

# Snapshots

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BLM

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## Idaho

### Boise BLM Partners with Local Park for Wildland Fire Education

The view from southwest Idaho's Celebration Park is stunning. Located in a steep canyon along the Snake River, visitors are treated to dramatic vistas of stark basalt canyon walls, the deceptively calm, glass-like waters of the river and a variety of native flora and fauna. The park also memorializes several significant historical facets of Idaho's past. Visitors can read about the area's history as a Paleolithic, Archaic, and historic Native American winter hunting camp while hiking amongst peculiar basalt boulders that were tossed into the area about 15,000 years ago by the rushing waters of the Bonneville Flood. While camped in the area, Native Americans carved petroglyphs into the boulders, some dating as far back as 12,000 years. Thousands of the artistic renderings remain for visitors to see. The area was established as Idaho's only archaeological park in 1989 and is a popular recreation locale for fishing, boating and hiking, with about 80,000 visitors each year.

On Saturday August 16, 2008, BLM Boise District firefighters assisted in constructing trails, benches, and signs throughout the park. The trail and signs are part of an ongoing, collaborative fire mitigation project between three partners; Idaho's Canyon County Parks and Waterways, the Southwest Idaho Resource Conservation and Development Council, and the Boise District BLM. The signs explain the fire ecology of several plants native to southwest Idaho's Snake River Plain and Owyhee Mountains, along with information about invasive plant species and their subsequent effects on wildland fire behavior.



One of the signs installed at Celebration Park on August 16, 2008.

The park is heavily frequented by students; over 15,000 a year visit the area to participate in school field trips. Therefore, the three partners are exploring the integration of wildland fire ecology education into the park's educational curriculum. By presenting information about wildland fire, native and invasive plant species and their role in the fire ecology of the area, the partners hope to educate a large audience about the fundamentals of wildland fire and its effect on southwest Idaho's landscape, wildlife, and human population.

Celebration Park officials are planning to break ground on a new park museum in the near future. Because the area has a significant wildland fire history, the museum will be a Firewise building and will implement Firewise practices of defensible space and fire-resistant landscaping. In order to emphasize the importance of Firewise practices in wildland urban interface areas, the three partners are currently creating signs designed to showcase the building's Firewise attributes to the park's many visitors, which will be placed in various locations around the museum.

On November 8, 2008, the park and sign project were highlighted in a presentation at the National Firewise Conference. Boise District fire mitigation and education specialist Bob Narus and Canyon County Parks and Waterways director Tom Bick presented information about the fire ecology of the area, the project's history and future, and general information about Celebration Park.

Contact: Bob Narus 208-384-3444

### Twin Falls BLM Works to Restore Sagebrush Habitat

The vast canyon lands and remote sagebrush steppe ecosystems of southern Idaho are experiencing a change. These peaceful, steep mountainous regions, often left untouched by people and their loud automobiles, are being overrun by one of their own inhabitants; Utah juniper. Utah juniper trees, which occur naturally throughout southern Idaho on ridges, hillsides and in drainages, have expanded their distribution across the landscape as a result of decades of fire suppression. Consequently, they are competing with sagebrush and rangeland grasses for space and water. In such a dry environment, water is crucial for survival and both plant and animal species must



contend for hydration. The Utah juniper are winning the battle, taking over sagebrush habitat and in turn, affecting animal species reliant on sagebrush for survival. The sage grouse, one of the West's most sagebrush-dependent birds, are rapidly dwindling due to loss of habitat.

Hence the recent ongoing project conducted by the Twin Falls BLM in an area called Walker Hollow, approximately three miles southeast of the quaint western town of Oakley, Idaho. Walker Hollow provides a small picture of the recent juniper invasion quandary throughout the West. Currently, the density of juniper in the 800-acre area is sparse and an understory of grass and shrubs still exist. In order to prevent the juniper from completely removing the grass and shrubs, the Twin Falls BLM has begun to remove the juniper from the area with chainsaws. In the fall of 2008, BLM fire crews used chainsaws to remove young juniper from approximately 600 acres in the Walker Hollow area. In the spring of 2009, the fire crew will resume the project to finish the remaining 200 acres. After completion, the Walker Hollow project will have opened about 800 acres to sagebrush and grasses, providing more habitat for sage grouse.



Firefighters work together to build the signs.

