

Snapshots

November 2008

BLM

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Idaho

Fire Squirts Summer Camp

In 2008, the US Forest Service partnered with the Bureau of Land Management, Framing Our Community, an Elk City non-profit community-based organization, and local school districts to provide a summer opportunity for children in Idaho County to learn about fire. The Fire Squirts program is a fun, educational week-long camp that teaches children, ages eight to 14, about fire ecology, fire history, fire behavior, fire prevention, and fire suppression.

Through interactive sessions, creative artwork, laboratory experiments, and dramatic play; students learned about the fire triangle, ecological cycles, fuels treatments and defensible space, as well as map and compass skills. Students dressed up in firefighter and smokejumper protective equipment to learn firsthand about tools and gear, engines and parachutes, and even implemented suppression tactics on a practice



Hands-on experiments with laboratory-controlled fires provided a lot of excitement in the lab. Students learned about fuels, fire behavior and the fire triangle.



Students were transformed into smokejumpers.

fire. The children also visited some nearby homes that had been impacted by a recent wildfire to learn about defensible space. They “played with fire” in laboratory experiments that demonstrated how fuel composition, wind, and topography influence fire behavior.

The Fire Squirts program has been offered annually by the Nez Perce National Forest since 2000. The camp curriculum was originally designed and implemented for Elk City children by Jill Wilson, a former Forest Service Fire Prevention Technician and teacher at the Elk City School. Jill has since moved on, but the program has become well-established. Locations have varied from year to year in order to reach more children across Idaho County. This year, camps were held in Elk City and White Bird, while previous programs were held in Grangeville, Kooskia, and Riggins. Tuition is free with space limited to 25 students in second through eighth grades.



Smokejumpers from Grangeville Air Center show students how a parachute works.

Interagency partnerships have allowed this program to expand to more than one location per year and to enhance the curriculum. With Community Assistance funding, the BLM Cottonwood Field Office has provided support to this program through an Assistance Agreement with Framing Our Community to keep Jill involved with the program she originally developed. Other instructors included Nez Perce National Forest employees from the Clearwater and Slate Creek Ranger District fire programs as well as Grangeville Air Center smokejumpers.



Students dressed in firefighter PPE try their hand at fire suppression tactics.





A field trip allowed students to see how effective defensible space projects saved homes during a recent wildfire.



Students designed and then colored their official camp T-shirt, each as unique as the student.

For 2009, the Fire Squirts program is being planned in two to three communities, locations yet to be determined. The Payette National Forest is also interested in expanding this program beyond Idaho County.

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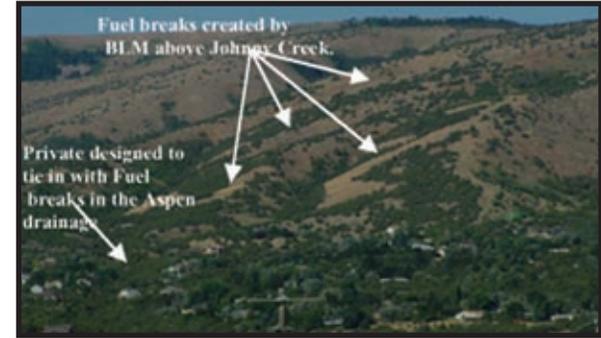
Partnering to Create Firewise Communities

The city of Pocatello, Idaho is nestled in a scenic valley at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, surrounded by sloping hills and picturesque high-desert vegetation. Pocatello is a prime example of a peaceful, small metropolitan area; urban living mixed with a rural setting, attractive neighborhoods peppered amongst wildlife-infused juniper forests. Because of its charming setting, many homeowners have moved to the city's outlying neighborhoods even though the area is frequently visited by wildfire, which has created wildland urban interface (WUI) conditions in many of Pocatello's neighborhoods.

