

Snapshots

March 1, 2007

BLM

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Jenna Sloan, editor
Sheri Ascherfeld, layout and design

Idaho

Idaho Partnership Receives BLM “Cooperative Conservation” Award

On December 19, Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary C. Stephen Allred presented the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM’s) prestigious national “Cooperative Conservation” award at a special ceremony in Boise, Idaho.

The award was presented to representatives of the “Fire-Up for Summer!” program, a partnership effort of the Idaho BLM, Meridian School District and Northwest Nazarene University.

The BLM award recognizes collaborative conservation achievements, and this particular award recognizes the importance of connecting today’s youth with the environment. “As this country has become more urban, our youth have become more and more distant from the land that sustains us in so many ways,” said Assistant Secretary Allred. “We need to recognize efforts that educate and connect young people to their public lands.”

According to Assistant Secretary Allred, “America’s young people will soon drive public policy relative to the environment and federal land management; it is critical that they are informed. A famous Native American quotation relates that ‘we don’t inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.’ It is my fervent hope that by educating our children on the environment, they will be knowledgeable public land



Assistant Secretary C. Stephen Allred (back right) honors representatives from the Meridian School District for their participation in the “Fire-Up for Summer!” program. These students are representing more than 50 young men and women who have participated in the program over the past three years.

stewards and will leave a wonderful legacy for those generations yet to come.”

The “Cooperative Conservation” award recognizes collaborative activity among a diverse range of entities, including federal, state, local and tribal governments; private for profit and nonprofit institutions; as well as other nongovernmental entities and individuals. This particular award recognizes the importance of educating and involving today’s youth with the environment.

“Now in its fourth year, the “Fire-Up for Summer!” program is helping students learn about wildfire behavior, its effect on natural ecosystems and what can be done to minimize rural communities’ susceptibility to wildfire,” Allred said.

BLM employees use the students’ findings to give homeowners suggestions on improving their homes’ resistance to wildfire. They also provide treatment options for fire-prone vegetation in and around the study areas, which will improve the communities’ overall resistance to wildfire. To date, the students’ work has benefited not only public lands and resources but also numerous homeowners in the communities of Garden Valley and Silver City.

The Fire-Up program will continue in 2007. The Fire-Up students will be doing work in the Pine and Featherville, Idaho area. The Boise BLM and the Boise National Forest are working on a joint project in the area to reduce hazardous fuels in the corridor of the South Fork of the Boise River. The students will gather data to input into the Firemon database. They will also do wildland fire home hazard assessments using



“Fire-Up for Summer!” students present their project findings as well as information on Firewise landscaping at Northwest Nazarene University.



Redzone software. The students will provide this data to the Southwest Idaho Resource Conservation and Development Council. The Council has a grant proposal to do hazardous fuels removal on private land in the corridor. The hazard assessments will also be provided to homeowners, so they can be aware of all mitigation measures that are applicable to their property.

Contact: Shelley-Davis Brunner, 208-373-4020

Revised Idaho Strategy Signed in Boise

On December 12, 2006, Idaho Governor Jim Risch joined a delegation of nearly one dozen state, federal, and local agencies in signing the revised *Idaho Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan*. The updated plan was signed at the meeting of the Idaho State Board of Land Commissioners.

“This plan shows Idaho’s continued dedication towards implementation of the National Fire Plan,” said Governor Risch.

“Idaho has been recognized nationally for its past successes in local collaboration and implementation of projects to reduce hazardous fuel loads on private and public lands.”

The revised *Idaho Implementation Strategy* comes on the heels of an updated national strategy unveiled at the Western Governors’ Association winter meeting



Boise National Forest Supervisor Dick Smith (far left) and Idaho BLM State Director Tom Dyer (far right) look on as Governor Jim Risch signs the new Idaho National Fire Plan Implementation Strategy at an Idaho Land Board ceremony in December, 2006.



Newly signed Idaho Statewide Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan.

December 7, 2006, in Las Vegas, Nevada. The National Fire Plan was initiated in response to the unprecedented wildfires in the summer of 2000, including many large fires that burned across Idaho.

