

National Fire Plan

Snapshots: Successes of BLM Hazardous Fuels Projects

March 11, 2002



Colorado, Durango Hills/ Edgemont Ranch Fuels Treatment Thinning - The San Juan Field Office is in the final phase of completing a National Fire Plan fuels reduction thinning on a 40-acre inholding within the Edgemont Ranch and Durango Hills subdivisions northeast of Durango, Colorado. This project is a joint effort between the BLM, Colorado State Forest Service, and adjacent private landowners. With guidance from the Colorado State Forest Service, many of the private landowners have completed fuels reduction thinning on their properties. Realizing the importance of reducing the fuels on public land, access to the project area was granted by a private landowner. The project area was stocked with approximately 175 trees per acre of young, dense second-growth ponderosa pine with an occasional old, large yellow bark pine. The goal was to reduce the ladder fuels and create gaps in the canopy so that a crown fire could not be sustained without extremely strong winds. Approximately 100 trees per acre were harvested; of these, 75 trees per acre were less than 10 inches in diameter. Emphasis was placed on leaving the healthiest and largest trees while meeting the objective of reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire to communities. Other timber benefits include improving forest health and the stands' fire resiliency or ability to survive a wildfire. Slash was piled at the landings for later burning. During implementation of the project several goshawk nests and an historic cabin site were found within the treatment area. The tree canopy immediately around these goshawk nests was not thinned but an understory treatment was accomplished by hand with the Southwest Youth Conservation Corps. The old cabin site was easily avoided during the implementation of the thinning. Watershed improvement included creating slash sediment traps by placing cull trees in an old roadbed that in places had become a 4-foot deep seasonal stream channel.

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Area before the fuels treatment.



Area after the thinning project.

CD on Hydromower Use Available

Over the past several years, the BLM San Juan Field Office in Durango, Colorado has used a hydromower in several fuels-reduction and wildlife habitat improvement projects. The most notable of these is Grandview Ridge, a 160-acre inholding close to the town of Durango. In response to inquiries about the project and the use of the hydromower, the Field Office has developed a PowerPoint presentation on CD outlining the considerations, benefits, and results of using the hydromower. CDs are available by calling the San Juan Public Lands Center at 970-247-4874.

Colorado Counties, Inc. Promotes Fire Planning

Colorado Counties, Inc. (CCI), an organization composed of Colorado county commissioners and administrators, is conducting a series of workshops around the state to promote countywide comprehensive wildfire planning. The effort builds on county fire planning experiences in eight counties and groups of counties supported by the BLM, Colorado State Forest Service, and USFS. Four workshops have been held to date with five more planned in the next two months. Each of the meetings is hosted by a county and CCI. The Colorado State Forest Service moderates the program. Commissioners, administrators, sheriffs, fire chiefs, and planners from the participating counties attend. Local, state and regional fire managers from the State and Federal agencies participate in the program and assist county working groups. Where possible, one of the counties that has completed or nearly completed a comprehensive fire plan describes their results and how they got the work done. Following presentations on fire planning processes and descriptions of approaches used by the agencies, participants work together to first write a fire protection mission statement that recognizes landscape-scale fire management across ownerships and jurisdictions. The emphasis is on a seamless plan coordinated among neighboring landowners and managers, including federal lands. Snapshots Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects.

Next the counties work on identifying communities at-risk from wildfire and describing the fire threat. The landscapes surrounding the communities are divided into A-polygons where no fire is desired and B-Polygons where fire under current conditions is highly undesirable but where fuels management could reduce threat. In this way, the counties establish priorities for hazard mitigation in the wildland urban interface and begin to take ownership in wildfire preparedness and hazard mitigation. The county fire plans will help BLM managers establish priorities for hazard mitigation work on public lands.

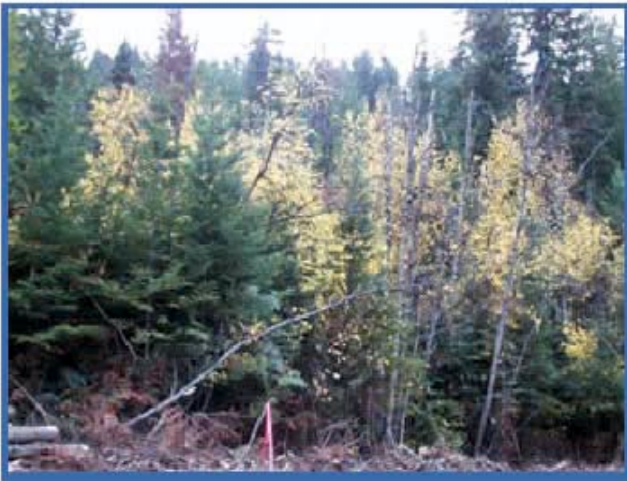
The goal is to encourage participants to return to their counties and begin the comprehensive countywide fire planning process in cooperation with the federal and state agencies. Participants have been enthusiastic. Some have come to the workshops believing that they had adequate fire plans in place only to recognize that they have much to do. BLM, USFS, and Colorado State Forest Service resources are made available to counties to help them complete their plans. These include data sets, maps, training, and technical assistance. The BLM in Colorado plans to make funding available to assist counties with comprehensive fire planning again this year.

