

Snapshots

December 2009

BLM

Colorado

Boulder County Good Neighbor Agreement..... 1

Idaho

Gem County Implements Wildland Fire Hazard Assessment..... 1

Junction Lodge hazardous fuels project..... 2

New Interagency Wildfire Group Hosts Drill 3

Idaho BLM Twin Falls District Protecting Lives and Property in the
Elba Wildland Urban Interface..... 5

Montana

Central Montana - Cottonwood Creek Prescribed Burn - A Collaborative Effort 6

Summer Prescribed Fire a Success in Northcentral Montana..... 7

Tri-county FireSafe Working Group Celebrates 25 years!..... 8

New Mexico

Timber Mountain Prescribed Burn..... 9

Upper Taylor Prescribed Fire and Mesa Fire Hazardous Fuels Project 9



Colorado

Boulder County Good Neighbor Agreement

Federal, state and private cooperation remains the driving force in a six-year-old program to maintain fire safe communities. The Boulder County Good Neighbor program is a partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado State Forest Service and private land owners from the Gold Hill, Sunshine, Rowena and Sugarloaf areas in Boulder. Given the need for programs like these and the importance of fire safety, the Good Neighbor program has since expanded to include other nearby communities as well. During the early 80s, homeowners in these areas were devastated by the Black Tiger Fire, which was Colorado's largest urban interface fire and resulted in several lost homes.

As part of the program, communities have an active role in the wildfire education program, and have been working to complete defensible space on their private property. In addition, there are 2,000 acres of dispersed BLM lands that can potentially be treated simultaneously to create continuous fuels treatments. Treatments such as hand thinning and piling projects,



chipping projects, and Hydro-Axe projects are completed where the terrain is suitable. Other critical planning and treatment activities include establishing evacuation routes. Coordination, public meetings, planning, and field days with individual land owners make this program a success by getting everyone on the same page and in agreement. BLM's contribution of funding for a uniform treatment across all BLM boundaries also helps with the success of these projects.

In 2004, the BLM Categorical Exclusion was completed, and the Good Neighbor agreement was put into play by September 2005. The Good Neighbor agreement is the first of its kind for BLM Colorado. The agreement was agreed upon by the BLM Royal Gorge Field Office and the Board of Governors of the Colorado State University System. The Board of Governors is acting through Colorado State University to benefit the CSFS in order to reduce hazardous fuels and complete watershed restoration activities. This agreement makes it possible for agencies and private land owners to cooperatively work together to implement fuels reduction services on BLM lands in Boulder County when similar fuels reduction services are conducted by CSFS on adjacent state or private lands. This cross boundary management enhances the implementation of the National Fire Plan and is reflected in this agreement.

Idaho

Gem County Implements Wildland Fire Hazard Assessment

The Boise District BLM is continuing to work with the West Central Highlands Resource Conservation and Development Council (WCHRCD) and local fire departments in the counties the WCHRCD serves in order to implement RedZone hazard assessments. This past summer, Gem County Fire District #1 has been using RedZone hazard assessment software to assess homes in their Fire District. The assessments determine a home's vulnerability to damage from a wildland fire. Later this summer, Gem County Fire District #2 is also planning to assess homes in their District. Both fire departments have BLM land in and adjacent to their Fire District and have a long history of working cooperatively with the Boise District BLM on wildland fires.

This project continues work that was started between the Boise BLM, the WCHRCD, and local fire departments in 2007. That summer, homes in the Weiser Rural Fire District were assessed. In 2008, homes in the Payette Rural Fire District were assessed. Both departments are now using the data they have collected in their everyday operations. Although the 2008 fire season saw no major fires in the surveyed Districts and the 2009 fire season has been below average in terms of acres burned and number of fires, the data is ready to be used by the fire departments and cooperators in the event a major wildland fire occurs that threatens homes.

When the Gem County portion of the project is completed, over 4000 additional homes will be assessed. In the Weiser and Payette Rural Fire Districts, approximately 2000 homes were assessed.



The RedZone program produces maps that include topography, location of homes, water sources, and hazards in the area along with photographs of the homes and their wildfire hazard classification of low, moderate, high, or extreme wildfire risk. The classification is based on survey questions that pertain to access, topography, vegetation, home construction, and hazards/concerns such as propane tanks and lack of water sources. The survey questions have been developed with input from local fire chiefs, so they can address local concerns.

