

# Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



August 27

## California

### Butte County Community Collaboration Pays Off

More than \$112-million worth of property has been protected from wildfire after fuel breaks, defensible space and community education activities in northern California were completed between 2001 to 2004. BLM grants totalling approximately \$282,270 were used on pre-fire activities in the local area in collaboration with fire safe councils and communities at risk to achieve success.

Level of the success from completing defensible space work was dramatically illustrated on August

11 this year when the Oregon Fire near Lake Oroville in Butte County, California scorched over 1,800 acres. While this fire burning in foothill chaparral, oak and pine did burn 17 structures, more than 200 homes were saved due to the pre-fire defensible space work done in the community.

The experience of two families helps tell the story.



*Part of the 1,800 acres burned in the Oregon Fire on August 11 this year. Nearly 200 homes were saved from this fire due to community pre-fire work.*

Due to work that had been done to clear fuels and create defensible space, the Bangor, California Fire Department were able to defend the home, and thanked the owners for the work they had done. Another home being built had nearly been surrounded by the fire. Fire Information Officer John Simon was certain the structure would be lost, but a defensible space area along with suppression efforts, kept the house standing. Carole Robirds, a neighbor living half of a mile from the Walkers, was prepared with defensible space, new roads signs, and double-pane windows. Her property was used as a safety zone for fire crews.

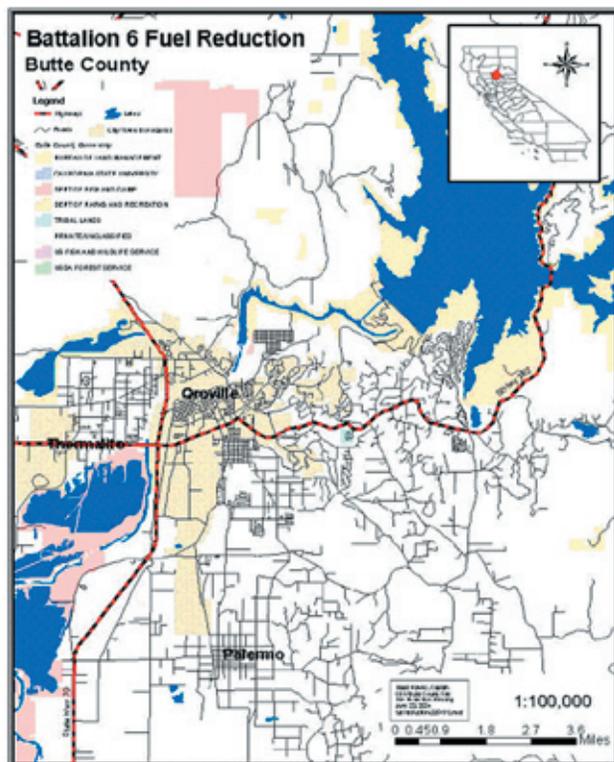
The Butte County Fire Safe Council, Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council, and California Department of Forestry and Fire along with local partners have done significant work to educate and assist this rural community in preparing for wildfires.

Historically there have been other large fires in the Yankee Hill, Concow, and Paradise areas. The Concow Fire in 2000, Raulson Fire in 1994 and Dry Fire in 1992 burned total of

In October 2003, the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council provided Shanti and Mayama Tommaro with a home assessment, videos and pre-fire planning guidelines to help them protect their home. In response, they widened a road, cleared vegetation and completed defensible space around the home. They included a posted sign outside the driveway designating their swimming pool as a water source to assist in fire suppression efforts. When the fire threatened on August 11 this year, firefighters were able to save the home due to the defensible work that had been done.

The Walker family owns a home nearby, and the fire approached several sides of their property.

Butte Unit  
Fire Management Plan  
2004



*Butte County Fire Management Plan map.*

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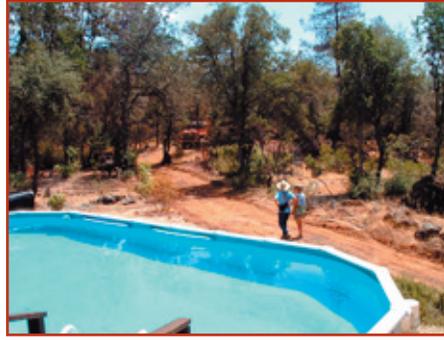
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*Local residents Shanti and Mayama Tommaro completed defensible home protection work that paid off during the Oregon fire.*



*Making the road wider and using the home swimming pool as a water source for firefighters helped protect the home.*



*Mr. and Mrs. Walker in front of their home that was nearly surrounded by fire. Because they had completed defensible space work, the home was saved by firefighters.*

3,645 acres. Increasing population, heavy fuel loading and fire history have created a high potential for large catastrophic wildfires. Through collaborative and strategic planning efforts these communities are now implementing pre-fire activities that are continuing to demonstrate success in decreasing losses from wildfires.

