing to take the risk of fire before they would thin and cut back the vegetation.

After receipt of this grant and ongoing efforts by the fire committee and State of Utah to educate the residents, many have altered their opinions. Today numerous home owners have been anxious to create defensible space, even competing with each other for community resources to get their yards treated. Utah Forestry Fire and State Lands has provided directions and training in every aspect of this educational process.

The heart of the Skyline Mountain Resort Project has been removal, thinning and trimming of vegetation around homes. The National Fire Plan grant is a 50/50 matching project, requiring the community to invest time and money before the grant would be made. To date, matching efforts have been largely accomplished by creating defensible



The warning siren installed to alert residents to evacuate if necessary.

space around homes. Residents have been cutting and disposing of brush at a feverish pace. All defensible space work has so far been funded by home owners. Either they do the work themselves or contract with a vegetation crew to have the work done at personal expense.

More than 75 home owners have treated or are treating their property. Although this isn't everyone, it is a significant start, and represents a major attitude change among



This water development once covered in willows will be used as a helicopter dip site and fire engine drafting location to fight fires.

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Before and after photos showing work by a home owner to cut back vegetation adjacent to the house.



the wildland urban residents. In just three years approximately 23 percent of home owners have made behavior changes in protecting their property.

Another positive change has been water development for firefighting. A willow infested pond was cleaned out and improved to allow for a helicopter dip site and an engine drafting site. A conditional temporary well was acquired on a permanent basis for use for community fire protection. Permission has been granted for the installation of three dry hydrants along Birch Creek. These hydrants have been designed and materials acquired and will be installed next spring.

To meet communications and emergency evacuation notification concerns, a warning siren was installed by community leaders to alert residents in the event of fire.

To date, Skyline Mountain Resort has accumulated approximately \$210,000 in matching funds. Their target is \$325,000

before the grant period deadline of September 2005. The documentation is being accounted for very carefully by both the state representatives and the community fire committee. Sanpete County emergency services personnel have praised Skyline Mountain Resort for the efforts put forward and example they give to others.

Natural Resource Festival

Every year in April, the Fishlake National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, and Utah Forestry, Fire & State Lands work together in hosting an interagency program known as the “Natural Resource Festival”. The Natural Resource Festival is held at Snow College in Richfield, Utah, providing a number of indoor and outdoor booths full of educational activities for a full two days. Approximately 2,400 people from the surrounding communities attend the festival each year including students from the Sanpete, Sevier, Millard, Piute, and Wayne County school districts.

The Festival provides a variety of booths to provide unique learning experiences using demonstrated principles. “Living with Fire” is just one of the booths offered at the Natural Resource Festival. This message was given by Jill Ivie, East



“Living with Fire” booth – Students learn about Defensible Space.

Zone Fire Prevention Officer for the Central Utah Fire Management Area. A small discussion using the ten steps outlined in “Living with Fire” were taught, along with suggestions on how to make homes safer from wildland fire.



“Fires Role in Nature” booth – Kevin Greenhalgh explains the necessary role of fire in our ecosystem.

To assist with the education process, a hands-on display was part of the “Living with Fire” booth. A number of small model trees were provided to represent a dense forest stand, along with a cabin placed within the trees to represent the homes that are in the wildland urban interface. The question was then asked, “Would this home survive a wildfire?” After the students made their decision, they were able to re-create their own model by rearranging the trees around the model cabin. Each student was able to utilize the ten steps to “Living with Fire” when re-creating the model display. The students went away with a better understanding with “Living with Fire” and defensible space. A checklist of how to make their homes safer from wildland fire was sent home along with a list of informative websites and local contacts.

At the Festival, students learn about the natural and necessary role of fire in forested and rangeland ecosystems. A brief presentation was given that tells how fire has influenced various plant communities and how some plants have adapted to the effects of fire. Students learn that without fire the forest would become unhealthy and

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Wildland Fire Suppression booth – Wess Freeborn teaches the students about the equipment used in wildland fire suppression.

remain at the final stage of the fire cycle. They walk away knowing that fire in our ecosystems give a variety of plants and animals the opportunity to reproduce and flourish, resulting in a healthy forest or rangeland.

Salt Lake Field Office Wraps Up the Season

Snow is on the ground and the fuels crew of BLM's Salt Lake Field Office is ready to complete the final phase of three wildland urban interface projects initiated last year.

Three projects in particular had fuel reduction objectives for areas surrounding the towns of Cedar Fort, Terra and Eagle Mountain. One of the main issues was how to dispose of the by-product from chainsaw thinning treatments.

Biomass consisting of juniper slash was offered to local residents of the communities. Hundreds of permits were offered for collection of firewood, posts and poles. Information about the wood cutting areas was also posted on the field office website. As people applied for their permits the Salt Lake field office staff were able to share fire and fuel project information with them. During collection of firewood residents were familiarized with the relationship of project work to home protection, which encouraged mitigation and prevention on private land.

