

Snapshots

March 2009

BLM

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Montana

BLM Central Montana Fire/Fuels Program Ready to “Go Big”

The BLM Central Montana Fire/Fuels Zone (CMFZ) has been busy preparing for what potentially could be a “big” spring burn season. According to CMFZ fuels specialist, John Seemann, “For the past couple of years, we’ve been pretty much focused on burning the activity fuels that we generated in the WUI. It will be nice to get out and do some larger landscape burning for a change.”

The transition from relatively small and expensive projects to larger landscape burning marks a significant

milestone for the CMFZ fuels program. “We’ve made great strides over the past eight years towards reducing the threat of catastrophic fire to our high fire danger communities within the zone. Now we can put these areas into maintenance and spend more time out on the landscape protecting and improving our natural resources while hopefully making conditions safer for our firefighters this summer,” stated Jennifer Walker, fire ecologist for the CMFZ.

Of the 18 prescribed fire projects planned for 2009, three exceed 1,500 acres which is considered “relatively large when you’re in the timber,” according to Walker. The goal of these projects is to improve the overall condition of the fire-adapted ecosystems that exist in central Montana. Specific objectives



Various ignition techniques will be utilized including aerial ignition as shown here in a similar 2005 landscape level project designed to improve habitat for bighorn sheep.



Until recently many of the CMFZ’s prescribed fire projects dealt with disposing of slash, much of which was not piled. These burns tend to be expensive, risky, and labor intensive.

of the burns include reducing the threat of catastrophic fire by reducing the amount of surface and understory “ladder” fuels, improving wildlife habitat by stimulating shrub response and increasing forage production, and, in some cases, creating travel corridors to reduce predation of important big game species. Resource managers also hope to improve the health and distribution of the numerous “fire-starved” species that exist in central Montana.

In addition, these landscape-scale burns have generated much interest and assistance from several non-profit organizations and non-federal entities including the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and others.

Stay tuned! An upcoming Snapshots article will let you know how the projects went.



BLM and Tribe Collaborate to Achieve Common Goal

In January 2008, fire and fuels managers from BLM's Central Montana Fire Zone (CMFZ) sat down with fire management personnel from the Fort Belknap Reservation to discuss options for completing hazardous fuels reduction projects on the BLM-Fort Belknap Reservation ownership boundary. The Fort Belknap Reservation is located in northcentral Montana, approximately 100 miles north east of Lewistown, Montana, and encompasses 650,000 acres of plains, grasslands, and timber.

Since 2002, the CMFZ has actively implemented mechanical and prescribed fire fuels reduction projects around the timbered town sites of Landusky and Zortman, which have been designated as Wildland Urban Interface Communities-at-Risk. Since then, BLM fire personnel and contractors have completed hazardous fuels reduction projects on BLM lands within and around Landusky and Zortman. Similarly, the Fort Belknap tribal hand crew has completed numerous fuels reduction projects on tribal lands



Fort Belknap hand crew employee evaluates a tree to be cut down during thinning project.



Work completed by the Fort Belknap Tribal hand crew.

adjacent to these town sites. Seeing the need to collaborate across the boundary lines, the tribe and BLM decided to partner. BLM and tribal specialists worked closely to identify key hazardous areas along the boundary and laid out a 36-acre thinning unit, regardless of ownership, and got to work using the 20-person tribal hand crew from Fort Belknap. Using a cost-share agreement, the tribe paid for labor and supplies for work done on tribal lands, while the BLM paid the hand crew for work done on BLM lands. The project was nearly completed in late September 2008.

Future plans are to continue this effort along the boundary, utilizing the tribal hand crew and further protecting the WUI townsites of Landusky and Zortman.

Contact: Karly Krausz, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist at 406-538-1977 or email: kkrausz@blm.gov.

Community Gets Defensible Space Program Rolling With Community Assistance Funds

For several years, homeowner Chris Croff has seen a need to help his community become more defensible from wildfire but didn't know where to start. Luckily, the BLM was there to help! Chris lives and works in Monarch, Montana, a close-knit community located in the Little Belt Mountains approximately 46 miles southeast of Great Falls, Montana.

In June of 2008, the Monarch Volunteer Fire Department (MVFD), with the help of volunteer firefighter Chris Croff, applied for and received community assistance funding from the BLM's Central Montana Fire Zone. In reading MVFD's application for Community Assistance funding, BLM fire mitigation and education specialist, Karly Krausz, also felt the need to help this community.

Upon notification that they had received funding from BLM, Croff and MVFD sent out mailings and began going door-to-door with brochures and pamphlets, trying to educate homeowners on defensible space and the cost-share agreement that could help them gain defensible space around their homes. The group also completed home evaluations to help homeowners understand the work that needed to be done.

