

Snapshots

November 2007

BLM

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Montana

Baseball and Defensible Space... A Yearly Tradition in Helena

The 5th Annual “Defensible Space Night” at the Helena Brewers baseball game was once again a huge success. The night has quickly become one of “the” things to do in Helena during the month of June. We handed out nearly 500 cooler bags with a defensible space message to fans.

Smokey threw out the first pitch and competed in the mascot base-running race!

Throughout the game, the public address announcer plugged the Tri-county FireSafe Working Group’s mitigation program and explained the importance of defensible space. He also provided the fans with tips for creating defensible space several times in between innings. Members of the interagency fire group were on hand to answer questions and provide applications for the mitigation program.

Sponsors of the event were the BLM Butte Field Office, Helena National Forest, Montana Department of Natural Resources, Tri-county Fire Working Group, and local media outlets from Helena.



Ponderosa pine regeneration from the 1991 Forgotten Fire. The downed, dead fuels under the relic canopy have since been treated in preparation for prescribed fire.



BLM Butte Field Office employee Charles Tuss and Trico FireSafe Working Group representative Pat McKelvey hand out defensible space coolers to eager Brewers fans.



Defensible space cooler bag.

The Old Burn becomes Re-burned

In 1991, a 260 acre wildfire near the town of Landusky was forgotten, sort of. In 2006, the Forgotten Fire was re-forgotten and became the Old Burn. In a year or two, the Forgotten Fire, Old Burn, will be re-burned to thin Ponderosa Pine regeneration, and to enhance bighorn sheep forage. The project will further expand the hazardous fuels reduction treatments near the town of Landusky.

To prepare for prescribed fire, mechanical treatments have been implemented to reduce conifer stem densities, to reduce ladder fuels from recent blow-down, and to reduce downed dead fuel loads from the Forgotten Fire.

First entry thinning treatment objectives were conservative to accommodate additional mortality that



will occur from prescribed burning and wind throw. Objectives have so far been achieved in preparation for prescribed fire; and as desired, the stem density is still high.

Ultimately, basal area will be further reduced to improve forest health and to reduce the risk of bark beetle infestations. Commercial volume could be removed as convenient via future nearby timber sales, or by individual saw-log sales to meet local requests. When second order fire effects of prescribed burning become evident, the basal area and forest health will be reassessed, and additional mechanical treatment will be implemented as necessary.

Contacts: Jennifer Walker, 406-538-1982 or Pat Harty, 406-538-1983

Red Flags Announce Fire Danger

Large red flags were hoisted in a variety of locations in three west-central Montana counties this year to warn people when the wildfire danger was high. When a “red flag warning” was issued, local, state, and federal fire service organizations displayed red flags with a no burning symbol in Lewis and Clark, Broadwater, and Jefferson Counties.

Patterned after the hurricane warning flags used in coastal areas, fire service organizations are hoping the red flags will alert residents to take extra precautions. Red flag warnings are issued by the National Weather Service to alert the public about the onset or possibility of critical weather and fuel moisture conditions that could lead to significant wildfire activity.

It may take a few years for agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of the flags. “Our goal is to raise public awareness when fire danger is high,” commented Terina Mullen, BLM fire mitigation and education specialist. “If we can get the public in the habit of looking for flags in their area, we’re hoping that will translate into being extra cautious in the field.”



area that was adjacent to the Forgotten Fire. This area will be under-burned along with the other areas.



Same photo point, post-thinned.



Two firefighters display one of the flags used to implement the “red flag warning” system in Broadwater, Jefferson and Lewis and Clark Counties, Montana. Photo courtesy of Helena National Forest.



Stewardship Project Provides Ethanol for the Country

The Deer Mountain Stewardship is located five miles south of Lead, South Dakota in the Wildland Urban Interface. The project size was 85 acres and included harvesting 1,100 tons of Ponderosa Pine sawlogs and about 450 tons of spruce sawlogs

The purpose was to reduce the wildland fire intensity near the numerous subdivisions built and being built around the BLM administered lands. It was also to decrease the density of the smaller new growth trees to help promote the growth of the older age trees. A fire containment zone was created along the major road. A fire containment zone is a zone along a road anywhere from 100 feet to 300 feet wide that is thinned out even more than a regular thinning project to help slow a fire and is accessible for fire personnel and vehicles. The fire containment zone is more of a park-like stand.