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Idaho
Upper Columbia-Salmon Clearwater District
Coeur d'Alene Field Office – BLM
Mechanical/ RX Fire Fuels Treatments

The Bureau of Land Management Coeur d'Alene Field Office in northern Idaho faces the challenge of a variety of fuel types and conditions. Traditionally, fuels specialists have relied upon prescribed fire as their primary tool for treatments. However, these treatments did not adequately address the many diverse resource management issues of the panhandle area, such as wildland-urban interface areas, high timber resource values, recreation, visual impact areas and heavy fuel loadings. These issues call for a variety of fuels treatment types. By combining mechanical work with fall and spring burning, they have been able to treat more areas in less time, while successfully achieving resource management objectives and reducing risk in the wildland-urban interface areas.

The photos here show the different types of mechanical and prescribed fire treatments on two recent projects – Windy Bay and Huckleberry/ Long Mountain. Windy Bay is a 180-acre parcel on the shore of Lake Coeur d'Alene. It contains a boater access campground, urban-interface and heavy fuel loads. The fuel loads were caused by past ice storm damage and poor forest health. The various fuel treatments applied include mechanical brush busting/ slash busting; hand slashing and piling; lop and scatter; and broadcast and pile burning. The Huckleberry/ Long Mountain project covers over 600 acres and includes a large portion of a helicopter logging area. The project is being conducted in conjunction a with timber sale. The primary fuels treatment to be applied consists of hand slashing combined with machine piling.



Windy Bay project before treatment.



Machine piling logging slash and hazardous fuels.

The piling and clearing of fuel provides a greater burning window while still achieving resource objectives. This approach also dramatically reduces risk and allows projects to be completed in a timely manner. Waiting for proper weather and fuel conditions under narrower burning windows can set projects back months and even years. The work was accomplished by local contractors, which meets an objective of the National Fire Plan. Although contracting substantially raises the cost of these projects, many risks that accompany the use of fire are eliminated, and more options are available for the retention of leave trees that would not withstand the use of fire. The duration of the effectiveness of the treatment must also be considered. Treatments in these heavy fuel types are often effective for 40– 60 years. In addition, the mechanical work can often be completed in a more timely manner, which allows tight planning schedules for tree, scrub and grass planting and other restoration activities.



*Winter burning of slash piles, Huckleberry/
Long Mountain project.*

Oregon Forest Creek Project The Forest Creek hazardous fuels

The Forest Creek Hazardous Fuels project on the BLM's Medford District in southern Oregon utilized new technology to reduce the threat of wildfire to the nearby communities of Jacksonville and Medford. As part of the landscape-level hazardous fuels reduction operation, a specially designed machine called a slashbuster was used to mechanically thin the

non-commercial understory. In this instance, the slashbuster was more effective and less costly than traditional methods of fuels removal. In one section of the project area traditional manual means of fuel reduction would have cost \$1,300 per acre. Using the slashbuster, the cost per acre was \$460. The district will follow up the slashbuster treatment with a prescribed underburn to reduce any remaining fire hazards within the stands.



Bay project after mechanical thinning.



Aerial view of the Forest Creek Project Area



Forest Creek Project after fuels treatments were conducted.

The slashbuster work was conducted in conjunction with a variety of other treatments including understory thinning, hand piling, pile burning, broadcast burning, and commercial thinning to reduce the threat of wildfire within the 186 acre stand of conifers and hardwoods. This combination of fuels treatments served to remove all the ladder fuels in the project area and 95% of the surface fuels (surface fuels are characteristically small diameter trees and understory brush).

The Forest Creek Project is one of four landscape-level projects being conducted in the Applegate Valley of southern Oregon. Through National Fire Plan grants, the City of Jacksonville has also conducted fuels reduction treatments on their lands within the Forest Creek watershed in cooperation with the BLM and the Oregon Department of Forestry. Contact: Greg Chandler, (541) 618-2267

For additional information on the National Fire Plan, visit www.fireplan.gov