## A History of Successful Collaboration

The Bureau of Land Management through their Community Assistance Program granted Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council \$16,740 for their 2001 Yankee Hill and Concow Community Fire Safe Education Program, which includes a Defensible Space Demonstration Site and the "Dooryard" Education Program. In 2001, this project was expected to protect at least 32 homes and decrease predicted suppression costs by \$5.6 million. The area has since grown and home values increased. It is currently estimated that 200 homes valued at approximately \$39 million were protected from the Oregon Fire in the Yankee Hill-Cherokee and Concow areas.

In 2003, BLM provided \$49,510 to the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council for the Jordan Hill Shaded Fuel Break

and Outreach Program, which would continue the "Dooryard" visits in the Concow area. This 55-acre fuel break, in combination with two other project phases, was designed to protect approximately 1,154 homes in the Concow Basin and Paradise Ridge. The Redding Field Office completed a 40-acre portion of the break on BLM land in August 2003.



The Paradise Fire Safe Council received a 2003 BLM grant for \$76,600 for the West Branch Fuel Break, which created a three to four mile long 56 acre fuel break along the ridge of Dean Road south to the Feather River Hospital.



*Before and after photos of the Jordan Hill Shaded fuel break. The work was done through a BLM community assistance grant to the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council.*

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*This home under construction was saved from the August 11 fire due to the defensible space work that had been done.*

contained within one quarter of an acre. Approximately 75 homes, valued at \$18 million were protected due to the presence of the break.

With implementation of the National Fire Plan and California Fire Plan, the California Department of Forestry has developed Fire Management Plans to address pre-fire and suppression strategies for different units across the state. With continuing guidance for collaborative community wildfire protection planning, these plans are being adapted and adopted by fire safe councils to meet their strategic planning needs. BLM is also in the process of updating fire management plans to better incorporate collaborative community planning.

Results of the cooperative approach to establish fire safe homes and property is paying off in a big way!

#### Contacts:

Valerie Glass, Yankee Hill FSC, (530) 534-8244

Brenda Rightmyer, Butte County FSC, (530) 877-0984

Erica Bisch, California FSC, (626) 335-7426

Miriam Morrill, BLM California, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist, (530) 978-4436

## Listed Species Habitat Improvement through Prescribed Fire

In 2004, The Bureau of Land Management's Bishop, California Field Office, Inyo National Forest, and California Department of Fish and Game, implemented two prescribed fires to help protect the Fish Slough watershed from potential catastrophic wildfires and to assist in habitat enhancement for two federally listed species, the Owens pupfish (*Cyprinodon radiosus*) and Fish Slough milk-vetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *piscinensis*).

In close proximity to Bishop, Fish Slough is a fresh water marsh of substantial size which annually provides a large quantity of dead aquatic vegetation that is highly susceptible to wildfire. Bishop is listed as a community at risk and is a priority area in fire mitigation planning.

Fish Slough is also one of a few locations where native populations of



*BLM staff lighting off vegetation with drip torch.*

the federally endangered Owens pupfish still occur. The Owens pupfish, a tiny desert fish uniquely adapted to conditions in the Owens Valley, is in danger of extinction from habitat alteration and the competition and predation of non-native fish.

The Fish Slough milk-vetch, listed as a federally threatened plant found only in this location, is highly restricted in its distribution to the alkali flat habitat bordering the fresh water marsh. This species is susceptible to excessively wet soils which negatively affect reproduction. The human altered water table in Fish Slough is a



*Fish Slough before the prescribed fire with dead and overgrown vegetation.*

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direct contributor to degraded habitat conditions for this very rare species.

In February this year, agencies cooperated to burn a half acre portion of the project occurring in the 36,000 acre BLM Fish Slough Area of Critical Environmental Concern. In March an additional 23 acres of neighboring Department of Fish and Game land was burned. These fires were implemented with minimal impact techniques and helped remove a build-up of cattails and downed woody material that were obstructing hydrologic enhancements planned for the pupfish and the milk-vetch plant. With much of the vegetation removed, more natural hydrologic functions could be restored which should result in reduced populations of non-native predatory species and improve habitat conditions for the pupfish and milk-vetch.