“It’s really a benefit to the homeowner as well.” According to Holly Lefevre, Local RedZone Coordinator, “property owners will be issued a report letting them know their wildland fire risk rating and what efforts could reduce the threat of damage to personal property in case of a wildland fire.”

The Boise District BLM and the WCHRCD plan on expanding this project to other local fire districts in the counties that the WCHRCD serves. The Boise BLM, the WCHRCD, and the local fire districts have found the process to be an excellent method of quantifying hazards for wildland fire responders and educating the public on how to reduce the existing hazards.

Contact: Bob Narus 208-384-3444

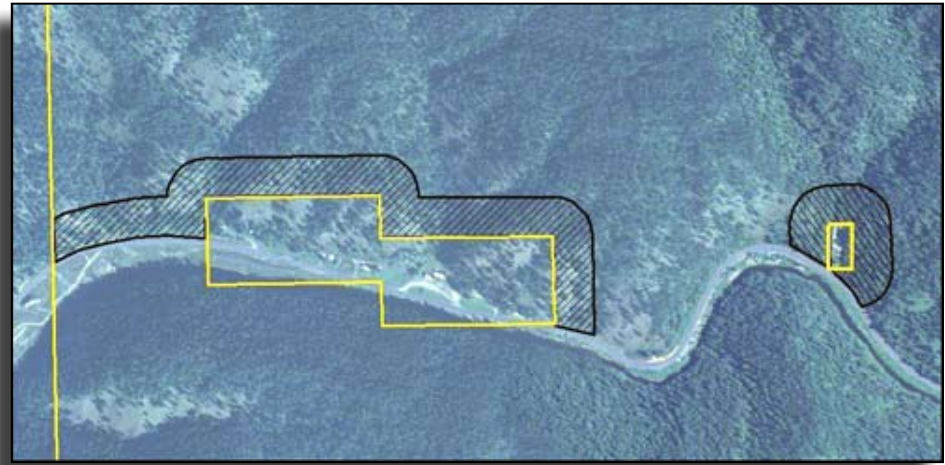
Junction Lodge hazardous fuels project

The Cottonwood Field Office recently completed a wildland-urban interface hazardous fuels reduction project around private in-holdings by Junction Lodge near Elk City, Idaho. The project area, located near the confluence of Crooked River and the South Fork of the Clearwater River in rural Idaho County, is managed by the BLM, with approximately 29 acres of private in-holdings.

Multiple structures, including eight homes and an unoccupied hotel, are situated along the base of the steep slopes of the Clearwater River’s South Fork, where fire once frequented the landscape. Due to fire suppression activities over the past century, fuels have accumulated in the form of Douglas-fir and grand fir regeneration, along with decadent brush and associated litter. The area’s historic fire regime has been altered from low or mixed severity to one of high severity and stand replacement characteristics.

The project, which created a 300 foot wide shaded fuel break adjacent to private property, was designed to lessen the likelihood of a crown fire near private structures and to provide opportunities for controlling an approaching wildfire. Treatment activities included thinning small diameter trees, slashing all brush, and pruning residual trees. Some biomass was utilized as firewood and the slash was hand piled to be burned later this fall.

During the project planning stage, the landowners were contacted to inform them about the proposed project and to initiate homeowner involvement and interest. Initially, there was no response, as most landowners lived outside of the local area. Only one landowner is a full time resident along with a local caretaker residing in another home.



The project area is a 300 foot wide fuel break around the private inholdings at the confluence of Crooked River and the South Fork of the Clearwater River.



The project area is located around the old Junction Lodge hotel, and adjacent homes. The hotel is currently closed and most home are vacation homes.



The first day of project implementation, as the chainsaws fired up, both residents were on scene to express interest in the project. The project took four weeks to complete on 41 acres of BLM land, finishing just one day shy of Independence Day, leaving the landowners – many of who were visiting for the weekend – in peace for the holiday.

Within two weeks of completion of the BLM project, chainsaws were once again fired up to complete similar treatment on the private parcels, creating defensible space around the structures. A local non-profit organization, Framing Our Community, had secured the funding through Idaho County grant money and contacted the landowners to pull this project together. Fuels reduction work has been completed around five primary structures to date.

Contact: Kristen Sanders, Fire Ecologist, Cottonwood Field Office, 208-962-3786



Fuel loadings were heavy in places due to higher stand densities and mortality.



