

Snapshots

June 1, 2007

BLM

Table of Contents

Arizona

BLM Strengthens Partnerships To Make The United States-Mexico
Border Safer 1

Montana

Fuels Treatments Continue in the Wildland Urban Interface of the Little Rockies 2

Forest Health and Vegetation Management for the Judith and Moccasin Mountains 3

Colorado

Gore Lakes: A Project about Partnerships 3

Local Video Produced on Developing CWPPs..... 4

Southwest Conservation Corps Projects Help Protect Infrastructure 5

South Dakota

Grizzly Gulch Pile Burning Complete 6

Eastern States

Prescribed Burn at Lathrop Bayou 7

New Mexico

WUI Project Achieving Ecological Improvements, Enhanced Public
Relations, and Interagency Cooperation 8

BLM & NM Fish and Game Work Together to Reduce
Hazardous Fuels and Improve Wildlife Habitat 9



Jennifer Smith, editor
Sheri Ascherfeld, layout and design

Arizona

BLM Strengthens Partnerships To Make The United States-Mexico Border Safer

Illegal immigration activities are increasing along the United States-Mexico Border including the Colorado River area managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Yuma Field Office, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) withdrawn lands, and Cocopah Tribe lands. These illegal immigration activities also bring an increase in wildfires, crimes and violence associated with the drug and immigrant smuggling. Assaults, burglaries, and other serious criminal activity regularly occur within these areas of dense vegetation. The BLM, U.S. Border Patrol (BP), the Yuma County Sheriff Office (YCSO), Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), and the Cocopah Indian Tribe, are increasingly concerned about the potential for violence and wildfires affecting officers, employees, visitors, hunters, and undocumented immigrants. On average, the limitrophe area receives between 15 to 18 fires each year, with the primary cause being undocumented immigrants.

The Colorado River corridor supports dense stands of vegetation, including non-native salt cedar as well as important cottonwood, willow and other shrubs. An area known as the "limitrophe" (roughly between the northern and southern international boundaries along the Colorado River) is a wildlife migratory corridor and supports important neotropical migratory bird populations, including the Southwest Willow Flycatcher and Yuma Clapper Rail. While this area supports diverse wildlife and vegetation, it also has become a hotbed for drug smuggling, and illegal immigration.



Illegal crossings are frequent along this 23 mile stretch of the international boundary. Sandbag bridge across Colorado River with abandoned vehicles.

The Border Patrol has initiated upgrades to infrastructure along the border to prevent smuggling and increase safety. The upgrades include installing lighting, constructing barriers, fences and roads, and clearing brush and salt cedar. In the past several years, the Cocopah Indian Tribe has removed salt cedar to improve security and safety on tribal lands. In 2005, the BLM Yuma Field Office, in close coordination with Border Patrol, created several fire breaks totaling approximately 200 acres, to assist with security and fire protection. The BLM was reimbursed by the Border Patrol for the BLM costs.

In the past, removing the exotic salt cedar was a controversial issue, in part, because of limited information sharing between the many diverse agencies. There were also problems associated with multi-jurisdictional land ownership, boundary



Brush hogs at work



Project Security was coordinated through Yuma County Sheriff's Office and Border Patrol.





Project area before (above) and after (below) treatment



issues, and funding availability. The Borderland Management Task Force (BMTF) was created to streamline information sharing, tackle important issues, and coordinate activities along the international border near Yuma, Arizona. The task force includes: Bureau of Land Management, Border Patrol, Bureau of Reclamation, Arizona Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Yuma County Sheriff's Office, Cocopah and Quechan Indian Nations, and the International Boundary Water Commission. Treating the salt cedar for security, and wildfire prevention has become the major focus of the Yuma Borderland Management Task Force Work Group.

As a result of the work group efforts, a project to remove salt cedar was completed on 214 acres of the limotrophe area in fiscal year 2007. This project was an interagency effort utilizing Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife equipment, BLM funding, personnel and project oversight, Border Patrol and Yuma County Sheriff's Office providing security, and on-the-ground support by the Arizona Game and Fish Department. The Cocopah Indian Tribe and Quechan Tribe participated as project monitors. BLM has requested reimbursement from

the Border Patrol for this work which falls under the hazardous fuels reduction program.

