

Snapshots

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BLM

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Colorado

County-Wide Annual CWPP Review Meeting

Jackson County, a small county in north-central Colorado, held its first annual Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Review Meeting in Walden, the county seat, in late September. Annual reviews of completed CWPPs are not unusual or new, many communities hold them. The difference with this meeting was the format. The county, which hosted the meeting, invited all communities within Jackson County that had completed CWPPs, as well as partnering federal and state agencies and local fire departments. Local State Extension Agent, Deb Alpe, facilitated the meeting.

This setting gave participants from various Home Owner Groups and communities an opportunity to share ideas and resources, present progress reports, and make appropriate updates to their existing CWPPs. Each community representative reported on mitigation and preparedness projects, outreach and educational efforts, and fund raising ideas.

The meeting also provided state and federal partners an opportunity to present information to all communities at the same time. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and US Forest Service (USFS) fuels planners provided updates on hazardous fuels projects while ensuring future projects were coordinated with all partners and tied to the priority areas identified in CWPPs. The BLM Mitigation/Education Specialist presented funding and grant information for project planning and implementation. The meeting allowed the North Park FPD Chief to learn more about actions the communities were taking and express concerns of his department.

Jackson County took the first step in wildland fire planning with the development of the county's 'Wildland Fire and Fuel Management Plan' in accordance with the 2000 National Fire Plan. The more detailed level



Jackson County Extension Agent, Deb Alpe, facilitating the first Annual CWPP Review Meeting.

of planning which fit under the umbrella of the county fire plan is the CWPPs. Jackson County was supported in this planning effort with funding provided through BLM's Community Assistance Program.

One of the main intents of CWPPs is for communities to take responsibility for their own wildfire protection and build mitigation and preparedness capacity through the process of prioritizing fuel reduction projects and identifying areas of concern. It's a collaborative process that brings federal, state, local officials and the public together to develop plans that fit the community. The Jackson County communities have definitely approached CWPPs from that perspective with the support of their county officials and other partners.

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Idaho

An Emerging Fire Management Strategy – Appropriate Management Response

As budgets tighten and fire management agencies continue to be scrutinized, all land managers are broadening their consideration and utilization of various devices available to safely control a fire with the most effective and economical means. Appropriate Management Response (AMR), part of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, was fully implemented in 2003 to aid in the decision making process that land managers confront when responding to a wildfire.



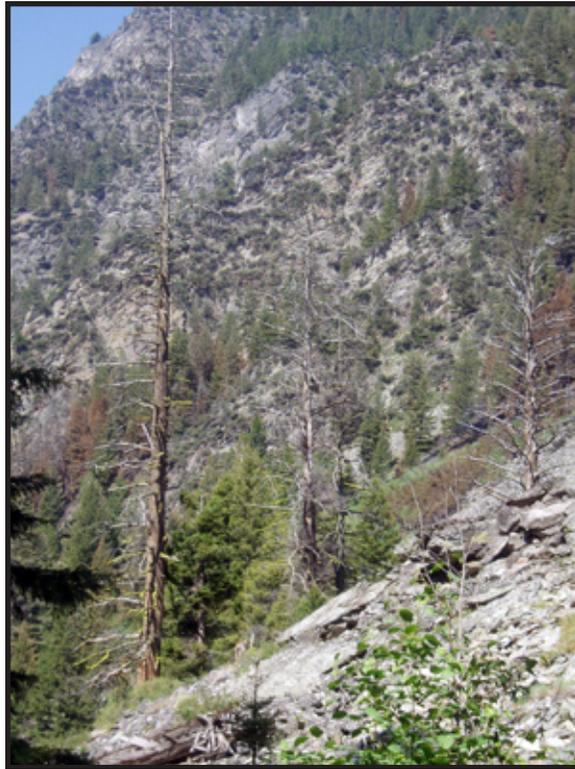
The Bohannon Fire was particularly dangerous because of the steep rocky terrain, falling snags and rocks, abandoned mines and difficult access in and out of the affected area.



