

Snapshots

June 2009

BLM

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Idaho

Seeds of Success

The BLM Upper Snake Field Office has given the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes local and national funding for a full-functioning greenhouse. Through this partnership, BLM provided funding for a greenhouse, as well as the necessary materials to produce sagebrush seedlings including soil, plug trays, tables, hoses and fabric. The Tribes employed one person to work at the greenhouse and another person for additional part-time assistance. They bought and built a shed where they could store materials and fill trays. They also bought a cooler to store the seedlings and purchased a lifter, which is used to pull the seedling plugs out of the flats where they are grown.

During the first year of operations, the Tribes accomplished a fully functional greenhouse and provided 35,000 seedlings to the Idaho Falls District for Healthy Land Initiative projects. In turn, the BLM contributed additional funding to the Tribes so they could buy more materials for the greenhouse and operations. Currently, the greenhouse has 25,000



This year the Shoshone-Bannock Junior/Senior High School in Fort Hall will hire students to work part-time in the greenhouse for high school credits.



Each greenhouse will be able to hold about 40,000 seeds.

seeds growing which can be utilized for late summer or early fall for planting

“This partnership has been a benefit to both the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the BLM,” stated Upper Snake Field Manager Wendy Reynolds. “It has not only provided us with much needed seedlings, but now our relationship with the Tribes is growing each year.”

In 2008, the BLM provided additional funding to purchase a second greenhouse, which is currently being built with the anticipation of opening in the spring of 2009. “The new greenhouse is expected to be completed by mid-May and fully operational by June,” stated Resident Fisheries Coordinator Hunter Osborne. “This greenhouse, at full capacity, will be able to grow 40,000 seeds.”

By the spring of 2009, the Tribes will have provided the BLM nearly 100,000 seedlings for public lands restoration and rehabilitation through this partnership. The Tribes also plan to begin another seedling operation in both greenhouses this spring, as soon as the new greenhouse is up and running. They will then have the capacity to produce another 80,000 seedlings for the fall. These seedlings would then be available for use in upcoming Healthy Land Initiatives and other fuels projects.

The Tribes also have a partnership with the Shoshone-Bannock Junior/Senior High School in Fort Hall where students have access to do their own projects in the greenhouses. Last year, two seniors were able to work part-time in the greenhouse for high school credits. These students provided maintenance and care of the plants.

The partnership continues to grow as the Tribes plan on hiring several people to work with the BLM on public land seedling plantings during the fall of 2009. “We hope to build a stronger business by not only growing the seedlings in the greenhouse, but having the staff to plant them on public lands,” stated



Interagency cooperation and partnership continues to grow as the tribes learn how to plant the seeds on public lands.



Two greenhouses will be up and running in 2009.

Osborne. “This will provide more job opportunities for Tribal members in Fort Hall.”

Contact: Joanna Wilson, 208-524-7550

Participating Agreement Facilitate Prescribed Burn

Riggins, Idaho, is famous for its rugged terrain and access to numerous recreation activities. The town is nestled deep inside steep canyons at the confluence of the Salmon River and the Little Salmon River in west central Idaho. Hells Canyon and the Salmon River, some of the most exciting, beautiful, river-floating canyons in the west, are nearby.

About ten miles north of Riggins lies Wet Gulch, a steep, scenic ravine blanketed with bunch grasses and tall ponderosa pine. Because of its proximity to recreation opportunities and scenic beauty, several small communities thrive in this remote and peaceful rift. The absence of fire in the area has provided for thick undergrowth and a continuous fuel bed of vegetation. If a wildfire were to ignite, it would very likely rage out of control, endangering lives, property, and precious riparian



Wet gulch Unit 6 prescribed burn, located in the steep, rugged Salmon River canyon, was completed in April 2009.

areas. A wildfire in such steep terrain would be very difficult to suppress.

In order to combat the potential for a fast-moving, devastating wildfire, the Idaho BLM Cottonwood Field Office recently completed the 24-acre Wet Gulch Unit 6 prescribed burn with assistance from US Forest Service and local contractors. On a windless day this spring, fire personnel from the Nez Perce National Forest and local contractors ignited the burn and were supported by small 6-wheel based engines and rubber



The primary objective of the prescribed burn was reduction of hazardous fuel created by timber harvest activities.



