September 23, 2009

MONTANA FUEL REDUCTION PROJECTS

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:
Fires in public forests and on public rangelands now threaten people, communities, and natural resources in ways never before seen in our nation's history. Today's forests contain fuels at previously unrecorded levels, while highly flammable invasive species now pervade many rangelands. They do so because decades of fire exclusion policies and other land management actions have altered fire's historic role in shaping plant communities.

To decrease risks from catastrophic wildfires, the Montana BLM completed fuels reduction projects on 5,452 wildland urban interface (WUI) acres and 8,287 acres of non-WUI in fiscal year 2009. We exceeded our goal of 13,580 acres by two percent. These projects enhance public safety in the WUI, and improve forest and rangeland health.

ISSUES:
The challenge to completing our prescribed fire projects is largely weather related. Periodic spring rains delayed the spring burn window, reducing the days available to burn because of early green up. Where possible, we look for alternative methods for meeting our objectives, but in most cases, the best way to maintain fire-adapted ecosystems is to apply fire to the landscape.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:
The fuels reduction projects are planned on a landscape level, taking into account other resource management objectives and requirements.

Projects are developed through collaboration with our cooperators and accomplished through partnerships with local, tribal, state, and other federal agencies, as well as interested stakeholders. We use a combination of contracted and government labor, and mechanical and prescribed burning methods.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:
The utilization of stewardship contracting, interagency government agreements, and indefinite deliveries/ indefinite quantities (IDIQ) contracts have helped in expediting critical fuels treatments in the wildland-urban interface.

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