Three Rivers RC&D and the Gateway Interagency Fire Front (GIFF) have partnered to reduce the wildfire risk in WUI areas on public and private lands in Bannock County, Idaho, where Pocatello is located. Three Rivers RC&D is a nonprofit organization enhancing community development in south east Idaho through conservation of natural resources; it serves Bannock, Bingham and Power Counties and the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. GIFF is a consortium of Bannock County



GIFF booth at Spring Fair 2008, promoting spring cleaning for a "lean, clean and green" WUI of Bannock County.



Several hazardous fuels reduction projects laid out and administered by Pocatello Field Office fire use specialist in partnership with Three Rivers RC&D.

Emergency Services, local fire departments, Forest Service and BLM.

Three Rivers RC&D has been awarded several grants from the BLM, FEMA, Pocatello Fire Department and Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) in cooperation with the US Forest Service to implement hazardous fuels reduction projects on private lands. Idaho Falls District (IFD) BLM has had a large role in steering this partnership that was formed in 2000 and fostered over the last eight years, proving to further the working relationships long into the future. This relationship has served to help educate homeowners in southeast Idaho about the risks of wildfire and about how to create defensible space around their homes. Defensible space creates a barrier between a home and its surrounding vegetation, which greatly increases any home's chance of surviving a wildfire.

IFD alone has provided a great deal of funding to Three Rivers RC&D through cooperative agreements for projects that have culminated in the completed acres seen on the ground today. From 2003 to date, IFD funded Three Rivers RC&D a total of \$581,000 in a Communities at Risk grant. The final results are directly related to achievements throughout the



process, from initiating an education and information campaign, to project lay out, to the actual burning and removal of hazardous fuels on private land.

IFD largely funded and supports the implementation of a comprehensive education program called Wildland Fire Education and Prevention (WFEP). Three Rivers RC&D established WFEP objectives to educate homeowners and the general public with offerings such as Firewise techniques (creating defensible space and improving the home itself to increase its survivability during a wildfire) and free home evaluations for those living in the WUI. They also unite with IFD on several recurring opportunities for education:

- The WUI wildfire simulation with GIFF, which involves both city and wildland firefighters training for possible wildland urban interface fires.
- Events such as the Johnny Creek Block Parties, when community members gather on a certain day to clean up flammable vegetation around their homes.
- Community exhibits such as the Spring Fair.



BLM fire and fuels crews worked year-round alongside local fire departments to remove hazardous fuels on private lands.



Some of the hazardous fuels were removed by thinning, piling and burning the debris.

In many cases, homeowners in wildland urban interface areas are unaware of the risks associated with wildfire. By educating homeowners, BLM, the RC&D and WFEP created a collective consciousness about wildfire and motivated homeowners to take action.

The BLM Pocatello Field Office fire use specialist provided Three Rivers RC&D with technical assistance and contract administration on a majority of the projects, and IFD fire and fuels crews burned and removed the hazardous fuels alongside local fire departments. Additionally, IFD funded the purchase of supplementary tools needed at various steps of the process, such as REDZONE projects for numerous fire departments within Bannock County and a chipper for fuels removal. REDZONE is a software program designed to bring professional quality survey, GIS, and mapping capabilities directly into the hands of firefighters and/or homeowners. Firefighters and homeowners use the software to record data about WUI areas and then utilize the information to diminish wildfire risk around homes and entire neighborhoods.



Eric King, Chubbuck Fire Department Chief, speaks to the group on the fieldtrip that was conducted by Three Rivers RC&D in September of 2008.

On September 24, 2008, Three Rivers RC&D hosted a tour to showcase wildland urban interface collaboration throughout Bannock County. The RC&D highlighted seven different locations throughout the county where wildland urban interface areas had been treated using varied treatment methods and tactics, including hazardous fuels reduction and the creation of defensible space around homes and neighborhoods.

Several cooperating agencies and partners came together for the tour in Bannock County foothills. Participants included representatives from Three Rivers RC&D administration and board, Pocatello and Chubbuck Fire Departments, Senator Crapo's Office, Bingham County Commissioners Office, BLM Idaho State Office, Caribou-Targhee National Forest and Pocatello's NBC affiliate, KPVI Channel 6.