Assistance from the Nez Perce National Forest was integral in accomplishing the prescribed burn.

tracked smidgen, each equipped with water tanks. The Cottonwood Field Office does not have direct fire suppression responsibilities. An agreement with the US Forest Service and Idaho Department of Lands provides additional resources for prescribed burning. The project was a success; undergrowth and ladder fuels were removed, and wildlife habitat was restored. If a wildfire burns in the area, firefighters will be able to use the burn as a buffer, as it will promote lower intensity fire behavior.

Due to scattered land ownership, the Cottonwood Field Office frequently partners with private land owners. For the recent Wet Gulch burn, the BLM developed a written agreement with a private land owner in the area so that five acres of his land

would be burned in the operation, which provided a wildland fire buffer for his property and others.

Below: Local contractors have built their own equipment designed specifically for fighting fire in steep rugged terrain.



Contact: Kristen Sanders, Fire Ecologist, Cottonwood Field Office, 208-962-3786

Montana

Cottle Creek Stewardship

The South Dakota Field Office will solicit award its first stewardship contract in the Fort Meade Recreation Area. The Fort Meade Recreation Area is in Meade County, South Dakota. The area lies approximately one mile east of Sturgis and includes approximately 6,700 acres of the former Fort Meade Military Reservation which surrounds the Fort Meade Veterans Affairs medical center. The entire Fort Meade Recreation Area is designated as an area of critical environmental concern (ACEC) due to the numerous historical and archeological sites.

The primary objective of this project is to maintain and improve the ecological structure and aesthetic values of both the forest and rangeland areas of the Cottle Creek drainage while enhancing watershed values and wildlife habitat.

The Cottle Creek project encompasses 120 acres within the Cottle Creek drainage. Areas of ponderosa pine, bur oak, and iron wood are present in the project area. The treatments are intended to reduce the risk of high severity wildland fire, improve forest health, encourage hardwood establishment, rejuvenate decadent bur oak woodlands, and improve wildlife habitat.

An additional treatment objective is to protect traditional roost trees, nesting areas, and brood rearing areas for wild turkeys. The National Wild Turkey Federation is a strong supporter of this project. The NWTf encouraged the BLM to apply for \$5,000 in grant funding to help offset



One of the selected roost trees for wild turkey habitat.

the costs of the project. To date, the office has yet to hear if this grant has been approved, but it sounds promising. One to two predetermined ponderosa pine trees per acre will be left for wild turkey habitat.

Ways to control or eliminate iron wood species within the project area were also discussed. The iron wood species within the Cottle Creek drainage doesn't provide suitable wildlife habitat, rangeland benefits, or allow for more favorable tree species to thrive. One of the service activities is to cut all 12 inch tall and greater iron wood trees within two separate designated 150 feet by 150 feet areas. Two different types of treatment methods in these areas will be conducted on the iron wood and monitored to see which is the most successful.

This contract is scheduled to go out for bids by the end of April or beginning of May, with hopes of having it awarded by the end of June 2009.

Questions pertaining to this article can be directed to Cory Neuharth, SDFO Fuels Module Leader; 605-892-7031.

Wild Turkey Restoration Project

The National Turkey Federation also helped with a project 60 miles east of Miles City, Montana. The organization helped fund a project to restore natural habitat for turkey roosting and to eliminate dense pockets of ponderosa pine so that fire suppression in the area, if necessary, would be easier. A contractor, working through an IDIQ contract, ground approximately 80 acres of ponderosa pine less than seven inches. The contractor worked during the winter to avoid soil disturbance and grazing conflicts with the permit holder. The Miles City Field Office plans additional mechanical treatments in the future. Custer County also helped with the project by plowing drifted roads in the area.



Above: Dense fuels in the project area before the treatment. Below: After the treatment.



New Mexico

Chimayo Stewardship (WUI) Thinning Project

The Taos Field Office is working collaboratively with the Chimayo Youth Conservation Corps, Forest Guild, Earth Works Institute, Boy Scouts of America, and the US Forest Service on a 205 acre thinning project. The thinning project, which started in June of 2007, is concentrating on protecting a variety of small communities in northern New Mexico and a Boy Scouts camp.

The primary objective of the project is aimed at reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfires to a number of small communities in northern New Mexico through forest restoration in nearby watersheds. This includes, reestablishment of historical fire regimes, ecosystem restoration, old growth preservation, forest product utilization, and the creation of local forest-related employment. The project is moving into its third year, with thinning



Chimayo Youth Conservation Corp



Post-thinned piles at the project site.

being conducted on schedule by the Chimayo Youth Conservation Corp.