“The essence of the *Idaho Strategy* is to focus on reducing fuels in forest and rangelands that are a wildfire hazard, and to increase the capability of local fire departments and districts who provide a front-line defense on private lands where people live,” said Governor Risch.

The revised *Idaho Implementation Strategy* establishes a collaborative partnership between the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group and working groups organized at the county level. Some important changes include:

Composition: At a minimum, County Working Groups should include a county representative, local fire chief (or chiefs), and federal, state, and tribal representatives as appropriate.

County Contact: Each County Working Group will designate a

County Contact that will interface directly with the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group. It is the responsibility of the State Working Group to keep County Working Groups abreast of National Fire Plan policy changes that may take place statewide or nationally.

CWPP Updates: County Commissioners and/or County Working Groups will ensure that a current copy of their Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is on file with the Idaho Department of Lands. The State Working Group will work with County Working Groups to ensure that each CWPP is compliant with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

Project Prioritization: County Working Groups are asked annually to submit a list of priority needs for hazardous fuels treatments (on both federal and non federal lands) and firefighting assistance funds to the Idaho State Working Group in order to receive highest priority for assistance funds. The State Working Group has provided a simple form for County Working Groups to fill out that will serve as an addendum to a county’s CWPP.





Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group photo at their quarterly meeting this fall in Boise. Shown here are representatives of the 14 different agencies that make up the statewide group which focuses on collaboration and prioritization of wildfire education, fuels reduction and mitigation projects across the State.

Representatives of state and federal agencies and organizations who signed the *Idaho Strategy* include:

- James E. Risch, Idaho Governor
- George B. Bacon, Interim State Forester, Idaho Department of Lands
- Richard A. Smith, Boise National Forest Supervisor, US Forest Service
- Thomas Dyer, Idaho State Director, Bureau of Land Management
- Robert A. Whistler, NW Regional Forester, Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Deputy Chief Doug Brown, President, Idaho Fire Chiefs Association
- Dr. Robert Cope, Lemhi County Commissioner, Idaho Association of Counties
- Morris Huffman, Idaho Resource Conservation & Development Association
- Major General Lawrence F. Lafrenz, Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security
- Mark Larson, State Fire Marshal, Idaho Dept. of Insurance

Nevada

Manhattan Thinning Operations Help Make Remote Community “Fire-Safe”

A multi-year project to thin pinion and juniper woodlands and protect the small town of Manhattan, Nevada from the dangers of wildland fire has gone a long way toward the ultimate goal of making the community “Fire-Safe.”

The local Firesafe Council chapter and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are currently working together to obtain grants that will enable them to address hazardous fuel issues inside the town. In addition, they have recently obtained grant funding to work in areas where the BLM is unable to work because of land ownership issues. The local chapter has systematically worked to plug gaps in the Fire Defense System in order to solidify the project and make Manhattan truly “Fire-Safe.”

The Manhattan Wildland Urban Interface Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project is a multi-year, phased project currently in its fourth year of implementation. This interagency project is led by the BLM Battle Mountain Field Office (BMFO). The BLM’s partners include the Manhattan Chapter of the Nevada Firesafe Council, Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF) the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (USFS).

The purpose of the project is to protect the historic mining town of Manhattan from the types of Nevada wildfires that typically occur in pinion-juniper forest lands. Manhattan is located in a heavily forested canyon of the Toiyama Mountain Range. The project provides for safe access routes for firefighters and escape routes for the community, in addition to providing a buffer zone around the community. The project is designed to protect the town and infrastructure from a crown fire advancing from any direction.

BLM collaborated with its interagency partners to educate the residents of this mountain community about the extreme risk their small town faced from wildland fires on nearby public lands. Residents also recognized that their own community lands posed a serious wildfire risk. The community provided significant input into the proposed action, which was incorporated into the resulting Environmental Assessment (EA).