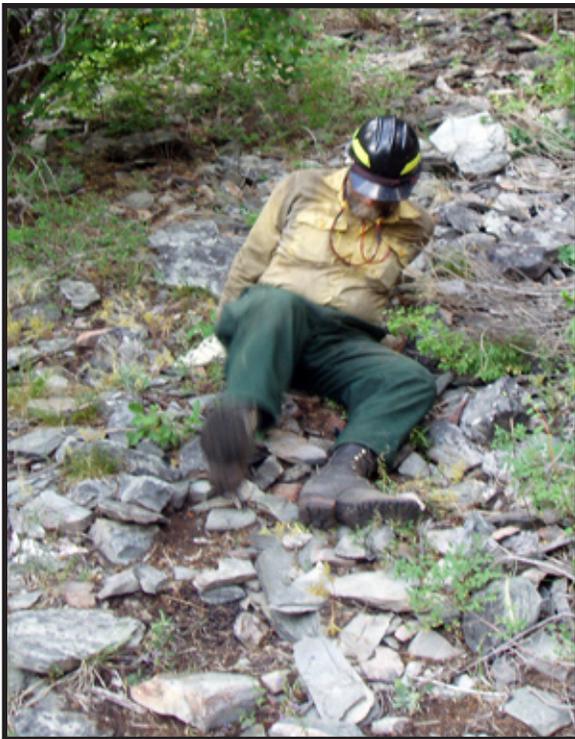
On July 8th, 2007, the BLM Salmon Field Office Manager and a Fire Use Management Team Incident Commander (FUMT IC) found themselves faced with numerous complex considerations. Lightning ignited the timber of Bohannon Creek drainage, which lies south and east of Salmon, Idaho. Minimal initial attack, consisting of two retardant drops and some helicopter support, which slowed the flames, but the steep rugged topography, along with additional local fire activity and diminishing available resources, created an unacceptably hazardous firefighter situation.

Safety of fire personnel and the general public consistently remains fire officials' top priority. The Bohannon Fire was particularly dangerous because of the steep rocky terrain, falling snags and rocks, abandoned mines and difficult access in and out of the affected area. Due to these factors, the local land managers ordered an Incident Management Team (IMT) to direct the desired focus of AMR.

“The low commodity values of the area do not justify a large expenditure of money to suppress this fire, and resource values at risk are also low,” explained BLM



The fire was burning in a steep narrow drainage, on a southeast-facing slope that ranged from 70-90 percent in steepness.



Although only a few people were assigned to this incident, one minor injury was reported, which occurred when a firefighter lost his footing and twisted his knee, while navigating the steep, rocky slopes of Bohannon Creek drainage.

Field Office Manager Steve Hartmann. “In addition to taking only those actions needed to protect life and property, a team of fire specialists will assist me in the development of a confinement strategy for the fire.”

On July 12th, 2007, the Great Basin FUMT, led by Chris Ourada, was ordered to manage the Bohannon Fire. Upon arrival, Ourada verified Hartmann's concerns regarding the exposure of firefighters to such dangerous conditions. The fire was burning in a steep narrow drainage, on a southeast-facing slope that ranged from 70-90 percent in steepness.

Balancing Bohannon's current and potential impacts to the health and safety of Salmon residents and tourists, the community and structures of Salmon and the high value of the Bohannon Creek watershed and clean air became the ideal that steered the extinguishment of the Bohannon Fire.

A continuum of suppression strategies and tactics, Appropriate Management Response, was similarly employed only one other time in Idaho Falls District BLM history and never before with the help of an outside team of specialists. “AMR is every tool we have as fire managers to manage fires . . . [from] Wildland Fire





Private owners agreed to let the FUMT protect their cabin with fire shelter material and a gravity-fed sprinkler system after they had removed their personal belongings.

Use (WFU) to suppression and everything in between,” explained Chris Ourada, Incident Commander of the Bohannon Fire.

The number of personnel assigned on the ground was minimal, resulting in one minor injury. That number would have likely been higher if crews had been ordered to take suppression action. “The 12-person FUMT that managed Bohannon was involved mostly with planning purposes, understanding exactly what potential the fire did or did not have. Very little time was spent on the fire itself, and we still had one accident. If the fire had been actively suppressed, that proportion, time on planning to time on the ground, would have been reversed, resulting in an increased likelihood of something bad happening under those hazardous firefighting conditions,” stated Ourada.

The FUMT confined and contained Bohannon within natural and human-made barriers: Geertson Creek to the north, Bohannon Creek to the south, the Continental Divide to the east and private property boundaries to the west. The team of specialists actively monitored the blaze and took several precautions in case of rapid fire growth.

Land owners were notified of the fire’s progression and were allowed to gather personal belongings. One cabin was protected with a gravity-fed sprinkler system and was wrapped in fire shelter material. A self supporting dip tank for helicopter bucket work, sometimes called a “pumpkin” because of its orange color, was set up near the opening of the drainage.