## Montana

### Deep Creek

The Butte Field Office recently completed phase one of a 473-acre project near the old Deep Creek ski area in southwestern Montana. The multi-disciplinary project benefitted both the forestry and fuels programs. The project included removal of bug-infested trees and disposal of the slash piles through burning. As a result, adjacent wildland/urban interface areas are at a reduced risk from fire and the forest is healthier.

Objectives of the project were to: reduce the effects of developing and a widespread, epidemic infestation of bark beetles in the mature lodgepole pine stands, removal of dead and dying lodgepole pine to reduce and remove the populations of infesting insects within the stands, decrease a considerable quantity of hazardous trees and large fuels, and reduce the chance of catastrophic wildfire.



The local homeowners' association identified the need for the project. BLM will continue with subsequent phases in 2009.

Contact: Charles Tuss, fuels program specialist,  
406-533-7634



OnPanaramic view of the project area .



## Interagency Prescribed Burning in Montana

Multi-state and multi-agency crews recently completed a 1000-acre prescribed burn south of Butte. Fire and fuels personnel from the BLM Butte and Missoula Field Offices, Fort Meade fuels crew, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, and smokejumpers from Missoula and Boise cooperated in the project, known as the Camp Creek Prescribed Burn-Unit 5.

Objectives of the project were to reduce Douglas fir encroachment into sagebrush areas, return the timber stand to its historic condition, and burn a mosaic pattern through sagebrush.

Prior to the burn, US Forest Service crews cut and slashed 700 acres of small trees and left them on the ground as fuel to carry the fire. The BLM crews used a skid-steer with a mowing head to construct approximately 50 acres of fire line through the sagebrush areas.

Five units, comprised of about 3,000 acres, are identified for treatment in the Camp Creek area of the Butte Field Office. All of the units will have both mechanical treatment and prescribed burning. The



personnel from federal, state and local agencies all attended.

“This is an exciting day for the Fire Safe Council,” said Andrew, List Director for the Nevada Fire Safe Council. “What this means is that more homeowners are stepping up and taking responsibility to make their home and property fire safe. In the long term, this means less loss of lives and property and wildfire events that are shorter and less costly to suppress.”

Green Ranch will be one of the 25 chapters to benefit from a \$1 million Nevada Fire Safe Council grant secured through the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) for fuels reduction efforts. The funds will be administered through the Nevada Fire Safe Council in coordination with Washoe County, Sierra Fire Protection District, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, City of Reno Fire Department, Carson City Fire Department, East Fork Fire and Paramedic District and the Nevada Division of Forestry.

A portion of SNPLMA funding will be used to reduce hazardous fuels along the Evans Creek area. The project is designed to reduce the hazardous and flammable fuels from the area adjacent to the Green Ranch Fire Safe Chapter to the US Forest Service boundary. This will minimize the chance of a fire beginning on US Forest Service land moving into the community along Evans Creek.

“Even though we live inside the city limits, we still have a huge wildfire threat,” said Paul Richards, Green Ranch Chapter leader. “Just last week we saw homeowners in Reno lose their homes due to a lack of defensible space. We are pleased to be recognized as the 100th chapter for the Nevada Fire Safe Council and receive assistance to protect our community against the

threat of wildfire. We would like to encourage other members of our community to do the same.”

SNPLMA funds are generated from the sale of surplus public lands in the Las Vegas Valley and are available to various public agencies and non-profit organizations for specific purposes. This is the second year that funds are available for wildfire threat reduction efforts on federal, state and private lands.

The Nevada Fire Safe Council, a non-profit organization, was formed in August 2000. The first chapter, located in the Virginia City Highlands, was formed on February 25, 2002.

## Nevada

### Nevada Wildland Urban Interface Fire Summit a Great Success

#### Community Members and Fire Service Agencies Strengthen Cooperation

Members of Nevada’s fire service elite, including fire marshals, firefighters and community organizers, met with citizens of Nevada’s high- and extreme-fire-hazard communities on September 18 and 19 to share strategies of reducing the wildfire threat to urban, rural and wildland Nevada. Representatives from 28 of the 68 communities rated high- to extreme-risk gathered at the Joe Crowley Student Union at the University of Nevada, Reno with a total of 140 people in attendance.

