

NEWS Release BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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The Oxbow Fire 45 Years Later Looking to the Future

Roseburg, Oregon. The Bureau of Land Management and Roseburg Resources Co. would like to recognize the 45th Anniversary of the Oxbow fire, with the outlook of timber harvest, restoration and job creation on the horizon, for lands previously devastated by intense wildfire.

Catastrophic Event

On August 20, 1966, road equipment sparked a fire on Oxbow Ridge, 20 miles southwest of Eugene, Oregon. The resulting blaze, known as the Oxbow fire grew to consume over 42,000 acres of forest land, across parts of the Coos Bay, Roseburg, and Eugene BLM Districts, and lands owned by International Paper (now Roseburg Resources Co.)

At the height of the fire, 1200 men, 30 dozers, 40 engines and seven helicopters fought the blaze. One man lost his life. The Oxbow fire was the first wildfire ever brought under control without a major weather change event, lending credit to the tenacity of the fire fighters to control the blaze. The fire stretched for over 15 miles in length and six to seven miles wide.

Vision for the Future

Out of the ashes of the Oxbow fire, BLM cooperators and the precursor to Roseburg Resources Co. developed a cooperative plan to provide protection in the fire area. This plan included fire breaks, extra patrols, special logging regulations and public access restrictions. Each landowner developed salvage and logging operation plans with intensive tree planting. Within five years, an area of mass destruction was transformed to a new, growing forest.

“It was all hands on deck,” said Phil Adams with Roseburg Resources Co. “The terrain in that area presented challenges and there was just such great cooperation between the BLM and International Paper and later Roseburg Resources Co.” to see a healthy forest re-established.

The cooperators have worked extensively to protect the area during its regrowth. “One of the things that is often overlooked is the Coho Salmon and the stream restoration that is taking place as part of the cooperative management,” Adams said.

Approximately 160 logs and 610 boulders have been placed or are planned for placement in North Sisters Creek, a stream located in the upper Smith River Watershed. Many other stream restoration projects and culvert improvements are planned to help restore fish habitat to the burn area.

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Jobs for Tomorrow

Today the Oxbow burn area is a fast growing young forest of Douglas-fir. Through intensive cooperation, the partners are bringing the forest to a stage where merchantable timber will be available.

“On the much smaller land base comparatively to the BLM,” Adams said, “Roseburg Resources expects to get about 600 MMBF (Million Board Feet) over the next 10 to 15 years,” within the Oxbow area.

The BLM cooperators are moving forward with planning efforts for thinning projects to assist in the rate of forest growth and other management objectives that will begin taking place over the next 10 to 15 years.

“It’s amazing to see an area heavily impacted by a high intensity wildfire become a thick forest within 45 years,” said Max Yager, Swiftwater Field Manager with the Roseburg District. “We are looking forward to working with adjacent landowners into the future to provide jobs and protect habitat.”


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The BLM manages more land – 245 million surface acres – than any other Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM’s multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.



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