BLM treatments came close to structures in some locations, but homeowners still maintain responsibility to treat their own property and make their structures defensible.

New Interagency Wildfire Group Hosts Drill

During recent years, growth in Idaho Falls has expanded into the foothills but remains outside of any fire district. An increase of homes in this wildland urban interface resulted in concern from local fire districts when responding to fires in these unprotected areas. Issues ranged from the cost of fire suppression to who has jurisdictional authority and who is liable if a person gets injured. These concerns came to fruition in 2007 when the Black Hawk fire (formally known as the Comora Loma Fire) burned 6,224 acres in the foothills region of Idaho Falls.

In February of 2009, a conglomerate of agencies came together to form the Upper Snake Interagency Wildfire Group (USIWG). USIWG hopes to resolve these interagency jurisdictional issues and to discuss fire protection, tactical operations, interagency communications and other fire related issues arising in these unprotected areas.

Before the 2009 fire season arrived, USIWG developed a wildfire exercise in the southeast Ammon area to work on interagency fire operations coordination. A week before the drill, USIWG personnel went door to door in the subdivisions of southeast Ammon and met with over 180 homeowners to discuss the drill and explain to the residents that this was a simulation and they should not be alarmed. The door to door communication provided an excellent opportunity to speak with locals about making their homes safe from potential wildfire.





Multi-agency initial attack.

On June 27th USIWG hosted the wildfire training drill near the Blackhawk Estates and Comora Loma subdivisions. The fire call was initiated from the Bonneville County dispatch center at 10:00 a.m., and from that point was treated like a real wildfire. The parking area of Woodland Hills Elementary School, served as the Incident Command Post where agencies such as High County RC&D, Homeland Security, Bonneville County Sheriff's Office and local media



Firefighters construct a hose lay near the subdivisions.



Firefighters protecting homes in the wildland urban interface.

could meet to discuss logistics and their role in a wildfire incident.

A conglomerate of fire agencies responded to the 'wildfire.' The departments coordinated with the incident command system and worked quickly and efficiently to suppress the fire. The drill acted as a great opportunity for new firefighters to get a feel for the Incident Command System, coordinate with fire agencies other than their unit, work with radio interoperability and master the process of hose lays. A total of 109 people were involved in the drill.

Local homeowners were grateful for the exercise and graciously complied with the drill and its requirements. One homeowner was so appreciative that he called the BLM and said, "... We're really grateful to you for giving us a call and letting us know that, we're extremely grateful for that, we support you 100 percent, thank you." Local media broadcasted an in-depth story of the drill focusing

awareness on the potential threat of wildfire to homes located in the WUI area and the importance of defensible space.

After the drill an after action review occurred and agencies discussed what went well and areas that could use improvement. The biggest concern was the struggle with handheld and vehicle radios and the breakdown in communication that resulted from the incompatibility of multiple agencies' radio systems. Local fire departments were thankful for the drill and said they learned a lot about agency cooperation and general wildland fire suppression. Overall, the drill was successful. It provided training for new firefighters, fire experience for local media, fire education for homeowners, and cooperation among fire suppression agencies. Fire agencies are remedying the radio communications problem, and agencies are more prepared for the next fire to occur in the wildland urban interface.



Idaho BLM Twin Falls District Protecting Lives and Property in the Elba Wildland Urban Interface

There are around 100 people in the rural community of Elba, Idaho. Their homes are the definition of living in the wildland urban interface—backyards and tool sheds bordering expanses of sage and juniper. When the Jones Hollow Fire ripped through the area in 2000, citizens realized just what life in the middle of Idaho’s rangelands could mean as they attempted to protect their homes and property, even evacuate their families from the oncoming flames.

In 2003, the Twin Falls District Bureau of Land Management Fire and Aviation Program conducted their first fuels project in the Elba area, grinding dense, expanded stands of juniper trees into piles that could be consolidated and burned. Since then, the BLM has monitored the project and maintained relationships with homeowners.

As a result of increased homeowner involvement, another project was able to be completed entirely on private land through Mid-Snake Resource Conservation and Development just this last spring. Mastication equipment was again used to grind hazardous fuels surrounding a home in the area. The primary homeowner involved was particularly impressed with the results of the effort and praised the BLM for following through with the project and further improving safety in the area.