BLM will continue to take a leadership role in ensuring multi-agency coordination on this significant issue through the Yuma Borderland Management Task Force, and the Salt Cedar Work Group. The BLM Yuma Field Office is responsible for ensuring that the NEPA and land use planning process is fully considered, while working with other agencies, which are equally committed to improving human safety.

Contact: James Stewart, Fire Mitigation/Education Specialist, 928-317-3260

Montana

Fuels Treatments Continue in the Wildland Urban Interface of the Little Rockies

It has been five years since fuels treatments were begun around the towns of Zortman and Landusky. Thinning work has been accomplished through contracting and the BLM fire crew. Contracts have ranged from HUB-zone preference which fostered development of new hand crew contractors in the local area; to end-result stewardship contracting where commercial volume offset the cost of additional thinning and biomass utilization for mine reclamation.

As thinning units have progressed to areas farther from the two towns, slash has been lopped and scattered rather than piled. Hundreds of piles have been burned these past five years, and now, broadcast slash burning has begun.



Example of pre-burn slash load in the Landusky Plateau Prescribed Burn Unit.





Due to the heavy fuel load in the thinning unit, ignitions require finesse.

This late winter and early spring, burning has begun in an area west of Landusky. Fire hazard must be reduced while minimizing tree mortality, so the key burn objectives target reduction of fine fuels (such as slash needles). In several years the units can be burned again to decrease heavy-sized fuel loads and further promote herbaceous and deciduous shrub growth. With frozen ground and adjacent snow cover, tree mortality has been minimal and slash reduction objectives have been met.

Contacts: Jennifer Walker, 406-538-1982
Pat Harty, 406-538-1983.



Post-burn slash reduction at the first photo site. Fine fuels have been reduced while tree mortality has been minimized.

Forest Health and Vegetation Management for the Judith and Moccasin Mountains

The Lewistown Field Office is working with interested parties to better manage BLM forest resources in the Judith and Moccasin Mountains. The group effort may provide opportunities to accomplish shared objectives on public lands and to coordinate treatments across ownerships. Working together may also foster monitoring and lead to better future projects.

This collaboration process began with BLM funding from the National Fire Plan that provided for cost-share agreements with local landowners for hazardous fuels reduction around homesites on private lands. Funding and agreements were implemented by the Fergus Conservation District (FCD).

The collaborative process continued with work on the Environmental Assessment (EA) for Forest Health and Vegetation Management in the Judith and Moccasin Mountains. The EA was a cooperative plan prepared by the BLM and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The Environmental Assessment was approved in July of 2006 and provides guidance for implementing forestry and fuels treatments.

The BLM now wishes to continue collaborative efforts prior to and during project implementation. As a means to enhance and maintain this group effort, BLM is hosting meetings to discuss how interested parties can be involved.

The Lewistown BLM is encouraging those interested to join scheduled discussions and help implement projects. More information can be found on the Lewistown Field Office website: http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewisstown_field_office/judity_moccasin.html.

Contacts: Jennifer Walker, 406-538-1982
Bruce Reid, 406-538-1960
Brad Eckert, 406-538-1927

Colorado

Gore Lakes: A Project about Partnerships

The BLM Kremmling Field Office and the US Forest Service Yampa Ranger District recently coordinated on a hazardous fuel reduction project to protect the Gore Lakes subdivision, located just below Gore Pass, about twelve miles west of Kremmling, Colorado.





Before (above) and after (right) photographs of the Gore Lakes project.

The agencies constructed a fuel break to protect this wildland-urban interface (WUI) subdivision and increase forest health. The BLM treated the west side of the project area and the USFS treated the east side. This was the second combined BLM and USFS project completed in northwest Colorado using the Categorical Exclusion authority provided under the Healthy Forests Initiative.

Community meetings were held at Latigo Ranch to inform homeowners of the potential for catastrophic fire and the beginnings of the mountain pine beetle epidemic in Grand County. Homeowners supported the project and were eager to learn their role in the mitigation process.

The fuel break is designed to drop a crown fire to the ground. The designated area for the fuel break and thinning was in dense lodgepole pine and mixed conifer forest, as shown in the photo. The fuel break construction removed all standing material up to eight inches in diameter and all dead and down material up to 10 inches in diameter. The material was then bucked and piled; all aspen were left uncut for regeneration. The standing trees were limbed to six feet above ground level to decrease the possibility of fire spreading from the ground into the tree crowns. The treatment also increased the spacing between standing trees and removed the heavy fuel loading on the ground.