Based on BLM advice and guidance, the community formed one of the first Nevada Firesafe Council chapters outside the Sierra Front. Formed in 2003, the council included nearly every permanent and seasonal resident of Manhattan. The local chapter further developed plans to implement a critical piece of the fuel break and used a grant provided by the Nevada Firesafe Council to create a 20-acre shaded fuel break at a strategic location on private land. This work was completed in 2004 and tied in perfectly with the fuel break on public land. As a result, the overall effectiveness of the entire project was strengthened.



BLM's NDF partners have been the real workhorse behind the project's success. They have done the majority of the thinning and chipping operations on both public and private lands. Their efforts on this project and dedication to stewardship and community safety have proven paramount to the success of this project. The BLM has been able to partner with NDF because of an existing Interagency Agreement for Fire Management. BLM has been able to fund NDF work on this project and deploy a large, cost-effective, local workforce.

Managing the large amounts of slash and tree material generated from thinning operations has been one of the greatest challenges. Pinion and juniper trees are not considered "merchantable timber," but their wood can be used as fuel for wood stoves and fireplaces or chips for use in co-generation power plants.

Unfortunately, no cost effective method exists for transporting fuel wood or wood chips from the site to these kinds of power plants. The BLM allows the public to use the wood for home heating, and crews will often leave large chip piles for people to use as mulch in their flower beds. But such uses only dispose of a fraction of the slash and tree material, which are known as "activity fuels." Most of these materials are either chipped back onto the ground (where accessible by the chipper) or burned in piles.

The local ecosystem has benefited greatly from these thinning and prescribed fire operations. When crews thin out sick and dying trees along with excessive under-story trees, the competition for nutrients and water resources is considerably reduced among the remaining trees. The healthier trees that remain after thinning operations are completed can take advantage of these resources and grow larger and more resilient to common plant diseases such as dwarf mistletoe and other pests such as boring beetles. Crews leave about 30 trees per acre on-site with a diversity of age-classes.

The many prescribed fires conducted on the project have also proven beneficial to the local ecosystem. Although burns are only conducted on a small scale, many nutrients are recycled back into the ground on the periphery of the piles. BLM's post-burn monitoring has noted regeneration of such under-story species such as sagebrush, native grasses, bitterbrush, and Mormon tea.

These successful operations have also increased public awareness of the usefulness and necessity of prescribed fire in such fire-dependant ecosystems as pinion-juniper and sagebrush fuel types. The project has not only succeeded in achieving its primary goal of protecting lives, property and resources, however. It has also reaffirmed BLM's role in collaboration, cooperation and stewardship, and moreover has increased the level of public trust among those who call Manhattan, Nevada home.



Shrubs and weeds in the project area.



Pinyon and juniper vegetation covering the project area.



Prescribed fire implemented in the snowy season.



Prescribed fire implemented on a hillside to burn pinyon and juniper.



Hillside after prescribed burn.



Oregon

Partnership's Prescribed Burning Enhances Native Prairie Habitat in the Willamette Valley

The southern portion of Oregon's lush Willamette Valley is the location for a creative partnership effort to enhance native prairie habitat on hundreds of acres of public and private lands. The habitat enhancement is being accomplished with prescribed burning directed by the BLM's Eugene District and several partner organizations.

The effort is part of a cooperative venture known as the West Eugene Wetlands. The BLM, City of Eugene, and The Nature Conservancy formed a partnership in 1994 to manage the wetlands in west Eugene in a cooperative manner. Their goal was to protect and restore wetland ecosystems in the local area. Other agencies and organizations including U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Youth Conservation Corps, Willamette Resource & Education Network, and the McKenzie River Trust have since joined the partnership.

In the past decade, the BLM has prepared plans and conducted prescribed burning on approximately 1,000 acres of land owned or managed by partner agencies. The objectives for the prescribed burns are to enhance the native wetland prairie plant community including the Federally-listed species: Bradshaw's lomatium, Kincaid's lupine, and Willamette daisy. In addition, the prescribed burning is intended to kill or suppress the non-native grass monocultures and control woody vegetation which dominates some areas. Historically, natural fire was a major component of a healthy wetland prairie ecosystem. In the twentieth century, many of the



Fire personnel maintain a watchful eye on the prescribed burn from the road.

lands were converted to agricultural use, and fire was excluded.