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Photos courtesy of Three Rivers RC&D and Sonja Shadow



New Mexico

Target Wells Fuels Treatment “Chemical and Prescribed Fire”

The Carlsbad Field Office is implementing a range health and improvement project within Eddy County, 20 miles southeast of Loving, New Mexico. This 10,098 acre project (9,320 BLM acres, 668 State of NM acres and 120 private acres), was identified in 2003 as an area that would benefit from a brush control treatment. The primary objective of the Target Wells Fuels Treatment was to restore fire adaptive desert grassland. The benefits of the chemical and fire treatments include: reduction in broom snakeweed densities, reduction in mesquite densities, reduction in tasajo cactus densities, and increase in native grasses.

The Target Well Fuels Treatment Project is a collaborative effort between the BLM Carlsbad Field Office, Fire and Range Management, and rancher Tim Higginbottom, BLM grazing permittee. The project area, historically desert grassland with a 10 to 15 percent mesquite component, was composed of 80 to 90 percent mesquite, lacking an herbaceous

component. Years of drought combined with historical grazing practices and a lack of fire resulted in a decrease in the density and composition of native grasses as well as an increase in exposed bare ground. BLM Fire and Range personnel determined that in order for the restoration to be effective, the project must be completed in phases. In 2004, fuels funding supplemented Range Betterment Funds and phase one of the Target Well Fuels Treatment began with chemical treatment of the mesquite. Aerial application of Remedy (triclopyr) and Reclaim (clopyralid), both liquid herbicides, was completed in June 2004 on 6,500 acres of the project site. The mesquite treatment was successful and in the coming years, a variety of grasses and forbs began to appear. Rancher Tim Higginbottom was pleased with the results as were the BLM Range and Fire personnel. In early 2008, phase two of the Target Well Fuels Treatment began as fire was applied to the landscape. Firefighters from Carlsbad, Roswell and Taos BLM completed the Target Well prescribed burn over a period of three days for a total of 10,098 acres. The burn was a success. Pre-treatment, the project area consisted of 14.0 percent grasses, 1.8 percent forbs,



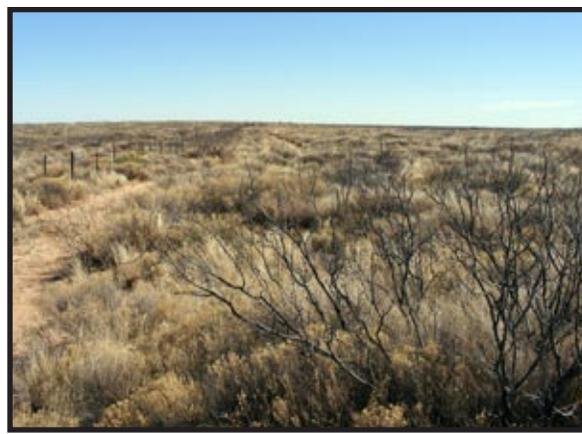
Target Wells Prescribed Fire



Target Wells Project area after prescribed fire and chemical treatments



Target Wells Fuels Area before chemical and fire treatments



Target Wells Fuels Area after chemical treatments



Post Treatment – Target Wells Project Area (left) and untreated area (right)



and 83.8 percent shrubs (primarily mesquite). Post-treatment, grasses increased to 54.5 percent, forbs increased to 16.6 percent, and shrubs decreased to 28.4 percent throughout the project area. The increase in grasses reduced the amount of exposed bare ground, resulting in a decrease in the amount of soil erosion. Additionally, the increase in grasses and forbs has benefitted a variety of wildlife species including upland game birds, mule deer and raptors. Fire will continue to be used to control encroachment of shrubs and maintain the grassland community.

The success of the Target Well Fuels Treatment was widely recognized by private landowners, oil companies, the NM State Lands Office and the Natural Resource Conservation Service and together we are currently approaching our 500,000th acre chemically treated.

Contact: Jennifer Ward, Fuels Specialist, Carlsbad Field Office (575) 234-5944.