BLM Fuels Planner, Bill Wyatt, contracted with C & R Forestry out of Idaho to complete the project which covered 127 acres and resulted in a 600 foot wide by 1-1/2 mile long fuel break. The work was matched by the USFS for WUI protection of the Gore Lakes Subdivision along the western segment of the fuel break. Approximately 4,000 piles were created from the



thinning and will be burned over several years. The cost of constructing the fuel break ranged from \$823 per acre to well over \$1,000 per acre.

In addition to protecting lives and homes, the treatment will also benefit wildlife. The newly opened area will improve habitat for deer and elk by promoting forb and grass growth and some slash piles will be left as shelter for smaller animals. The work completed will also serve as a model for area homeowners. The US Forest Service recently concluded their segment of the project. The Gore Lakes hazardous fuel reduction project is another example of interagency cooperation and public partnership.

Contact: Lynn Barclay, Mitigation and Education Specialist, 970-826-5096

Local Video Produced on Developing CWPPs

Over the last six months, a local interagency group in west-central Colorado has been working on a video for fire protection districts, county emergency managers, homeowner associations, and other stakeholders that explains how to complete a community wildfire protection plan (CWPP). The video is a short overview





The members of the Horsefly HOA take a break between meeting shoots.

of the process for completing a CWPP, from making the initial contact with the local sheriff's office, fire department or Federal or State Agency to completing the draft CWPP for final review. The video shows a homeowner's association in the process of developing its plan, and includes interviews with many of the participants. This video is the product of effective collaboration and communication across multiple jurisdictions and organizations, which is essential in reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfires to our communities.

Ouray County initiated the project to help entities understand who needs to be involved and what needs to be done to complete a CWPP. The filming took place over a four-day period in the fall of 2006, and the final version of the video was completed in May 2007. Members of the Horsefly Fire Protection Homeowner's Association were generous enough to help produce the video. In addition, personnel from Ouray County, Montrose Fire Protection District, Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), Montrose Interagency Fire, BLM Uncompahgre Field Office, and Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forest (GMUG) participated in the filming. Financial support to produce the video came from a BLM community assistance grant



Jodi Hohenstein, a Colorado State Forest Service Forester, puts on a microphone before her presentation to the Horsefly HOA.

and USFS community mitigation funds.

The video will also be used to help entities interested in developing a CWPP, such as fire departments and homeowner associations, in the six counties within the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Area and the West Colorado Homeland Security Region; Ouray, San Miguel, Montrose, Delta, Gunnison and Hinsdale Counties. Several CWPP efforts are currently under way within this six-county area, and numerous other groups have expressed an interest in starting a plan for their area. The video presents a stream-lined process to help stakeholders generate the information they will need to identify and prioritize values, complete a risk assessment, and develop actions to mitigate the threat to life, property, and other values.

Contact: Maggie McCaffrey, Mitigation/Education Specialist, Montrose Interagency Fire, 970.240.5396.

Southwest Conservation Corps Projects Help Protect Infrastructure

Though considered small projects by many standards, the Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) recently completed a couple projects that have left two southwest Colorado communities breathing a little easier.

In the small town of Mancos that sits about 30 miles west of Durango, the SCC recently removed dead trees from the 6-acre Mancos Water Treatment Facility where a beetle infestation had killed 40-50 percent of the pinyon trees in the area. The town had removed some of the dead trees but had been unable to complete the project. Using community assistance funds from the BLM, the SCC partnered with Mancos to finish the project, making the facility safe from the threat of



An SCC member piles brush at the project site.





View of the water treatment plant from above Mancos.

wildfire. The town provided trucks to haul the cut trees and slash to the town dump site where they will be burned during a period of low fire danger.

Dalla Mountain Park, a newly acquired City of Durango park, also benefited from the SCC's mitigation efforts. The park, located on the edge of Durango, adjoins both private and BLM lands and contains several hiking trails and a small climbing area. SCC members worked along the main trail, thinning out small ponderosa pine, juniper and non-native trees.

“One of our main goals is to empower our corps members to positively impact their lives, their communities, and the environment,” said SCC Executive Director Harry Bruell. “These community assistance projects accomplish all three goals.”

Founded as a non-profit organization in 1998, SCC provides young men and women with structured, safe, and challenging work and educational opportunities through employment projects that promote personal growth, social skill development, and a natural resource stewardship ethic. Their Wildfire Prevention Program provides comprehensive fire mitigation and education services while training 18-25 year olds for careers in the wildland fire management industry.