Although team members checked the fire every day, the proximity of the fire and visibility of the smoke to the town of Salmon was a driving force in informing and educating the public about this less frequent choice of wildfire response. Wildland fire itself is not a new phenomenon in and around Salmon, Idaho. This community lives with wildfire every summer, so the choice for employing AMR on the Bohannon Fire was accepted with minimal explanation.

The use of a FUMT in Bohannon Creek during July 2007 is an example of what trends in fire management are proving to be appropriate for continually-decreasing budgets and resources and ever-increasing wildfire activity. Containment and control of the burning acres within the surrounding natural and human-made barriers of Bohannon Creek proved to be the most effective and economical choice, as the safety report recorded only one minor injury, and the cost did not exceed \$100,000.

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Big Goals Being Met Through Communities at Risk and Hazardous Fuels Projects in South Central Idaho

Having suppressed nearly 700,000 acres during this past wildfire season of 2007, the Idaho Bureau of Land Management Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation Program is certainly not at rest during these cooler fall months. Fall signals a massive surge in the efforts of the fuels and rehabilitation programs. This fall, the Twin Falls District is completing nine Communities at Risk and Hazardous Fuels projects in an effort to achieve some big goals that could help prevent such a significant fire season in the future.

Communities at Risk (CAR) projects in south central Idaho are done through Mid Snake Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D). This organization is the grantor of funds allotted to the BLM through the National Fire Plan to complete CAR projects. The two agencies operate under a cooperative agreement that allows the RC&D to conduct fuels, prevention, and mitigation projects on private land that the BLM could not otherwise treat. This collaboration is crucial given that all CAR projects are completed on private land. The partnership between the BLM and RC&D is strong as the two are constantly working together to protect local communities from the threat of wildfire.





Brush in the Rock Creek area south of Twin Falls was thick and created a fire danger for area residents.

Among the CAR projects being completed within the Twin Falls District this fall, is an 80 acre re-seeding effort in an area west of Shoshone. The private land being treated is located adjacent to public land and has no defensible space. While the goal of such efforts is to help communities and protect homes, there is also another benefit.

“Too often public land burns up because we have to dedicate our resources to protecting structures,” Twin Falls District BLM Fuels Specialist Brandon Brown says. “Doing a project such as this will reduce the threat to private property and ultimately allow us to focus on protecting public land.”

Another such project is being done in the Big Little Ranches subdivision of Jerome. This past summer, a wildfire in the area threatened multiple houses and caused significant traffic hazards and delays. 120 acres of the area is being re-seeded to a more firewise vegetation, perennial grasses and forbs that won’t have to be irrigated, but slow the progress and decrease the looming threat of a wildfire.

“Using perennial grasses and forbs allows the area to be greener longer and breaks up the fuel continuity,” Brown indicates.

Another 40 acres has already been treated at Rock Creek south of Twin Falls. Brush was mechanically removed on private land that is again adjacent to public land. One goal of this project was to specifically improve the road and the access to the landowner’s homes. The one-way, dead end lane was originally very narrow and fully lined with bushes and trees. Before the project, in the event of a wildfire, there would be no way the homes could’ve



Prior to a fuels reduction project, thick brush came dangerously close to homes south of Twin Falls.

been saved. The brush was cleaned up and a fuel break provided.

Another goal of the Rock Creek project was to protect the adjacent public land in the area. This particular spot is an area with high resource value, including healthy sage grouse habitat. Protecting this area from a wildfire that could spread from private land was needed and accomplished.

Idaho BLM Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation Program is also working on various Hazardous Fuels efforts. A 2,500 acre broadcast burn was recently completed on the Kimama allotment within the Shoshone Field Office, with the goal of removing annual cheat grass. Impressively, this burn ties in to more than 15,000 acres of treatments that have been done in the Kimama allotment in the past eight years.

In 2000, Fire Use Specialist Joe Russell planned out nearly a decade worth of treatments for this particular area. The land surrounding the Kimama allotment is healthy sage grouse habitat and contains more native vegetation. Kimama, however, was dominated by exotic annual plant communities that lead to increased fire hazard. An aggressive and long term project was created to increase usable space for sage grouse and minimize the fire threat in the area.

The proposed total acreage of the Kimama allotment project was 20,000 acres, a feat which clearly had to be undertaken in phases. This recent burn in 2007 is the final piece to the overall puzzle and will be seeded in the spring.