While both the original project in 2003 and this most recent effort were beneficial, BLM fuels specialists wanted to see an even more effective effort take place. These projects simply didn’t change fire behavior enough or provide sufficient access for firefighters to protect even more homes. As a result, a project to re-treat and expand the original treatment area is now seeking contracts and work is expected to start in late September.

This current fuels project in the Elba WUI area will treat a total of 325 acres, 100 of which contain heavy juniper trees and 225 where juniper is rapidly encroaching on the sage. The effort will seek to change the fuel model of the area, to reduce the intensity and severity of damage done in the instance of a wildfire.

The project falls at a particularly important time for the Elba community. With real estate signs sprinkled across the desert landscape, more and



Juniper growth in rural Elba, Idaho, makes this area a prime example of the need for the Wildland Urban Interface Program.



The intensity and severity of fires has been reduced following grinding work done on private land in Elba, Idaho, this past spring.



Mastication equipment is used on private land in Elba, Idaho, to help reduce the threat of wildfire for homeowners. Mechanical treatment such as this is safer than prescribed burning in this wildland urban interface area.

more people are moving in. Houses are being built and families are being raised here in this area where hazardous fuels abound.

The BLM Twin Falls District currently sees at least 60 percent human fire causes, making it clear that more people and more houses mean more wildfires. The project will also ultimately seek to give the Rural Fire Departments in the area the best chance of stopping a wildfire before it destroys resources or lives.



Real estate signs such as this mark growth in the wildland urban interface community of Elba, Idaho. A project to further reduce risks to homeowners is scheduled to begin in late September.

The project will seek to leave intact 10 juniper trees per acre, a number significantly down from the approximately 100 trees per acre that exist now. The contractor hired will have the ability to decide specifically how the trees are eliminated. It may entail using masticator equipment or even chainsaws by hand. Mechanical treatment has been specified given that a prescribed fire is just too risky in this wildland urban interface.

“The type of project we’re doing now has been shown to be valuable,” BLM Fuels Specialist Rance Marquez said. “Then from here we’ll always be monitoring and maintaining. It’s a lifelong process.”

The BLM Twin Falls District conducts multiple fuels projects using multiple methods each year. When at the end of the day, the paperwork and chainsaws can be set aside to see a family playing in their remote backyard or Rural Fire Departments more confident in their ability to protect their neighbors, the wildland urban interface program can be touted both effective and appreciated.

Montana

Central Montana - Cottonwood Creek Prescribed Burn - A Collaborative Effort

The Cottonwood Creek project was a cooperative effort between the BLM, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the agencies who helped carry it out—the local US Fish and Wildlife Service, BLM, and rural fire department. The project included 1,787 acres of ponderosa pine forests and savanna and conifer-encroached rangelands in the Musselshell Breaks area of central Montana. Variations in fuel loadings and arrangement resulted in a mosaic of burned



Under-burning ponderosa pine on the Cottonwood Creek prescribed burn.



Results of the under-burn within mature pine stands. Understory juniper and pine seedlings have been reduced to improve fire regime condition classes.





Results of the under-burn in savanna and rangeland areas. Sprawling savanna has been checked.

and unburned areas. Mature ponderosa pine stands were retained while the density of pine seedlings and juniper in the understory and in the open rangelands were reduced. The burn resulted in a reduction of ladder fuels and overall fuel loadings.

Prior to burning, the fire regime condition class of the ponderosa pine stands in the vicinity and within the unit were assessed at condition class 2, bordering condition class 3. As a result of the prescribed burn, condition class 2 areas have been improved to a condition class 1, or maintained/improved to a condition class 2. This area receives some of the heaviest lightning ignitions in the zone, so in the event of a wildfire, the area will be less susceptible to high severity stand-replacement fire behavior.

Spring and fall turkey hunters have been seen flocking to the area.

Contact: Pat Harty, Fuels Specialist 406-538-1983; Jennifer Walker, Fire Ecologist 406-538-1982

Summer Prescribed Fire a Success in Northcentral Montana

In August of 2009, a unique and seemingly unorthodox prescribed fire took place in northcentral Montana. The Guston Coulee prescribed fire was the first of its kind in the Malta Field Office. The 866 acre burn area is located approximately 16 miles southeast of Malta, Montana, in Phillips County.