Forest Schafer, North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District, said the Nevada Wildland Urban Interface Fire Summit helped to bring everyday citizens and firefighters together in order to tackle the wildfire threat.





“This is an excellent opportunity for fire service representatives to meet with members of the community,” Schafer said.

Nevadans gathered in a large conference room to hear accomplishment stories from participants who attended the seminar last September. Following a panel discussion, attendees split into smaller groups to gain a focused perspective on different fire hazard reduction tactics. In these groups, attendees learned about fire-safe construction materials, defensible space, differences in fire behavior, community designs, fire suppression capabilities and methods of volunteer recruitment and retention. A fire risk reduction vendor show was also available in the fourth-floor ballroom.



Every seat in Room 324 was filled for Ed Smith’s presentation on defensible space and fire behavior. Concerned attendees and fire service officials lined the back walls to listen to Smith lead one of the five panels on wildfire threat reduction for communities. Smith, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension natural resource specialist, stressed the need to be proactive.

“It’s important for us as a state to establish priorities and reduce this threat,” Smith said to a room packed full of concerned Nevadans. He added, “It will take a community effort.”

The event, in its second year, saw an increase in attendees since last September. Sandy Gregory, fire management specialist of the Nevada BLM, was pleased with the number of attendees.

“To see this many people in this room is phenomenal,” Gregory said.

Smith said that the event was an all-around success in that it served to unite everyday Nevadans with professional fire service organizations.

“What was unique about the event that you don’t see in other states was the interaction between community members and fire service agencies,” Smith said. “It benefits the state a great deal to have that kind of cooperation. We’ve come a long way in developing relations between community members and fire service agencies.”

Agencies that sponsored the Nevada Wildland Urban Interface Fire Summit 2008 included: University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, BLM, Nevada Association of Counties, Nevada Division of Emergency Management, Nevada Division of Forestry, Nevada Fire Safe Council, Sierra Front Wildfire

Cooperators, State Fire Marshal Division, Washoe County, Elko County and USDA Forest Service.

*For more information on the 2008 Nevada Wildland Urban Interface Fire Summit, please contact Ed Smith at 775-782-9960 or Sonya Sistare at 775-856-8403.*

## Wyoming

### Project Increases Safety for Residents, Recreationists and Firefighters

Beginning in January, 2008, fire management staff from the Worland, Lander and Cody Field Offices began work to reduce fuel loading in Sand Draw along the Smilo Canyon Road in BLM Wyoming’s Wind River/Bighorn Basin District.

The ultimate goal of the project is to protect a number of houses at the bottom of Sand Draw. In addition, it will also reduce the threat of destructive wildfire to other structures in Ten Sleep Canyon and nearby Canyon Creek. Sand Draw has seen catastrophic wildfire as recently as 1996 in the upper canyon and evidence exists of other wildland fires in the past.



*Ten Sleep Treatment - Fuels crew member Gabe Harry ignites piles in Sand Draw.*





*Ten Sleep Pre Treatment - Prior to the fuels reduction project, homes in the area would have been more susceptible to catastrophic wildfires.*



*Ten Sleep Post Treatment - Juniper thinning resulted in a more defensible area and a healthier ponderosa pine forest.*

When completed, the project will provide safer egress for the public using the area and safer access and egress for wildland firefighters. Added benefits of the project include the restoration of ponderosa pine tree stands to historic conditions and the restoration of a riparian bottom to protect native cottonwoods, willows and other species.

Work consists primarily of cutting and piling Utah and Rocky Mountain juniper. In some areas, ponderosas are thinned to break up the canopy for protection against crown fire. Wind River/Bighorn Basin engine crews, fuels crew, fire overhead and resource staff participated in cutting and piling juniper throughout 2008. Piles are burned with snow on the ground. Work will continue as needed until completed in the Sand Draw wildland urban interface.

*Contact: Andy Rothleutner, andy\_rothleutner@blm.gov, 307-347-5100.*

### **BLM works with WGFD on Mule Creek-Richeau Hills Habitat Improvement Project**

In 1998, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) established the Mule Deer Working Group to address habitat and mule deer population concerns throughout the state of Wyoming. As part of this effort, the Laramie Region of the WGFD began to determine the reasons for low deer densities or the inability of mule deer herds to recover from population losses which followed the winter of 1992-93.