Already the project has seen a degree of success. Within the past eight years, one fire has burned through the first treatment area. The blaze began to the east and quickly burned into the treatment area. Once the flames





An 80 acres fuels reduction project in the Rock Creek area created a 150-foot buffer strips, greatly reducing risk to homeowners.

connected with the newer native fuels, the fire slowed significantly and quickly died out.

“It was exactly what we wanted to have happen,” Russell exclaims. “After the fire, we allowed the area to recover naturally and it did great. This makes it so we don’t have to spend any more money on these treated areas.”

Another notable hazardous fuels project being completed in the Twin Falls District this fall is located in Martin Canyon near Bellevue. A 100 acre aspen thinning effort follows a recently finished commercial logging operation. This project is also a long term effort, having begun in 2001 and set to be finalized with a prescribed burn next spring.

The fuels work that has been and is being done is only the beginning for the Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation Program. Upcoming efforts include the planting of 50,000 sagebrush and bitterbrush seedlings. They are hand planted in the fall and spring months by both BLM fire crew members and volunteers with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, whom are also involved



in project planning. The seedlings will be planted within the Craters of the Moon National Monument, the Jim Sage area of the Burley Field Office and in the Jarbidge Desert.

Another upcoming effort is a 215 acre mechanical thinning that will be completed at Cougar Point within the Jarbidge Field Office. The area is littered with Aspen and Mountain Mahogany that are encroaching into sensitive species habitat. The goal of this effort will be to reduce fuel loading in the area.

Whatever the goal may be and the effort involved to make it happen, the Twin Falls District Fire and Aviation Program is clearly busy making positive things happen.



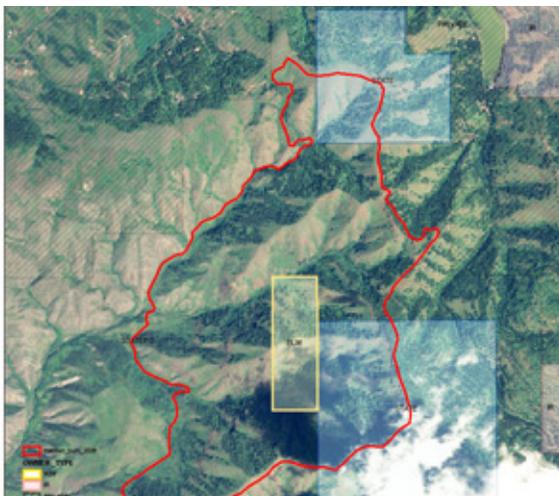
Wildfire Season 2007 Tests Fuels Treatments in the Wildland-Urban Interface

Fire Season 2007 proved to be a very busy one for the Cottonwood Field Office in north central Idaho. Three large wildfires burned a total of 115,000 acres, of which 21,000 acres were on BLM ground. Two of these fires, burning within the wildland-urban interface, threatened multiple homes and communities and put previous fuels treatments to the test.

The Chimney Complex burned over 51,000 acres in the Craig Mountain area south of Lewiston, Idaho, threatening the community of Waha Glen. The Craig Mountain area, which provides unique wildlife habitat along the lower Snake River, is cooperatively managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Idaho Fish and Game, Idaho Department of Lands, and The Nature Conservancy.

In October 2006, BLM, IDFG, and IDL conducted an interagency prescribed burn to reduce fuels and provide a buffer between the fire-prone landscape of the Craig Mountain area and the community of Waha Glen. The 1,600 acre Madden Creek prescribed burn provided an opportunity to successfully stop the Chimney Complex from advancing toward the structures in and around this community. Evacuations were in place for over 3 days, but residents eventually returned to find their homes intact.

Further south, along the Snake River in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, the Poe Cabin fire raced through the upper Deer Creek rural development with extreme wind-driven fire behavior. Residents had little time to prepare or escape, but remarkably few structures were lost. This was not a matter of luck.



Madden Creek interagency prescribed fire conducted by Idaho Department of Lands, Bureau of Land Management, and Idaho Fish & Game in October 2006.



Madden Creek prescribed burn conducted in October 2006.

In 2004, several of these residents had joined together to develop a plan and conduct defensible space treatments in an effort to reduce fuel accumulations. A combination of dense brush, steep terrain, the presence of beetle-killed trees, and over fifty years of fire suppression had created a dangerously high level of wildfire risk. This work was accomplished with assistance from local Forest Service, Framing Our Community and Clearwater RC&D. All structures involved in this program were spared, while 12 structures that had not undergone defensible space treatment were lost to this fire.

