

## National Fire Plan Hazardous Fuels Reduction California



The BLM Folsom Field Office completed the 60+ acre Round Mountain fuel break project along a roadway that provides the sole escape route for local residents as well as access to a high use recreation area along the South Yuba River. The mixed conifer habitat was mechanically thinned to reduce brush and open the canopy. The fuel break was challenged on July 4, 2001, when a vehicle caught fire on the road and quickly spread onto the treated BLM lands. The fuel reduction project caused the fire to burn slowly and firefighters were able to put the fire out. “If the fuel break wasn’t there, the fire would have made a run through heavy conifers and moved toward nearby homes in a matter of minutes,” firefighters said.



*Fuel treatments along road in Folsom area help reduce spread of fire.*

### California

Residents in and around Sawmill-Hungry Gulch (east of Bakersfield, California) participated in “Fire Safe Community Chipper Days” in the spring of 2003. Homeowners, in cooperation with the Kern Valley Fire Safe Council of which BLM Bakersfield is a member, volunteers and federal agencies, cleared roofs and thinned vegetation around homes. Through a BLM Grant, the Fire Safe Council was able to purchase the chipper, for this project. Cuttings and trimmings were piled and chipped or burned by BLM employees. In addition to the “Chipper Days”, BLM fire crews thinned vegetation 20 feet on either side of the main road to community, thus improving access during emergencies. In July 2003, a wildfire pushed through the community threatening more than 100 homes and burning four residences and five outbuildings. The hazardous fuel reduction projects completed in and around the Sawmill-Hungry Gulch community, including fuel

treatments along the narrow access road into Lake Isabella, turned what could have been a disaster into a success story. More than 100 homes survived the Sawmill Fire, which started in a residence, moved through the adjacent wildland, and then into the community.

BLM also co-hosted a National Firewise Workshop in the area and is currently hosting a Student Conservation Association Fire Education Team to supplement their wildfire outreach and education efforts.



*Dense ponderosa pine regeneration, post-treatment area, and burning near the Sawmill-Hungry Gulch area.*

## **California**

The Cow Mountain Recreation Area, BLM Ukiah Field Office, is block of public land is situated between two populated areas of Mendocino and Lake Counties. Local ranchers, hunting groups, County Fish and Game Advisory Committees and County Board of Supervisors had worked through their Congressional representative to have BLM initiate a fuels management program on Cow Mountain. Their concern was that history would continue to repeat itself without an active fuels management program. In 1981 a cooperative prescribed burn plan was completed along with all requisite environmental documentation to implement the prescribed burn in the fall (October or November) of 1981. However, in August of 1981, an arsonist set a fire in the Mill Creek Drainage. With summer temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit, the fire raced over the basically the same path as a 1960 fire. By the time the fire was contained, over 26,000 acres had burned, including 35 structures, a number of which were residential homes. The fire suppression and rehabilitation costs exceeded two million dollars.

In the fall of 1997, BLM and CDF cooperatively implemented a prescribed burn within the Mill Creek Drainage. The primary objective for doing the burn was to break up the continuous continuity of maturing chaparral and reduce the fuel loading.

In July of 2001, an arsonist did once again set a fire within the Mill Creek Drainage, within very close proximity to the 1981 wildfire. The air temperatures again exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Although the time span between fire starts (i.e., 20 years), fire start location, fire weather, location and availability of CDF initial attack resources were approximately the same between the 1981 and 2001 wildfires, the significant change in 2001 was the fuel loading. As CDF responded to the fire, it became apparent that the outcome this time would be significantly different from that experienced in the wildfires of 1960 and 1981. The reduced fuel loading brought about by the 1997 prescribed burn, substantially lessened the fire intensity and rate of spread of the wildfire. Supported by CDF's aggressive initial attack operation, the wildfire was controlled at less than 10 acres. The end result was a significant savings in terms of potential damage to public and private resources as well as fire suppression and rehabilitation costs.



## **California**

The Arcata Field Office with the NorCal BLM Hazard Fuel Modules, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), and through private contractors has developed and maintained 18.2 miles of shaded fuel breaks in the King Range National Conservation Area. The fuel break system is designed to reduce the potential fire spread from the remote sections of the King Range National Conservation Area to the wildland/urban interface surrounding the federally registered Communities-At-Risk of Honeydew, Ettersburg, Whitethorn, and Shelter Cove.

The King Range National Conservation Area is under the direct protection for fire suppression by the CDF. On September 3, 2003 the Humboldt-Del Norte Ranger Unit of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection experienced a significant lightning event, resulting in 64 wildland fires. Resources were thinly spread, with priority placed on fires immediately adjacent to residences.

The #10 and #11 fires in the King Range National Conservation Area were placed in a monitor status until resources were available. They burned together on September 4, made a significant run, and crossed the road below the ridgeline. Upon reaching the ridgeline the fire bumped against the Saddle Mountain Shaded Fuel Break and which significantly slowed its forward rate of spread. When fire suppression resources became available and arrived the following day, the fire had crossed the Saddle Mountain Shaded Fuel Break for less than half an acre. Fire engines and handcrews were safely able to

perform a backfiring operation along the fuel break for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile. The #10 fire was contained on September 8, 2002, at 226 acres.



*(Left) Saddle Mountain shaded fuel break stops the fire from spreading. (Right) Firefighters conducted burnout operations along the fuel break.*