The forest structure in the western United States has been dramatically altered over the past few decades by fire suppression and other human-caused activities. This has led to higher tree densities as well as increased ladder fuels and fuel loadings, thereby increasing risk of large catastrophic crown fires. Many small communities in northern New Mexico are, and have been, historically reliant on nearby forests for wood products, grazing of livestock, and water for drinking and irrigation.

For the future, this area includes treatments developed collaboratively that will ultimately aim to serve and address the needs of northern New Mexico communities, whether through healthy forests initiatives, economic development, training and education, or improved markets for forest productions.

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Utah

Color Country BLM Achieves “Bang for Buck” as War on Cheat Grass Continues

Wildfire is a hot topic for communities of southern Utah these days, and for good reason. Personal safety, property, watersheds, cultural and recreation values, and critical wildlife habitat are just some of the values that are threatened every season due to increasing wildfire activity. The rate of spread and often fire intensity are increased from historic fires, intensified by the invasive “cheat grass” *Bromus tectorum*. However, the primary question for many people is what steps are land managers taking to mitigate fire behavior and combat the spread of invasive species? The answers become more important when the continual expansion and growth of communities into scenic landscapes that border state and federal lands is added to the equation.

Proactive fuels management efforts have been increased following the Milford Flat Fire which burned over 360,000 acres. This, the largest wildfire in Utah’s history, resulted in the loss of two human lives during the fire, and another fatal vehicle accident, from dust storms along Interstate 15. Land managers have been committed to stabilizing the damaged landscape since the fire began on July 7, 2007 by working together to create a fire resistant buffer around communities at risk from wildfire. (Photo #1)

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has a new partner in the “war on cheat grass”. Through partnership efforts with the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF), Utah Division of Forestry Fire and State Lands (FFSL), and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), they are all working to reduce fire return intervals within the Color



The lightning-caused Milford Flat Fire burned in excess of 357,000 acres of land in central and southern Utah. Invasive cheat grass was a contributing factor to the rapid rate of spread, promoting the largest wildfire in Utah’s history.

Country District: Beaver, Iron, Washington, Kane, and Garfield Counties to break repetitive burn/reburn fire regimes.

Paul Briggs, Color Country District BLM Fuels Program Manager leading the five county ground treatments said that in order to out-compete cheat grass, agencies are using fire resistant seed mixes in strategic locations. This practice, often referred to as “greenstripping” is just one method of treatment being used in the Color Country. Following the 2007 fire season, the “Invasive Species Mitigation Fund” was created by the Utah Legislature in the 2008 session. The purpose of the funding initiative is to combat catastrophic wildfire and limit the spread of invasive species.” He added, “Senate bill 89 was sponsored by Senator Dennis Stowell and was funded with \$2 million in state funds through the Utah Department of

Agriculture and Food to help get the job done.” Color Country District BLM has combined \$1.1 million of the grant funding with BLM hazardous fuels funds and other partner dollars to accomplish a total of three projects, collectively treating 23,500 acres of federal, state, and private lands. (Photo #2)

Through extraordinary partnership efforts and effective treatment application, land managers plan to accomplish: 1) reduce and mitigate the loss of human life and property within the wildland urban interface communities that border public lands; 2) reduce future fire suppression and emergency stabilization/rehabilitation costs; and 3) maintain and enhance plant diversity on sagebrush-steppe and other important habitats before and following wildfires. (Photo #3)

Proactive interagency cooperation through the Color Country Interagency Fuels Committee and

the Southern Region Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative has proven to be the key in accomplishing landscape scale fuels reduction, habitat and watershed enhancement, community fire planning, defensible space education, and public outreach efforts throughout southwest Utah. The Color Country District currently has 109 communities at risk from wildfire within its management area. And 42 of those communities have completed specific fire plans and are planning and/or implementing fuels reduction projects with land management agencies district wide.

Aerial seeding of Milford Flat greenstripping is complete followed by chaining operations to ensure fire resistant seed is planted into the ground before winter precipitation occurs. This fire resistant seed is designed to out-compete cheat grass.



Looking east toward the Mineral Mountains, in an area near the origin of the Milford Flat Fire, a wide swath of fire resistant vegetation creates the desired “greenstripping” effect along main roads, providing firefighters greater opportunity to control future wildfires. This treatment was conducted in the late fall of 2008 and has proven to be a very successful investment.