The firewood has been available to local residents for over a year now. The fuels crew at the Salt Lake field office has begun the final phase of implementation this winter by burning all remaining fuel in piles. About 300 piles have been burned near Cedar Fort and Eagle Mountain. An additional 600 piles near Terra will be burned after the next snowfall.

The local staff will monitor the area to identify plant survival, recruitment, success of treatment, and potential weed invasion.



Salt Lake Field Office crews burn piles of fuel near the Cedar Fort and Eagle M

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East Carbon and Sunnyside Communities Work With Moab District

The communities of East Carbon and Sunnyside are situated in the foothills of the Book Cliffs in southeastern Utah. Both towns are flanked to the north and west by pinyon-juniper woodlands. A number of fires in recent history has threatened homes on

the outskirts of the towns. As recently as 1996, a 1,000 acre fire came "too close for comfort," and proved to be a real eye-opener for the community.

The Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands and the State of Utah's School & Institutional Trust Lands Administration combined efforts with BLM to tackle problems surrounding East Carbon and Sunnyside. As a result, 3,100 acres of land that had been previously chained was identified for fuel treatment by the agencies. In addition, a road was graded immediately behind the homes that border the wildlands.

Mitigating fuels within the state and federal acreage would meet several objectives including the creation of a fuel break to reduce or eliminate the threat of fire to the community, as well as the reduction of invasive non-native species in the area. The project will also provide much-needed maintenance to a cattle grazing allotment.

Phase One for the BLM project, accomplished in 2003, included the extension of the shaded fuel break from the state school land to complete the fuel break around the outskirts of the community. BLM crews used chainsaws to cut pinyon and juniper and created slash piles for burning. Pile burning took place after snow was on the ground.



A shaded fuel break on Utah school land was one part of the work to protect communities.

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Crews piling cut fuels in preparation for removal or burning.

Phase Two of the BLM project is planned for spring of 2004, and will again include mechanical treatment, including chainsaw work and hand-cutting, of the remaining 3,000 acres. Concurrently, a regular maintenance schedule will be developed and routinely followed into the future. The East Carbon and Sunnyside communities are another positive example of a successful cooperative approach for fire mitigation by the BLM Moab District and local and state partners.

Idaho

Placer Creek Project- Shoshone County, Idaho

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, US 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.

Nevada

Fire Risk Assessments Target Nevada Communities

Many homes and businesses in Nevada are built on the edge of the wildlands, the place known in the firefighting community as the wildland-urban interface. But the danger of catastrophic wildfire is greater for some of these areas than for others.

For those homes and businesses at the greatest risk, such catastrophic wildfires can pose a grave danger to property, natural resources and human safety.

However, those working to keep these communities safe from catastrophic wildfires must first assess each community's risk from wildland fire, and then take appropriate actions to mitigate the risk.

The Bureau of Land Management has provided a \$1.35 million grant to the Nevada Fire Safe Council to complete wildland fire threat assessments for more than 250 communities throughout Nevada.



Forested area near Markleeville, California southeast of Lake Tahoe before treatment was done.

The Fire Safe Council has hired a local contractor to conduct the community threat assessments and to develop mitigation plans for each of Nevada's 17 counties. The contractor will coordinate with county, state and federal fire suppression agencies, local governments, community leaders and interested citizens during the evaluation and plan development.

How It Works

The threat assessments will objectively score a community's risk for wildfire, and identify specific hazards that may increase the vulnerability to damage from a wildfire. The contractor will incorporate information gathered in and around the communities that pertains to fuel hazards, slope, aspect, ignition risk and local fire suppression capabilities into the final analysis and plans. Also included will be prioritized recommendations for future fuels treatment projects.

A county-by-county report will include recommendations for specific actions to reduce fire intensity and improve structure defensibility. Results for each community will be displayed on maps that will show the hazards, risks and locations of recommended mitigation measures.

Additional areas of natural resource or economic values will also be shown on the risk maps. These will include such features as critical habitat for wildlife, including federal and state-listed threatened or endangered species, critical watersheds,



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 Wallace. The devastating effects of the 1910 fire have not been erased from the memories of those living in Wallace, Idaho. USFS photo

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The same location after fuel treatment work was completed.

utility corridors, historic and cultural sites, and other infrastructure components.

Field teams of fire behavior specialists, foresters, rangeland fuels specialists, and technicians will be spending time in each of the identified communities. These specialists will focus on the wildland-urban interface areas, where homes and the wildlands meet.

Benefits to Communities at Risk

Fire is a natural component of the western landscape. The fire threat assessments will help communities be more aware of potential losses and take appropriate action to effectively increase protection for the community from wildfires.

The threat assessment and mitigation plans may be used to apply for fuels treatment grants. Such grants could come from a variety of sources, including state and federal government and private organizations. The grants will also help federal agencies form public-private partnerships.

Cooperating partners are BLM, Nevada Fire Safe Council, U.S. Forest Service, Nevada Division of Forestry, Nevada Association of Counties, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Service.



Prison Hill area east of Carson City, Nevada prior to fuel treatment.



Same location following treatment work.