Planning for this burn began in 2007, when Malta Field Office personnel saw the need to remove undesirable plant species from the project area. When range management specialist BJ Rhodes approached the Central Montana Fire Zone fuels staff about implementing a prescribed fire to remove prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia* spp.), Japanese brome (*Bromus japonicas*) and cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), former fuels management technician, Wendy Hall (BLM Farmington Field Office), embraced the challenge and began planning.

The goals and objectives for the prescribed fire project included removing 80 percent or more of the



Active consumption of prickly pear cactus and brome grasses.



BLM Fuels Management Specialist, Pat Harty, uses a drip torch during firing operations.

undesirable prickly pear cactus and annual brome species as well as destroying the above ground seed source of annual bromes. Burn conditions needed to be hot and dry, preferably during mid to late summer, because research indicated this is the most effective time to treat both prickly pear cactus and annual brome grasses. Furthermore, the resource objective to maintain onsite native grass species and prevent new weed infestations was to be achieved by limiting exposed bare mineral soil to less than 20 percent.

Implementation took place over several days throughout August, when weather and burn conditions were adequate. John Seemann, fuels management specialist and burn boss, as well as Josh Barta, fuels management technician and burn boss trainee, monitored weather conditions daily to ensure the prescribed fire was well within its parameters. This careful monitoring contributed to the overall success of the project.

In addition to the burn bosses, Jennifer Walker, fire ecologist and the burn's fire effects monitor (FEMO),





BLM Range Management Specialist, BJ Rhodes, performing post-burn assessment.

closely monitored the onsite burn conditions and continually evaluated the resource and prescribed fire goals to ensure the stated objectives were being met and that the prescribed burn project would end in success.

One other success in implementing this prescribed fire was the interagency workforce that aided in the implementation of this project. In addition to BLM personnel from the Central Fire Zone, several other federal and tribal agencies assisted in the effort. These agencies include: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Forest Service – Lewis & Clark National Forest, and Fort Belknap Tribal Fire Crew.

Although the proposed project was not completely treated this summer due to inadequate weather and burn windows, the Central Montana Fire Zone staff plans to complete the project in the summer of 2010, weather permitting!

Contact: John Seemann, fuels management specialist, 406-538-1944 or john_seemann@blm.gov, or Steve Knox, lead fuels management specialist, 406-538-1976 or steve_b_knox@blm.gov.

Tri-county FireSafe Working Group Celebrates 25 years!

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Tri-county FireSafe Working Group, established by Sonny Stiger in 1984 after the North Hill Fire burned both private and public land near Helena, Montana. Tri-county members include individual citizens; local, state and federal government agencies; private contractors; fire suppression, DES and planning departments and other interested parties in Broadwater, Jefferson and Lewis & Clark counties.

The Tri-county group works with individuals and communities in fuels mitigation and fire prevention. They have received fuels reduction grant funds from multiple sources, including the National Fire Plan through Montana DNRC, BLM, FEMA Pre-disaster Mitigation Grant, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, Project Impact, Economic Development Grant Program, and Title III. Projects to reduce hazardous fuels have been completed to create defensible space around hundreds of structures and to create fuel breaks around multiple communities.

The group has also conducted numerous educational events and presentations (radio spots, TV talk shows, FireWise workshops and chipper days at fire departments, Defensible Space night at the Brewers baseball games, etc.) and has completed a Community Wildfire Protection Plan covering the three-county area. Recently, the group members have initiated a CWPP update, utilizing Population Protection Plans specific to each fire district.

Additionally, Tri-county efforts have resulted in new subdivision regulations and building codes for structures in the WUI. The group has won several awards for their proactive approach to fuels mitigation and overall fire prevention and education.

Tri-county also served as the “model” for the development of “FireSafe Montana,” the new state-wide council.

TRI-COUNTY FIRESAFE WORKING GROUP

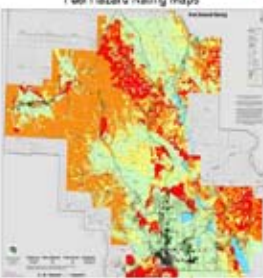
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS



Before



After



Fuel Hazard Rating Maps



TRI-COUNTY FIRE SAFE WORKING GROUP



EVACUATION ROUTE



Red Flag Warning System



Tri-County FireSafe Working Group Partners: Lewis & Clark, Jefferson, Broadwater counties, City of Helena, DES, USFS, BLM, DNRC, Volunteer Fire Departments, Cooperating contractors and private landowners.