Contact: Harry Bruell, 970-259-8607 or Pam Wilson, 970-385-1230

South Dakota

Grizzly Gulch Pile Burning Complete

The South Dakota Field Office completed burning the last remaining hand piles from the Grizzly Gulch Post Fire Fuels Reduction Project this past winter. This 937-acre project resulted from the Grizzly Gulch Fire that swept past the communities of Lead and Deadwood, South Dakota in July 2002. The BLM administers land that burned around the communities of Lead and Deadwood resulting in a total loss of ponderosa pine forest. To reduce the fuels created by this wildfire, the South Dakota Field Office administered a contract to clean up the dead timber in and around the communities of Lead and Deadwood on BLM lands that were within a designated wildland urban interface zone. This contract included hand cutting and hand piling all standing dead and downed trees nine inches in diameter and less. The contractors out of Oregon completed the project in the fall of 2004. Thousands of piles were visible from the communities of Lead and Deadwood.

The South Dakota Field Office Fuels Module started burning the hand piles in the winter of 2005. The pile burning continued for three winters until the last pile was burned in February of 2007. Over 14,000 hand piles were burned. This project was completed with assistance from interagency partners. Partners providing assistance to the BLM in completing this pile burning project included the South Dakota Division of Wildfire Blackhat Handcrew, City of Lead Firewise Crew, and the Black Hills National Forest.

The pile burning project was completed in three years when many people in the area thought it would take



Fuels module crew member ignited piles .



years to complete. The communities of Lead and Deadwood are very happy with the results and with the project being complete. This project is a great example of what can be accomplished when interagency partners work together to accomplish a project.



Before (above) and after (below) photos of the Grizzly Gulch project site.



Eastern States

Prescribed Burn at Lathrop Bayou

The Eastern States, Jackson Field Office, in partnership with St. Joe Company, Tyndall Air Force Base and U.S. Forest Service conducted a prescribed burn on over 500 acres at the Lathrop Bayou Habitat Management Area located east of Panama City, Florida. This was the second prescribed burn at Lathrop Bayou in the last three years. Reestablishing a more natural fire regime at Lathrop Bayou is the cornerstone of the collaborative management plan written by the federal, state and private partners in 2003. Frequent fires benefit endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and several species of rare plants endemic to the once far ranging longleaf pine forests of the southeastern United States. Lathrop Bayou and St. Joe's Wetappo Creek represent the most intact longleaf pine stands remaining in this region of Florida's Panhandle.

Prescribed burns at Lathrop Bayou had been cancelled in 2005 due to too overly wet conditions and again in 2006 due to drought. In 2007, while most of Florida was dealing with droughty conditions, Lathrop's high water table provided a small window of opportunity in early March. The burn team was pulled together from



The prescribed burn at Lathrop Bayou in March 2007.





Partners for the burn included the BLM, St. Joe Timberlands, Tyndall Air Force Base, and the Forest Service.

across the region. The Jackson Hotshot Crew and St. Joe Timberlands provided the core team, with Tyndall Air Force Base generously providing the helicopter staging area, boat support and aerial ignition with a BLM contracted helicopter. The experienced helicopter manager was a Forest Service employee. This highly skilled team was needed to complete what turned into a very challenging burn. The burn was ignited aurally

from the helicopter in as tight a pattern as possible to keep the fire from gaining momentum. For additional protection, the Hotshot and St. Joe ground crews backburned around the red-cockaded woodpecker trees ahead of the aerial ignition. The area around each of the almost 30 woodpecker trees had been previously hand-raked to clear a 20-foot buffer around each tree.

Although this was a hot “growing season” burn, it met all of its objectives: to reduce the shrubby vegetation, create conditions favorable to longleaf regeneration and to continue to stress encroaching slash pine. Each of the woodpecker cavity trees was checked early the following day and with the extra care taken all had survived the burn well. Post burn monitoring conducted in early May found that across the island longleaf and slash pine alike were recovering well from the stress of the burn and putting out new growth.

Contact: Shayne Banks, (601) 977-5405.

New Mexico

WUI Project Achieving Ecological Improvements, Enhanced Public Relations, and Interagency Cooperation

The Taos New Mexico BLM fire staff has been working on a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) project that is providing multiple benefits to the land and the people who live and visit there. The 31 Mile Project is beginning to restore the ecological balance of the area, helping to improve the public's understanding of wildfire risk reduction activities, and increasing cooperation between government agencies.