This project was unique for the South Dakota Field Office and is the first stewardship where the biomass left over from logging will be turned into ethanol. Ethanol is created when the polymers in the wood are broken down by an enzyme and turned into glucose, which can be fermented and refined

The project is very beneficial for both the public and the BLM. In previous contracts, the biomass created is either burned in piles or under ground and then spread on the ground. The biomass created from this stewardship will go to the ethanol plant for fuel. It will save money that would have been used to burn the piles. This process was started in the Black Hills this past year.



Project area after a brush hog ground the smaller trees and dead and down material.



One of the machine piles waiting to be ground, with a house in the background.



A boom delimeter works on limbing and cutting the trees to the desired length.



The horizontal grinder used to grind the biomass.





Piles of wood chips after being ground through the horizontal grinder.

The commercial sized trees marked were cut by a Timbco and whole tree skidded to a pre-determined landing. The trees were then measured and cut by a boom de-limber. The biomass remaining was piled into 150-foot by 75-foot piles. Then the contractor used a Timbco with a grapple hook on the end to feed a horizontal grinder controlled by the Timbco operator via remote to grind the biomass into wood chips. The wood chips are then loaded into trucks and hauled to Upton, Wyoming where a new ethanol plant opened in March of 2007. The ethanol plant in Upton is the first of its kind in the nation. The plant can produce about 1.5 million gallons of Ethanol.

Not Just Another Grass Burn

Wind is consistently a tricky factor in north central Montana that fire managers have to deal with. An interagency group of fire personnel were recently tested by Mother Nature when they assembled to implement the Whitewater Lake Prescribed Fire, approximately



ATV Instructor/Operator, Mike Ford. The torch worked quite well, reduced firefighter exposure to smoke and heat, and saved the ignition team a lot of walking.

25 miles north of Malta, Montana. After the burn boss determined that the short term weather forecast was not favorable (due to high winds) for September 26, burn personnel wisely stayed productive during down time by conducting training on ATV operations with eight individuals gaining approval to operate the newly designed ATV mounted drip torch. On September 27, the winds subsided and crews were able to conduct firing. The burn was completed without incident and resource objectives were met on nearly 700 acres of important waterfowl habitat.

The prescribed fire project area consists of a relatively dry lake bed, which was fenced off in 1969 to manage waterfowl nesting habitat. The BLM seeded portions during the early 1980's in an attempt to improve nesting habitat. Grazing within the enclosure had not occurred since the fence was built. The vegetation had become decadent with limited growth and quality for either nesting cover for migratory birds or forage for wildlife and livestock.

The burn crew organized to conduct the burn consisted of an impressive mix of resources from the BLM's Central and Eastern MT Fire Zones: Lewis and Clark National Forest, Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and fire management personnel from the BLM Montana State Office. Steve Knox, BLM fuels manager for the Central Montana Fire Zone commented, "There was a unique interaction that occurred on this burn between higher level fire managers and the field-going firefighters that perform these skills daily and as a result have become very skilled practitioners of prescribed fire. This burn organization provided an excellent opportunity for everyone to learn and gain understanding of a lot of things at all levels of our organization, which is usually a healthy thing for an organization." Burn boss, Scott McNeely added, "In the end, it was a good burn. The



Traditional (more arduous) ignition methods were still required.



job got done safely, we got some folks some good training and the resource folks in the Malta Field Office are happy with the result. That's about all a burn boss can ask for."

Contact: Steve Knox, BLM, CT MT Fire Zone at Steve_B_Knox@blm.gov.



Project overhead discussing the weather prior to making the no-go decision on September 26.

Nevada

Out of the Fire and Into the Fireplace

Pinion pine and juniper trees that could have contributed to a wildfire, will instead heat homes, due to a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) stewardship contract in eastern Nevada.

The Upper Gleason Creek Sagebrush Restoration Project, about eight miles west of the high desert community of Ely near Robinson Summit, was designed to protect an electric power transmission line, improve the native vegetative composition, and maintain overall watershed health.

The project area encompasses 1,500-plus acres of public lands. More than 1,100 acres of the project area will be treated using prescribed fire. An Oregon-based contractor is mechanically thinning the remaining 365 acres and harvesting the merchantable wood product as firewood. Non-merchantable material is being shredded and will remain to break down naturally.

The BLM Ely Field Office fuels program-designed and managed project began in May and is expected to be completed by late November.



The harvested pinyon-pine tree will be processed and sold for firewood. Contracted mechanical tree-thinning is just one of the tools the BLM Ely District uses to protect life and property, and to restore and maintain watershed health.

