

Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Utah

Tamarisk Wildland-Urban Project - Summer 2002 Moab Field Office

In early May this year, fuels reduction work saved a popular BLM campground from major damage. An early season wildfire, pushed by wind, rapidly spread up the river bottom and threatened to overrun the Goose Island campground, near Moab. The campground was quickly evacuated and fire crews, using the fire break that had been created just two weeks previously, were able to stop the fire before it seriously damaged the campground facilities.



Fire break at Goose Island campground that was instrumental in stopping the fire spread into the campground.



Ian Torrence, youth leader, working to reduce tamarisk levels.

This success illustrates the sound hazardous fuels reduction planning for the Tamarisk project in the Moab Field Office. Situated along the Colorado River just outside of Moab are eight BLM campgrounds heavily used by the tourists to Moab and the surrounding national parks. Tamarisk (salt cedar) is a non-native plant that has flourished along the river corridors in the west. The plant readily and rapidly burns year-round. It poses a major threat to the campgrounds and other Moab facilities located along the Colorado River.

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"4 Corners School" student cleaning her chainsaw.

The project consists of establishing fire breaks and thinning out the tamarisk in key areas to stop or slow the grow of a fire. The work is being done by fire crews and by youth groups. Work will continue on this long term project, which has already provided major benefit in protecting BLM campground facilities.

Contact: Brenda Dale (435) 587-1530



Students loading cut tamarisk into truck for removal.

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Ash Creek Project Cedar City Field Office

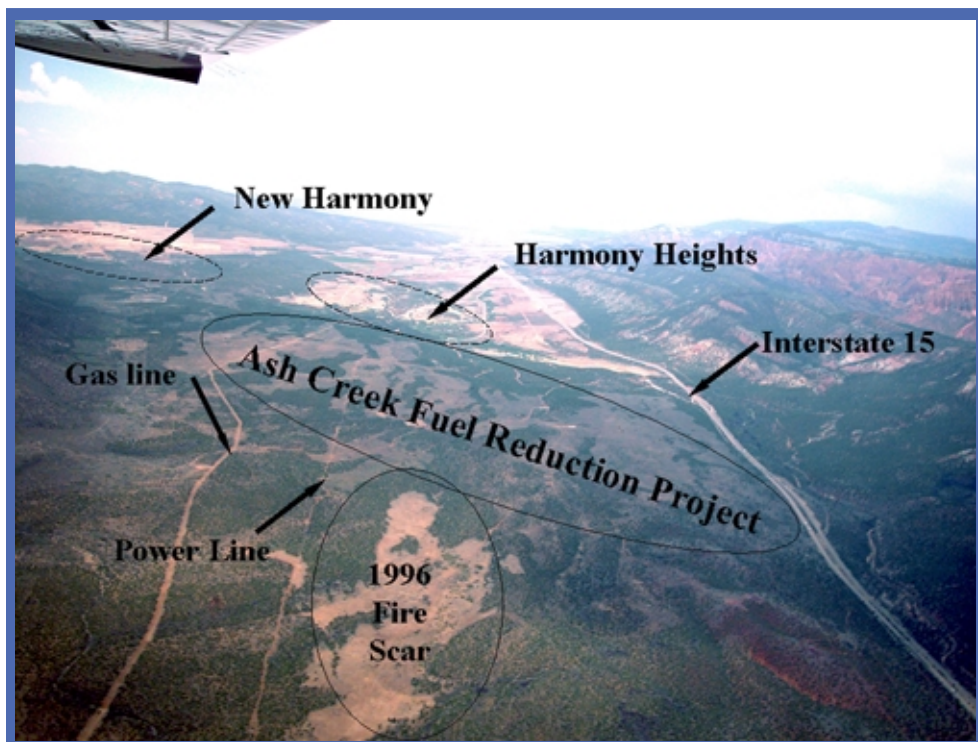
Hot winds from the Mohave desert each year are funneled up the Interstate 15-Black Ridge corridor in central Utah. This natural wind chamber along with a continuous dense stand of juniper extending for miles along the west side of the highway place the twin communities of New Harmony and Harmony Heights at high risk from wildfire. As part of a response to reduce the risk, the Ash Creek project, a 1,200 acre mosaic fuel break on the bench south of Harmony Heights was begun. With the initial work completed by hand thinning, a program of prescribed burning is planned to improve risk reduction.

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Several factors over many years led to the current situation. During the 1960s, the project area was chained to stimulate forage production for big game and livestock. Since then juniper trees have since dominated the site and choked out stands of bitterbrush, cliff rose, live oak, and other desirable vegetative species.

BLM's St. George field office resource specialists designed a project to reestablish plant diversity and landscape health. Resource management objectives melded with fuels reduction objectives of protection for the communities of New Harmony and Harmony Heights. The Ash Creek Project area provided the opportunity to integrate fire and resource management objectives in a unified way.



Lower opening is the 1996 burn. Openings in the middle are the project areas, with the communities shown in the upper area.

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Additional benefits from the project are being gained as well. The Fire Effects staff from the Rocky Mountain Research Station in Missoula, Montana has been monitoring project results to verify vegetation maps created through satellite imagery as part of the Southern Utah Fuels Management Project. Their goal is to develop fuel models for juniper and gather the needed information for a computer modeling program called

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FARSITE, which predicts large fire behavior on actual landscapes. Based on computer inputs from the Ash Creek work, Rick Stratton of the research station used FARSITE to evaluate the effectiveness of juniper thinning showing the potential reduced wildfire intensity achieved by the project work.

Last fall BLM fire crews worked late into the season cutting and scattering the trees to create the break. This summer two contracts were awarded, one local contract and the other to an Idaho company.

Hand cutting was completed for a total of 1,200 acres. This fall and winter prescribed burning will reduce the ground fuel, creating a mosaic pattern of vegetation.

The local communities have been involved on work needed to help firefighters protect their communities from wildfire. Interagency personnel gave suggestions on things they can do to make their homes and community safer from wildfire.

Other partners that are working with the BLM to create a continuous area of defensible space around and through these communities are: The Dixie National Forest, Southwest Five County Association of Governments and Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands.

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A contract crew cutting juniper for the Ask Creek project.

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