Join us in working to keep your home and community safe from wildfires ~ Call 447-8225

Tri-county members celebrated 25 years of success at the annual Fire Mitigation Night at the Helena Brewers baseball game and at several FireWise days at local fire districts.



New Mexico

Timber Mountain Prescribed Burn

The 2350 acre Timber Mountain prescribed burn was a joint project between the BLM Las Cruces District and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. The complete project is approximately 4350 acres. The burn had several objectives including protect communication infrastructure on the top of the mountain, improve habitat for desert bighorn sheep and mule deer, and reintroduce fire to the ecosystem. There are numerous communication towers on top of the mountain, some of which are for emergency services for surrounding counties and communities (nearest county and community - Sierra County, Truth or Consequences, New Mexico). The fuels were fairly dense in that area. In 2005, a thinning project was done to create a buffer around the towers, and the piles were subsequently burned. This buffer allowed crews to work around the towers during ignition. The ignition around the towers was completed by the Sacramento Hotshots. After the towers had a good blackline, the hotshots continued ignitions down the hill to take advantage of the favorable weather conditions.



Fire activity just downhill from the towers. The hotshot crew ignited this section after the blackline around the towers was completed.



Project site before (above) and after (below) the prescribed fire.



Aerial ignition was scheduled to take place next. The project had one day to complete the aerial ignition and was able to complete the burn. Crews worked hard to protect fence lines and cultural sites prior to and the morning of aerial ignitions, which was all part of the success of the burn.

Local resource managers and the fuels staff worked diligently to convince the permittee that the burn would be beneficial and work with him on his rest rotation. In the end, he was very pleased with the project and is ready to do it again and add acres to the next project.

Future plans may be implemented to potentially re-burn the area in the next year or two, due to the fact that the conditions were not quite what was needed to get the desired effects on some of the aerial ignition phase. The NM Dept of Game and Fish is planning to augment the herd of Bighorns this fall with a release of sheep.

Contact: Ryan Whiteaker, Las Cruces District, (575) 525-4342.

Upper Taylor Prescribed Fire and Mesa Fire Hazardous Fuels Project

On June 08, 2009, the Socorro Field Office planned to ignite the Upper Taylor prescribed fire. On June 6, 2009, a dry thunderstorm started the Mesa Fire about five miles northeast of the planned burn at Upper Taylor. This wildfire ignited in a burn block that was scheduled for burning the following year (2010), so the decision was made to manage the burn within the planned burn block since a burn plan was already in place for that area.

The perimeter of the Mesa Fire was burned out using BLM and New Mexico State Forestry resources, including those that were planned for the Upper Taylor prescribed fire. This operation was completed at noon on June 8.

Blacklining operations were initiated on the Upper Taylor prescribed fire by 2 p.m. and 3.5 miles were completed (about 250 acres) by the end of the shift. A call-when-needed helicopter was scheduled to assist with the Upper Taylor prescribed fire, but was instead used to ignite unburned islands with PSD on the Mesa Fire after the perimeter was secured. A weather disturbance came through the area overnight and higher relative humidity and light rain were reported on June 9. Based on the weather forecast and radar,



the decision was made to stop all burning, put the prescribed fire in patrol status, and send most of the resources home since the burn was out of prescription.

One week later on June 15, 2009, the Upper Taylor prescribed fire was able to resume. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided an engine to assist with this phase of the burn. Originally, the ignition plan for the interior of the burn was to be done with PSD, but due to airspace restrictions from White Sands Missile Range, firefighters ignited the fire by hand. Most of the burn was completed within three days. Currently, about 300-400 acres of unburned islands may be cleaned up in the fall or spring as a test to find another viable burn window for the pinyon-juniper (PJ).

The Upper Taylor prescribed fire and the Mesa fire both helped to reduce woody species encroachment into grasslands (especially PJ), improve forage for wildlife, and restore natural role of fire into the ecosystem.

Contact: Lann Moore, fuels specialist, Albuquerque District Office (575) 838-1296.



BLM Engine 1441 (Rio Puerco FO) holding the north line on the Upper Taylor prescribed fire.



Fire behavior on the Upper Taylor prescribed fire during blacklining on June 08, 2009 at 8 p.m.



Anthony Meza (BLM fuels crew - Socorro) burning out the south line on the Mesa fire.



Carlos Madril (wildlife biologist - BLM Socorro) igniting during the Upper Taylor prescribed fire.