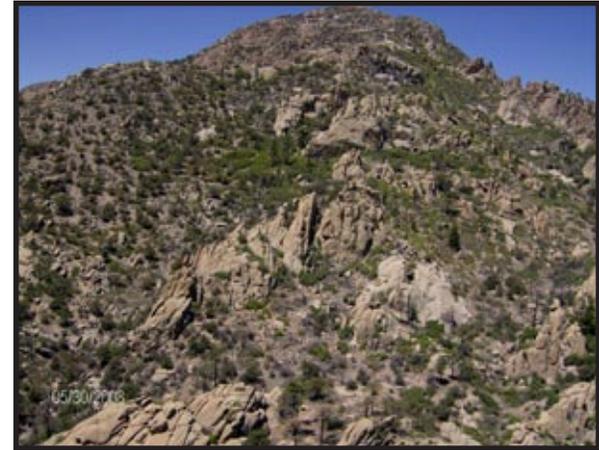
San Pascual and Ladrone Prescribed Burn

The Socorro Field Office has been working on a multiyear-multiphase hazardous fuels and forest health project since 2000, in the San Pascual and Ladrone Mountain areas. They are located within Socorro County and collaboration for these projects occurred with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), NM Game and Fish (Sikes Act) and the NM State Land Office. A late-season snow storm put a halt to a 38,000 acre landscape level burn, but having two projects “on-the-shelf” allowed us to adjust to changing weather and fuel conditions in different parts of the field office.

In the San Pascual burn, the main benefits were to reduce woody species encroachment into grasslands (especially sage), improve forage for wildlife, and restore the natural role of fire into the ecosystem. The first phase of burning took place on March 6, 2008, mostly black lining and hand ignition, which included one day of interior ignition with a helicopter and plastic sphere dispenser (PSD). The second phase of burning started on May 28, 2008, which included one day of interior aerial ignition with PSD, with some perimeter ignition by hand and ATV torch. The second phase included locations on the east side of Bosque del Apache NWR; the White Sands Missile Range lands were included as part of the allowable burn area (east side of the burn); BLM portion of the burn is entirely within the Antelope WSA (bordered by roads); FWS portion mostly within the Little San Pascual Wilderness. In May, the FWS monitored the burn for the next couple of days so we could move to the Ladrone prescribed burn. Acreage burned totaled 11,222 acres on FWS land, 3,058 acres on BLM land, 331 acres on private land, and 144 acres on state land. This project was completed in May, but maintenance burns will be conducted every 10 to 20 years.



PSD Operator Bethany Ritter (BLM Socorro Range Specialist) ready to takeoff for the Ladrone prescribed fire.



Typical fuels and topography on Ladrone Mountain.

The Ladrone burn targeted benefiting factors that enhanced desert bighorn sheep habitat by reducing predator hiding cover and improving forage and browse, rejuvenating browse and forage for wildlife, maintaining and enhancing ponderosa pine stands, and reducing PJ encroachment. The vicinity of the burn was located mostly in the Sierra Ladrone Wilderness Study Area (WSA) which was extremely rugged with little vehicle access. The burn area was highly visible from I-25 and the communities of Belen and Socorro. Over 2,000 acres were thinned in 2000, with an additional 900 acres thinned in 2003 to 2004 (all outside the WSA). Portions were burned in the past with varying success due to broken rocky terrain and discontinuous fuels including 2,500 acres minimally successful in 2003, 787 acres of old thinning slash in 2005, and 149 acres of old thinning slash in 2006. The FWS provided good cooperation by providing key burn personnel (i.e. helicopter manager and firing boss). Also burned was a small part of the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge (64 acres) and



private land (41 acres). Bethany Ritter, Range Specialist for the Socorro Field Office, was the plastic sphere dispenser (PSD) operator for the four days during burning; she spent five days riding backwards in the helicopter and dropped over 120,000 balls. This project is on-going and will be completed in phases, with follow-up maintenance treatments.

Both of these burns were completed over a four day period in May. The Socorro Field Office continues to work well with their interagency partners to implement projects across ownership boundaries.

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Typical fire behaviors on the Ladrone prescribed fire.



PSD operations on the San Pascual prescribed fire.