The natural occurrence or prescription of fire, in a carefully managed scenario, can be used to cleanse and restore the health of an ecosystem. The Fish Slough prescribed fire project carefully balances the protection and enhancement of community, watershed, and wildlife resources.

Contact: Terry Russi, Wildlife Biologist, 760-872-5035 or Fire Management Officer, Matt Kingsely at 760-872-5056

## Bakersfield Fire Planning and Community Collaboration

BLM's Bakersfield Field Office recently drafted a wildland fire management plan incorporating a successful collaborative process for protecting communities in the wildland-urban interface. An energetic interdisciplinary staff involved in the initial fire planning efforts made an easy transition to incorporate

community wildfire protection strategies into the planning.

National guidance on collaborative planning offers a general process, but lacks a personal touch that is needed to connect with the local community. Success in community collaboration revolves around individual attitudes and charismatic personalities requiring early and continuous communications between BLM staff, partner agencies, and affected and interested publics.

The Kern River Valley Fire Safe Plan is the basis for many wildland urban interface projects in the Lake Isabella Area. This plan, funded through National Fire Plan grants, outlines and prioritizes community projects which were developed by the community working in coordination with a contractor and partner agencies. Community projects are incorporated, when feasible, into a BLM fuels plan which may be modified to meet BLM needs and guidelines. Thus far BLM has successfully implemented



Poster created to promote community involvement in fire planning. Artwork by Miriam Morrill.

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several community projects in conjunction with the Kern County Fire Department.

The public is also involved at the project level. Involvement begins early in the planning stages, with Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist Debbie Santiago presenting proposed projects to the Fire Safe Council for review and comment. Early in BLM's National Environmental Policy Act compliance process, information about the proposed project is mailed to landowners and other affected publics in the area. An accompanying letter states the proposed action, the need, and gives the public contact information in case they have questions.

This process seems to be successful. The community is involved early the planning process and during project development and implementation. The Bakersfield BLM office actively participates in community planning strategies and provides technical and other assistance where possible in community fire protection efforts.

Contact: Deborah Santiago, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist, Bakersfield Field Office (661) 391-6097

## Community Chipping Efforts in the Eastern Sierras-More Chips Than a Keebler® Cookie Commercial

Talk about loads of chips. Not the kind the Keebler® elves use for baking cookies, but woodchips. The collaborative efforts of the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service have cooked up a community chipping program that produces loads of chips and one sweet reputation.

The chipping program is focused at reducing hazardous fuels around at-risk communities adjacent to public lands managed by the Bishop Field Office and the Inyo National Forest. These well-rounded efforts put the preparation work in the hands of the community, while the chipping work is shouldered by the agencies.

In May 2004, the Wheeler Crest Fire Protection District, Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council, BLM, and forest service prepared for Wildfire Awareness Week by hosting a neighborhood fuel reduction and chipping event for the Swall Meadows area. Community volunteers went door-to-door, distributing information about defensible space and the upcoming program activities. Prior to the weekend chipping event, homeowners cut and piled woody materials less than ten



Crews work to reduce cleared fuel into chips.

inches in diameter within five feet of the street. BLM and the forest service then traveled with two chipper machines down each street of the neighborhood, shredding the piles and putting it in homeowner's yards as mulch.

In early-June, Inyo National Forest and June Lake Fire Department hosted a community defensible space and chipping event. BLM and Inyo National Forest provided a chipper machine at the June Mountain Ski Area parking lot where residents could bring woody material to be chipped. Residents also dropped off other vegetation at the parking lot where a truck was available to haul the material to the dump.

During the week of June 26, residents in the Old Mammoth area participated in their first community chipping event. Many community volunteers went door-to-door to educate and involve their neighbors in the upcoming defensible space activities. It was a hugely successful event that included local residents, Mammoth Lakes Fire Department, Mammoth Lakes Fire Safe Council, three engine crews, a fire use crew, and BLM and forest service employees. Over 90 piles of branches and dead woody



Interagency chipping program for communities in the Eastern Sierras.

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material were chipped over a five-day period. At the end, homeowners reclaimed the chipped material for use around their homes and other materials were donated to the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area for use in erosion control.

The key ingredients to these successful community events, as spoken by Jeff Power, Mammoth Ranger District's Fire Management Officer "have been the strong interagency cooperation and the enthusiasm and commitment of community members". There are more things cooking in the eastern Sierra communities than just cookies. There's teamwork, motivation, agency support and those ever popular community barbeques!

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