Areas examined included the Richeau Hills southwest of Wheatland, Wyoming. The predominant winter range shrub on the majority of the Richeau Hills is true mountain mahogany. Most true mountain mahogany plants were large, mature and produced short sparse leaders. Initial nutritional sampling in the Richeau Hills revealed very low levels of crude protein. While additional study and sampling

was needed, it appeared that forage quality may be contributing to, or could be, a primary cause of the low mule deer fawn production and recruitment in some areas of the Laramie Range.

At this point, WGFD began contacting private landowners to identify individuals willing to participate in a series of habitat improvement projects, primarily prescribed fire, aimed at improving the nutritional quality of true mountain mahogany. One of the landowners was the McCulloch's (Clyde and Myrtle) of the JY Ranch in the Richeau Hills southwest of Wheatland, Wyoming. Myrtle is the daughter of Larry Rosentreater, Sr., who homesteaded the area in the early 1900's.

After convincing the McCulloch's of the benefits of prescribed fire to the local mule deer populations and their livestock grazing operation, Ryan Amundson, a habitat biologist with the WGFD in a position co-funded by WGFD and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), needed to get the other landowners within the ranch, specifically the



*2004 JY Spring Burn*



Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the State of Wyoming, onboard with the projects concepts.

Finally, after a series of field trips and inventories to insure no habitat for the then threatened Prebles meadow jumping mouse would be negatively impacted by prescribed fire, the BLM completed the NEPA documentation for the Middle Mountain phase of the Mule Creek-Richeau Hills habitat improvement project.

In November 2001, approximately 640 acres of true mountain mahogany communities were treated with prescribed fire by a private contractor (Firetrax, LLC) hired by the private landowners through the WGFD within the Middle Mountain Pasture of the Mule Creek Allotment. Initial results were very positive and it was decided to move forward with a prescribed fire program for additional areas within the allotment.

Neighboring ranches were also impressed and they contacted Amundson about the possibility of being included in the project. After additional NEPA documentation was completed, in April 2002, 686 acres additional acres were treated on the Mule Creek and Springfield allotments during the Headquarters-Sheep Mountain phase of the project. These successes



*Mahogany sprouting after 2004 JY Spring Burn*

were followed by more NEPA documentation and an additional 1527 acres in March 2004 and 2400 acres in November 2005 on the Mule Creek Allotment and adjacent allotments.

Following these treatments, the Platte County Weed and Pest began an increasingly aggressive campaign against Dalmatian toadflax plants that were now accessible due to the reduction in overly dense true mountain mahogany stands. In April 2006, another 1350 acres of the Mule Creek Allotment were treated, and then the Trailer Wildfire burned another 8400 acres in August 2006 on the western edge of the Mule Creek Allotment that were scheduled for implementation at some point in the future.

In 2007, one last area of the allotment, the Cedar Draw phase was initiated with just over 600 acres being treated in November. This phase will hopefully be wrapped up in the fall of 2008 with an additional 1000 acres being target for treatment. While the prescribed fire portion of the Mule Creek-Richeau Hills habitat improvement project moves into a monitor and maintenance phase, the aggressive battle with invasive plant species including Dalmatian toadflax and cheatgrass brome will continue into the future.

This project has been blended across multiple ownerships; private, Wyoming State lands, and BLM, and funding sources; WGFD, BLM, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, NRCS, Platte County Weed and Pest, and the local conservation district, to achieve common goals.



*2007 JY Burn*

The primary goals of this project were to: 1) increase the quality of mixed mountain shrub communities available to mule deer on crucial winter ranges; 2) increase the quantity and quality of herbaceous forages available to mule deer on crucial winter ranges; 3) set back succession in mixed mountain shrub communities allowing for recruitment of young plants and creating uneven aged stands across the landscape; 4) improve habitat diversity for other wildlife species (i.e., small game, upland game birds, etc.); 5) improve livestock grazing distribution by increasing the quality and quantity of herbaceous forage; and 6) reduce fuels that could contribute to increased wildfire severity 7) reintroduce fire to the vegetative community so that it more closely reflects an ecosystem with a fire return interval of 20 to 50 years.

According to BLM Natural Resource Specialist George Soehn, “None of this work would have been possible without the driven perseverance of Ryan Amundson beating the bushes and smoothing out the rough spots at the local ground roots level.”