Wildfire events like the Poe Cabin Fire can happen in a variety of environments. When living in these locations its necessary to identify hazards, means of fuel reduction, and the appropriate steps needed to lessen the damage. In the case of upper Deer Creek, a number of homeowners had the foresight to take action long before the fire occurred and a greater loss of structures was prevented. In the wake of the Poe Cabin Fire, an educational moment is being captured on video for others to share. The Forest Service, BLM, IDL, and Framing Our Community have joined together in the production of a professional video to be completed in the fall of 2008. This video will be distributed throughout the agencies, rural fire departments, and counties in an effort to reach a wide audience and share stories of success and necessity for defensible space treatment around homes. Additionally, in 2007, the local BLM, Forest Service and Salmon River Rural Fire Department, with support from Idaho Department of Lands, Clearwater RC&D, and Student Conservation Association, have partnered to conduct Red Zone homeowner fire risk evaluations along the Salmon River corridor. This is a multi-year project, involving 800 plus homes scattered up remote drainages and steep hillsides along the fire-prone Salmon River landscape.





Chimney Complex successfully held at Madden Creek prescribed burn control line in July 2007.



Defensible space treatment aid fire suppression efforts in protecting this structure during the Poe Cabin wildfire.

The most immediate outcome from this effort is homeowner education. These interviews often provide the impetus for many homeowners to take immediate action to mitigate hazards once they are identified. The data collected can be consolidated into the Red Zone database which can be shared with the fire protection agencies, county, rural fire departments, and incident management teams in the event of a wildfire. This data may also be used to identify opportunities and prioritize projects for grant money applications.

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Light fuel loads and vulnerable structure materials lead to complete loss of several structures to the Poe Cabin Wildfire.



Thinning and lawn maintenance provide adequate defensible space around home during the 2007 Poe Cabin Wildfire.



Utah

Hi-Country Estates Residents Recognized Nationally For Efforts To Reduce Wildfire Risk In Utah

Two Hi-Country estates residents are taking the lead to ensure their community and others in Utah don't suffer the same losses as we saw in Southern California last week.

Last week's fires in Southern California are a painful reminder of the importance of wildfire preparedness. Residents who take simple "Firewise" steps around their homes to clear vegetation and create defensible space will reduce their vulnerability from the threat of wildfire.

Randy and Jean Crane have done just that. They have dedicated numerous hours to mobilizing their own community and the state of Utah toward Firewise core principles of prevention and mitigation. Recently wildfire has taken a toll on the communities of Southern California and it is important to look to leaders like the Cranes to help teach and implement tactics to reduce the loss of life and structures in a wildfire. The Crane's efforts to educate property owners on prevention and mitigation principles have been an important part of not only the Hi-Country Estates Wildfire Council, but the entire state of Utah with the Utah Living with Fire Committee. Their hard work has earned them national recognition from the National Wildfire Coordinating Group's (NWCG) Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Working Team with a Firewise Leadership Award.

The Firewise Leadership Awards are designed to honor individuals and organizations conducting wildland fire mitigation activities in residential developments in the

wildland/urban interface. Winners were selected based on their efforts on the local, state, and regional level. Randy and Jean Crane have been recognized for their dedication, leadership, and influence of the Firewise mission and principles throughout the state of Utah.

"The Crane's are selfless in their work to educate their own local community of Hi-Country Estates and other Utah communities," said Erin Darboven,

Fire Education and Mitigation Specialist. "The Crane's have volunteered countless hours toward staffing information booths, hosting agency visits, providing educational services for neighboring communities, and even using their own property for how-to demonstrations. They are a true inspiration to the Firewise cause."

"Leadership Award winners serve as a perfect example of how communities and homeowners can work together to prepare for the threat of wildfire and their work deserves recognition," said Alan Dozier, chair of the NWCG's Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Working Team. "What makes Firewise work are these individual "spark plugs" that are passionate about the Firewise mission and who are leading the way to getting the work done."

In addition to recognizing the winners, the Firewise Leadership Awards program helps program administrators capture success stories and share best practices across the country, between all types of interests – public, private, and tribal. This year, more than 30 individuals and organizations from across the country were nominated for their outstanding efforts.

Communities and residents interested in learning more about the Firewise Communities program may visit www.firewise.org.