The BLM provides the trained personnel, and the equipment and supplies necessary to safely and efficiently conduct the burns. In addition, BLM leads quarterly prescribed fire meetings to effectively coordinate the planning and implementation of burning activities on partner-owned and partner-managed lands within the West Eugene Wetlands area. Some of the requirements the partners address include multi agency approvals and agreements from Lane County Regional Air Protection Agency, Oregon Department of Agriculture, and Eugene Fire and Rescue.

The partnership's work has been a major success. In 1998, the BLM's Eugene District received the National Prescribed Fire Award for its excellence in Ecosystem Management. In addition, the partners have been able to increase their staff capacity and set record accomplishments for prescribed burning on nine units totaling approximately 200 acres in one year. An automated weather station was also installed in the wetland project area which provides extremely valuable and accurate daily weather measurements. One major success story is the rebound of the population



The treatment is implemented under careful, prescribed situations to ensure success.



The prescribed burn will aid in restoring the ecosystem health of the wetlands.





Fire personnel ignite the prescribed burn using drip torches.

of Kincaid's lupine, which is the host plant for the federally listed Fender's blue butterfly. This butterfly species population has increased through time due to the implementation of prescribed burning treatments.

For more information contact Nancy Ashlock, Eugene District Assistant Fire Management Officer, at (541) 683-6667.

S-420 Field Course: Preparing Employees for Emergency Response

In recent years, the demand on the wildland fire community's emergency responders and incident management teams has increased due to national requests for assistance to events other than wildfire. To meet this need, it has become increasingly important to have highly-trained personnel. The Pacific Northwest has been working to ensure that proper training is available.

One course in particular, S-420 Command and General Staff, is in high demand and is a critical training requirement. Personnel need this course to be command and general staff members of incident management teams. Historically, this course is taught in the classroom and requires a student in each of the command and general staff positions of the Incident Command System in order to function. The seven required positions are: incident commander, information, safety, operations, planning, logistics and finance. This is difficult to accomplish since there are few incident commander, planning, logistics and finance students and an abundance of operations, information and safety students. As a result, S-420 was not being offered frequently enough resulting in fewer responders meeting the required qualifications for qualification.

In an attempt to find a solution for Oregon and Washington, a group of interagency partners, known as the Training Working Team, decided to take the S-420 course out of the classroom and into the field. The S-420 course is designed to prepare the student to function effectively in the position of a Type II incident commander, command or general staff -- all of which are lead positions on an incident management team. The group of interagency partners includes the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Forestry, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Oregon State Fire Marshal, and Washington State Fire Marshal.

By teaching the course during an assignment, students get to perform the duties and responsibilities of their respective positions as team members on a Type II incident. As a result, students in the Pacific Northwest are receiving hands-on experience while learning directly from incident management team members. Students witness the entire team in action, thus receiving a well-rounded education. Incidents have all the key players on site, removing the need to have students in each function. The field version of S-240 costs substantially less than the classroom version because it takes fewer people to manage the training.

When the field course first started, there were over 40 individuals in operations, 36 in safety, and 40 in information waiting to take an S-420 course in the Pacific Northwest alone. It is clear that this need exists throughout the nation.

The S-420 field course occurs as soon as an incident management team is mobilized; therefore, it was critical to have the dispatch community's support and have the students and cadre ready to go at a moments notice. The course is designed to take up to two students per section and runs two sessions per incident. Each time the course is given, this interagency cadre works to improve the course, and students often continue to work with the team even after the courses is over, to continue their training.

Now in the fourth season, the Pacific Northwest has been able to train over 65 responders in the fields of operations, safety and information. The field course cadre is now offering training to other regions to help spread the program around the nation and to encourage more responders to become Type II qualified. The goal is to do four course sessions per year.

For more information, contact Renee Beams, Training Specialist, at (541) 504-7342 or rbeams@fs.fed.us.