The project is located west of Espanola, New Mexico, adjacent to the Ram Das Puri Education Center. The center, operated by a non-profit religious organization of practicing Sikh's, includes an area of 175 acres with several structures surrounded by BLM lands. Throughout the year, seminars and programs are held at Ram Das Puri including the Khalsa Youth Camp, an annual Peace Prayer Day, and a Summer Solstice Program, which is one of the largest yoga gatherings in the world. Ram Das Puri's rural location compliments the philosophy of the center and at the same time, putting it in jeopardy. Due to current drought conditions, and the unhealthy density of the pinyon-juniper forest, the area is quite susceptible to wildland fire. Knowing the significance of this expanding cultural hub, the Taos fire staff has been working to



Lathrop Bayou before (above) and after (below) the prescribed burn in March 2007.



reduce the risk of wildland fire spreading from BLM lands to the community or visa versa.

The project will be completed in two phases, eventually treating approximately 1,000 acres west of Ram Das Puri. The first phase has been contracted to the Pueblo of Santa Clara’s fire crew, including 280 acres. They have mechanically thinned the area with chainsaws under Taos BLM supervision. Once thinned, slash piles are burned to decrease fuel loading of the area. Fuel wood is also set aside for fuel wood sales. The second phase of the project will include the same treatments of the remaining acres, once cultural clearances are completed.

While achieving its objectives of improved ecological management and addressing the threat of the wildland urban interface, the project has been beneficial in other ways. It has helped to develop interagency cooperation between the Taos BLM and Santa Clara Pueblo Agency. The agencies have formed a mutually beneficial relationship in which they can rely on each other for project support, training, and fire management expertise.

Contact: Pat Pacheco, Fire Management Officer, Taos BLM @ 505/751-4717

BLM & NM Fish and Game Work Together to Reduce Hazardous Fuels and Improve Wildlife Habitat

The Rio Puerco BLM fire staff has been working on the Mesa Chivato hazardous fuels project northwest of Albuquerque since 2003. The project area consists of approximately 20,000 acres of BLM administered lands. The goal of the project is to employ prescribed fire and mechanical thinning treatments to the pinyon, juniper, and ponderosa pine fuel types to reduce hazardous fuels, enhance wildlife habitat and watershed values, and

restore the historic fire regime within the project area. This multiple phase project between the BLM and the NM Department of Fish and Game is funded by BLM’s Fuels and SIKES Act Habitat Stamp Improvement Program.

The project area is located in the Ignacio Chavez and Chamisa Wilderness Study Areas. The Ignacio Chavez Grant (IC Grant) encompasses some 45,940 acres of federal lands, including over 10,000 acres on top of a



Ponderosa pine forest before treatment (above) and after thinning (below).



BLM fire crews using prescribed fire to reduce hazardous fuels on the on the Mesa Chivato project.



long flat mesa known as Mesa Chivato. Historically, the IC Grant has been used, and overused, since it was awarded by Spain to Ignacio, Tomas, and Miguel Chavez in 1768. The area was acquired by the US Government in 1940, but not before a century of severe overgrazing, fuel wood harvest, and unauthorized timber harvest.

This long history of overuse and exclusion of fire has altered the primary plant climax community from a ponderosa pine-bunch grass forest with many open mountain meadows to pinyon-juniper woodland with an understory of blue grama grass and snakeweed. This alteration of the plant community has resulted in reduced wildlife, and in particular, wintering big game habitat as well as increased competition for the remaining habitat. Also, competition between deer and elk on this critical winter range has been particularly harmful to the resident deer herd which is currently declining.

Past habitat improvement and fuels reduction projects within the project area includes a total of 4,000 acres of prescribed fire treatments and approximately 400 acres of mechanical thinning and hand pile burning treatments. BLM is planning to burn an additional 2,000 acres this year and another 6,000 in future years along with another 1,500 acres treated mechanically. By 2011, almost 12,000 acres will be restored through the combined efforts of the BLM and NM Fish and Game.

*Contact: Todd Richards, Fire Management Officer,
505/761-8769*



Thinning the number of trees restores the natural density of the Ponderosa pine forest and allows grasses and mountain meadows to become reestablished.

