



Communities Come Together to Complete Wildfire Protection Plans

BLM's Las Cruces, New Mexico field office serves a six county area that includes dozens of communities at risk from wildfire. When these communities learned federal assistance was available through initiatives such as the National Fire Plan and Healthy Forests Restoration Act, they were anxious to participate. The problem for communities was getting through the confusing procedures to access federal funding and technical assistance. The BLM fire and fuels program staff from BLM's Las Cruces Field Office jumped in to help.

BLM is committed to helping communities in southern New Mexico by participating in various groups with shared interests in reducing the threat of unwanted wildfires. With the Community Wildfire Protection Planning component of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act now considered a pre-requisite for federal funding of fire mitigation activities, communities at risk throughout the area were galvanized to action.

The small, unincorporated communities in southwestern New Mexico banded together to navigate the variety of programs available to assist them. They attended county fire plan meetings with the U.S. Forest Service, BLM and State of New Mexico, and asked questions. The strong interest of the communities helped BLM decide to commit existing fuels funding to help initiate community wildfire protection planning efforts. In an atmosphere of collaboration, all entities agreed on a focal point for data and information-sharing required by the community wildfire protection plan. As a result, federal funding, along with a significant cost share arrangement, pays for county wildland fire coordinator staff to provide focus and attention needed to complete the planning process.

Grant County was first to take advantage of this funding opportunity, with neighboring Sierra County following suit. The New Mexico Association of Counties is facilitating the pass through of funds to counties. Once plans are in place, mitigation strategies will be used to help prioritize where federal fuels dollars will be spent. BLM is pleased to see the level of interest shown by the counties and communities of southwestern New Mexico and hopes that their enthusiasm to reduce their risk of wildland fire spreads throughout the state.

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