

Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Alaska

FireWise Communities Workshops in Alaska

The FireWise approach to home safety in wildland fires has been successful in Alaska. The FireWise message with its emphasis on defensible space has generally been accepted as good advice by many cabin owners.

Alaska has hundreds of remote cabins. Most of them are on lakes or rivers in the Interior of the state and are either lived in, or maintained by owners who come in from towns. Many are vulnerable to fires because of black spruce forests and active lightning seasons.

The national FireWise organization has been helpful in promoting similar fire safety programs in many different states. In Alaska, the FireWise model was adopted for publication in a series of brochures and used in community outreach programs. Jim Smalley, Dan Bailey and the others in Quincy, MA, developed an excellent program to bring together participants from the communities to promote home fire safety.

A FireWise Communities Workshop was held in Kenai, Alaska in April 2001. About 100 people attended. Another workshop is being planned for May 2003 in Fairbanks, where it is hoped that some of the remote cabin owners can be reached.

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About 100 people attended the Firewise Communities workshop in April 2001 in Kenai.



The Fairbanks planning group will build on the Kenai model for its workshop. Ample expertise is available to fill the May 6-8 agenda from the interagency wildland fire community in Alaska.

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Kathryn Tietz, a forester with the Alaska Division of Forestry, is coordinating the event. She said the workshop was a good way to get people involved in a planning process on fire safety.

Some states have scaled the FireWise model down to a one-day presentation, and Alaska is also proceeding with that. “We’d like to get it so we could put the FireWise program on Saturdays when more people could get away,” she said.



Participants strengthen skills in community-based fire safety planning.



Interactive exercises are used to develop strategies for protecting homes and communities from wildland fires.

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Alaska Fire Service Helps Military with Beetle-killed Snags

The BLM Alaska Fire Service, working with Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base, is removing beetle-killed spruce trees near Stuckagain Heights, on the northeast hillside above Anchorage.

A crew of fellers from Alaska Fire Service and the Army will cut about 150 of the trees, killed by the spruce bark beetle, in a 200-foot-corridor on Fort Richardson from its boundary with the residential community. Some of the snags and downed wood will be left in place for habitat purposes. The rest will be made available to the public as firewood.

The operation began Oct. 16 and is expected to take up to 10 days. Military support units and local emergency services are using the operation as a training exercise to practice interagency coordination and extended operations. AFS smokejumpers and Army personnel are using it as an opportunity to gain proficiency in felling large-diameter conifers on moderate slopes.

The firewood will be stacked at a ski access point in the area and will be available free of charge.

Nevada

Engines go to Seven Nevada Volunteer Fire Department

Like most volunteer firefighters, Bob Vasey has a day job. He is manager for the local phone company in Elko, Nevada. But when the alarm sounds and Vasey dons his firefighter hat, he becomes the Chief of the 10-Mile Volunteer Fire Department south of Elko.

Up until recently, all 10-Mile firefighters had to work with were antiquated, unreliable engines and a loaner from the Nevada Division of Forestry. But thanks to the Bureau of Land Management, his firefighters have a 1990-model, modern, wildland firefighting engine.



Elko, Nevada volunteer fire fighters receive training from BLM fire crews.

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The 10-Mile Volunteer Fire Department is one of seven Nevada VFDs to receive surplus BLM fire engines on August 1, during a ceremony at the University of Nevada, Reno, Fire Science Academy in Carlin. BLM Director Kathleen Clarke handed over the engine keys to each volunteer fire department chief.



BLM Director Kathleen Clarke and U.S. Representative Jim Gibbons hand keys to a wildland fire engine to the volunteer fire chief. The presentation ceremony was at the University of Nevada Fire Science Academy in Carlin.

The excess BLM wildland firefighting engines are from the Ely, Carson City, Battle Mountain, Las Vegas and Elko Field Offices, and have already been replaced with newer engines. Each of the excess engines has been thoroughly mechanically inspected.

In addition to 10-Mile, the rural fire departments receiving fire engines included:

- Rye Patch Volunteer Fire Department, Pershing County;
- McDermitt Volunteer Fire Department, Humboldt County;
- Tecoma Volunteer Fire Department, Elko County;
- Austin Volunteer Fire Department, Lander County;
- Eureka Volunteer Fire Department, Eureka County; and,
- McGill Volunteer Fire Department, White Pine County.

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The 10-Mile Volunteer Fire Department Station is located near the South Fork Recreation Area, south of Elko. Before they got their surplus BLM heavy engine, Vasey's firefighters were working with:

- A 1947 water tender.
- A 1950s vintage surplus military engine.
- A 1980s vintage light engine.
- A loaner engine from NDF.



None of their older engines held more than 250 gallons of water. The new engine holds 750 gallons, and takes the place of the light engine and the Nevada Department of Forestry loaner.



The surplus BLM engine is modern, newer, faster, and more powerful, with high ground clearance and four-wheel drive. It is able to get into rough country, and is ideal for fighting both structural and urban-interface fires.

“This engine is designed for wildland firefighting but will definitely be useful for structural fires as well,” Vasey said.

The transfer of the fire engines is a part of the ongoing effort to enhance the fire protection capabilities of rural fire districts, under the National Fire Plan. Congress set aside additional funding for this purpose in the fiscal year 2001 and 2002 budgets for federal wildland firefighting agencies.

Like 10-Mile, many Nevada volunteer fire departments use antiquated engines that break down often and are unreliable. The chief believes that more of these newer, modern engines will be needed in the coming years in Nevada's volunteer departments.

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“I’d like to see the rural assistance program continue,” said Vasey, who has been with the 10-Mile department since it was formed 22 years ago. “If we can continue this I think the quality of service from the VFDs will increase. I know all the VFDs in Elko County are still using surplus military engines and could benefit from the rural assistance program.”

BLM has been extremely helpful with training and support on the new engine, according to Vasey.

“The new engine and training that goes with it will enable us to help the BLM on their fires as well,” Vasey said. “This is a win-win situation. I think this is going to be a great plus for everybody.”



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