To date, three properties in Monarch have been treated and now have an acceptable amount of defensible space. Several other residents have expressed interest in getting help. Work will continue this spring and summer when the contractor can access the sites.

Contact: Karly Krausz, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist at 406-538-1977 or email: kkrausz@blm.gov.



Utah

Fuels Program Review



Mission Statement

The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for stewardship of our public lands.

The BLM is committed to manage, protect and improve these lands in a manner to serve the needs of the American people.

As we enter a new year and an aggressive schedule of fuels management in northern Utah, the Salt Lake BLM Fuels program wanted to share the successes of 2008 and our plans for 2009.

Looking back on the sheer volume of hazardous fuels reduction projects needed can be a bit overwhelming: encroachment of juniper and cheatgrass on historical healthy rangelands, the wildland-urban interface fire problem, and the complex economic, environmental and societal challenges.

Together with our partners' help in 2008, we were able to achieve many important goals established through the 10-year Collaborative Strategy and Implementation Plan. The primary goal of this plan seeks to actively respond to severe wildfires and their impacts on communities while ensuring sufficient fire-fighting capacity for the future.

Treatment	WUI* acres	Non-WUI* acres
Prescribed Fire	602	1134
Mechanical	5698	626
Stewardship & Biomass Utilization	130	0
Totals	6430	1760

*Wildland Urban Interface

- Prescribed fire is used to mimic periodic fire occurrence which maintains healthy ecosystems.
- Mechanical treatments are utilized in reducing the hazards posed by wildfire by reducing fuel density and structures.
- Stewardship contracts stimulate local economic growth and encourage biomass utilization.
- Contracting opportunities abound-over 80% of project work is out-sourced.

Picture the Problem

Then



Historical Sagebrush steppe ecosystems, like this one in northern Utah, were high in biodiversity and extremely productive. These vegetation communities supported a number of key wildlife species including sage-grouse, mule deer, pygmy rabbits, pronghorn and burrowing owls. They are also an important component of Native American and Western culture.

Working on Solutions

Now



Today, the Western juniper is a species recently documented as "invading" the grassland sagebrush steppe. It has been estimated to increase by a factor of ten in the last 130 years. Management practices such as fire suppression and grazing have been implicated as the primary factors responsible for this expansion. The expansion of junipers has increased the risk of a catastrophic crown fire while decreasing the water supply of ground water supply to springs and streams.



When Wildfire Hits a Fuels Project-

Design and Placement Matter Most



3:43 p.m.
The Devil Fire ignites from a lightning holdover.



4:16 p.m.
Wildfire takes off in untreated fuels.

“The existence of the Chokecherry fuels project reduced the fire’s intensity and movement; firefighters were given the opportunity to attack the fire directly with engines and air tankers when it hit the fuels project,” said Fire Management Officer Jeff Kline of the West Desert District.



4:30 p.m.
Wildfire continues to rage unchecked in thick juniper.



Meanwhile . . .
Embers from the wildfire struggle to stay lit in the fuels project area.

Community Education Community Involvement Community Mitigation



Many thanks to our partners for being such an integral part of the West Desert District’s foundation of support.

More projects are on our website:

http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/fo/salt_lake/fire/fire_and_fuels_management.html

Or projects across Utah:

www.utahfireinfo.gov

Communities are the Crux of our Success

Northern Utah has over 300 Communities-At-Risk from wildfire. The Salt Lake BLM Fuels program is proud of the private and public partnerships in community outreach and education. Many communities adjacent to BLM public lands have formulated community wildfire protection plans identifying hazards, evacuation procedures, and mitigation measures. There are numerous examples of proactive communities developing and maintaining fire plans in conjunction with the State of Utah and the Bureau of Land Management.

The Dove Creek community is just one example of a proactive community developing and maintaining a wildfire protection plan with the State of Utah and BLM. The residents have been active participants doing the work needed on private ground. Federal funds administered by the State of Utah have assisted fuels reduction, reseeding efforts and the purchase of reflective, non-combustible street signs to help responders locate and access homes.

Building Relationships while lessening Risk

Another private and public partnership we’re proud of includes the innovative use of private goats on public lands to reduce fuels build-up. The namesake Lamborn project consists of up to 2500 goats belonging to a local citizen allowed on 350 acres of public land. The goats started munching their way through the heavy fuels beginning last fall.

At the Lakepoint Fuels Reduction Project a local resident has offered to harvest the abundant annual rye grasses north of the railroad, thereby reducing the threat of wildfire to adjacent homes, while providing feed for local cattle and horses.

