

Snapshots

Successful Bureau of Land Management hazardous fuels projects in the wildland urban interface...

California

Community Shaded Fuel Break

The small scenic community of Day is located east of Mount Shasta in northeast California. The area has a long history of large wildfires and has been identified as a community at high risk.

Preventing wildfire from starting on BLM land and carrying over to private property or visa-versa is the purpose of the Day Road Shaded Fuel Break project. A wildland-urban interface project, it consists of removing overgrown and/or decadent vegetation, eliminating fuel ladders, and opening the canopy between trees. Removed brush is being piled for later burning when conditions allow. The fuel break is located mainly on the BLM boundary with private land and when completed will provide a 60-120 foot shaded fuel break where firefighters can make a stand against a wildfire if the need arises.



Located east of Mt. Shasta, the Day Road Shaded Fuel Break is being built through mixed conifers and chaparral.



Dense and decadent vegetation is being thinned.



Completed section of the Day Road Shaded Fuel Break.

The Alturas BLM Prescribed Fire/Fuels Crew began work for the project in April 2001 and will be completing the 4 mile long project over the winter. Several local landowners are supporting the project, allowing the fuel break to pass through their private property. The local Fire Safe Council has also expressed interest in the project as one way to help mitigate the risk of wildfire to the local homeowners. The council will personally visit the site as work proceeds.

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Poppet Flat

Poppet Flat is a community in Riverside County with more than 400 private parcels, many with occupied residences. Expansive wildlands, including BLM and National Forest lands, surround the community and have an extreme fire history. Over the past 50 years, the community has been threatened by numerous destructive wildfires that have destroyed many homes. Poppet Flat has been identified by the California Department of Forestry (CDF) as one of the highest fire hazard areas in Riverside County and is federally listed as one of California's communities at risk.

A fuel reduction plan developed a year ago included plans for a fuel break around the entire community. A portion of the fuel break crosses BLM lands. The local homeowners are key players in, and supporters of, the project and have provided mechanical equipment to clear vegetation on private lands. Fire management staff from BLM's Palm Springs/South Coast Field Office have worked closely with residents and CDF crews, providing funding and equipment for the project and assisting in burning of brush piles.

Phase I of this wildland/urban interface project was completed in 2001 and Phase II will begin in spring 2002. Long range plans for the immediate area includes larger scale prescribe fire to provide more age class management in the chaparral. The community of Poppet Flats is becoming a more fire-safe community thanks to the local, state and federal cooperation to reduce fuels in and around the community.



Fuel break built on BLM lands adjacent to private property (border depicted by dashed line).



Completed section of fuel break with BLM border noted by dashed line.



Fuel break on BLM lands adjacent to portion of Poppet Flats community.



Completed fuel break outside community of Poppet Flats.

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Montana

South Elkhorns Fuels Management Project

The South Elkhorns Mountain Range lies between Butte and Helena in Southwestern Montana. It is a multi-jurisdictional land base with a mixture of BLM, Forest Service, Montana State, and private ownership. In July, 1998 a multi-agency plan was completed within the South Elkhorns to implement a variety of fuels treatments to restore the ecosystem health on approximately 80,000 acres. Participants included the BLM, Forest Service, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and private landowners.

As with most forested areas in the Western U.S., fire suppression over the last 70 years has had a major effect on the composition, structure, and function of plant communities in the Elkhorns. Fire scar studies revealed a natural fire interval of 15-25 years. Fire suppression has led to heavy conifer encroachment (primarily Douglas fir and juniper) into areas that were once open savannahs. This created an unhealthy vegetative state making the chance of large catastrophic wildfire significantly higher and also reduced elk feeding habitat.

To improve habitat conditions for elk and reduce hazardous fuels, the BLM began the implementation of prescribed fires in 1999. To date, 13 units encompassing over 5,200 acres have been treated with prescribed fire. These units contained large densities of younger age class trees which were encroaching into open park areas of sagebrush and grass. Many of these young trees were killed by the use of fire providing open areas and additional sunlight for the regeneration of sagebrush and bunch-grass species. This in turn will provide additional forage for elk and other wildlife. These projects were implemented using people and resources from a variety of agencies. Both the Forest Service, BLM and private landowners participated in the prescribed burning, while the BLM and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks provided study plots to measure the effects of fire on important vegetation.



Prescribed fire in the Elkhorns helps improve habitat and reduce fire risk.

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Implementation of the BLM project units will be completed in 2002. These projects within the South Elkhorns have demonstrated the ability of several resource agencies to work together in accomplishing habitat restoration and reducing hazardous fuels for future generations.

Bufs Picnic Area in the Little Rockies

The Bureau of Land Management in Eastern Montana is active with several projects in and around wildland-urban interface areas in order to uphold the number one priority in fire, “Provide for firefighter and public safety”.

After identifying potentially dangerous wildland-urban interface areas, a decision where to start and how to involve the public was made. Because of the ever growing volume of recreation and the close proximity to the community of Zortman, (one of two small communities in the Little Rockies) work in the Bufs picnic area was begun.

First year firefighters are taught the fundamentals to suppressing a fire of any magnitude is *anchor*, *flank* and *pinch*. These same principles apply to the hazardous fuels reduction plan for the Little Rockies. The Bufs Campground was a of establishing an anchor point and showing the local residents what can be done to protect their community from fire.



Bufs Picnic area prior to treatment.



Bufs Picnic Area after treatment.

Local BLM crews started small, did a thorough job and received a number of suggestions and comments from the public. During spring 2002, work will continue in the heart of the Little Rockies. These projects will serve as positive examples to build strong community support for additional work in the future.

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