

Fuels Treatment Project Aimed at Protecting Rural Community from Catastrophic Wildfire

For residents of one rural community in eastern Nevada, the potential for catastrophic wildfire has gotten a lot smaller, thanks to a BLM hazardous fuels treatment project completed last summer.

The project focused on selective thinning of pinyon and juniper trees on about 750 acres of public land near the Mount Wilson Community Guest Ranch, about 22 miles north of Pioche. The community of 25-30 permanent and summer homes is scattered throughout the heavily forested area near Mount Wilson.

The project has also helped to reestablish a healthy ecosystem of sagebrush, grasses and forbs.

Planning for the project began in March 2003, and called for removal of all but 25-40 trees per acre throughout the project area, according to Kyle Teel, fire ecologist for the Ely Field Office. Contract crews started work in July 2003, and completed the project 12 months later. The result was a natural mosaic of pinyon and juniper trees, sagebrush and open space that slows the spread of wildfire and hastens the growth of grasses and forbs.

“We used two three-wheeled feller-bunchers to create a 600-foot buffer zone around three sides of the community and to thin 150 feet from the center-line of the two access roads, thereby allowing the residents escape routes if need be,” Teel said.

Teel said the selected trees were sheared off at ground level and stacked for chipping. The chipping process created nearly 9,000 tons of biomass, which was taken to a nearby abandoned airstrip for removal.

While crews were thinning trees on public land, the Nevada Division of Forestry was responding to a request from landowners and conducting similar operations on private property, helping to further protect the community.

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BLM-contracted crews utilized two three-wheeled Feller Bunchers to selectively thin and stack the pinyon-juniper. The accumulated woody vegetation was later chipped, resulting in nearly 9,000 tons of biomass. Slated for eventual sale, the biomass is currently being made available to the public for use in landscaping and other efforts.