



## National Fire Plan

### **Black Mountain Fuels Reduction Project Umatilla National Forest, Heppner Ranger District, Oregon**

The Black Mountain fuels reduction project was designed to reduce the risk of fire to adjacent private property and the watershed. The 842-acre project is adjacent to Blake's Ranch Subdivision, a federally designated community at risk, approximately 25 miles east of Heppner in Morrow County. The project will reduce standing dead and downed fuel loading created by spruce budworm defoliation in the late 1980s. This area of the Umatilla NF is adjacent to private property where landowners, in cooperation with the Oregon Department of Forestry, have already completed fuels treatments on their own properties. Fuels reduction work on private land was accomplished through a National Fire Plan grant for hazardous fuels reduction on non-federal land.

The National Forest borders private and county land in this area, and the overall goal of this project is to reduce the threat of wildfire to Blake's Ranch Subdivision and Cutsforth Park (Morrow County Park). Existing fuels will be reduced to a level that will not support a stand-replacement wildfire using prescription and mechanical means such as harvester, forwarder, processor, grapple piling, chipping, mastication, and skyline suspension systems for thinning, followed by mechanical and hand piling. Areas typically contain fuel amounts and arrangements that require mechanical treatment prior to using prescribed fire.

**Private residence in Blake's Ranch:** This area includes vegetation that suffered high mortality from western spruce budworm, fir engraver beetle, and Douglas-fir beetle, along with many years of fire suppression. This has resulted in very high fuel loadings capable of supporting a high-intensity wildfire. To reduce this threat, the project will create buffers by removing hazardous fuels accumulations from selected areas. Fuel loading would be reduced in amounts necessary to effect an immediate change in fire behavior, thus reducing rates of spread and intensity. A contract is advertised that could begin treatment in this area by September 2004. It should take from three to five years to complete work in all of the designated units within the Black Mountain project. Actual numbers of acres treated will depend on funding and treatment costs.



This project was planned using HFI Categorical Exclusion #10 for hazardous fuels reduction (up to 1,000 acres of mechanical activities with no new permanent roads or infrastructure). The District collaborated with local citizens, private landowners near the project, Blake's Ranch residence, Oregon Department of Forestry, Morrow County Public Works, and potential contractors in the development of this project.

**Forest Boundary adjacent to Blake's Ranch:** New CE authorities allowed the District to shepherd this project through the environmental analysis process in approximately six months. New stewardship contracting authorities were employed in the formulation of the contract, which is expected to be awarded before the end of the fiscal year



In 2002, private landowners began treating fuels accumulations on their own properties with assistance from ODF and National Fire Plan grant funding. The District had been considering fuels treatment projects in the Black Mountain area; once we saw what our neighbors had accomplished on their properties, we were compelled to act “neighborly” and complete treatments on National Forest System lands. The Healthy Forests Initiative and the new categories of CE’s expedited the environmental assessment and shortened it from approximately 1.5 years to 6 months.

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