

National Fire Plan

BLM Fuels Break Work Pays Off

New Mexico

2003



Fire management investments don't often pay immediate returns, but they did this year in southwestern New Mexico.

A blaze erupted about noon May 8 near Pinos Altos, north of Silver City in Grant County. As night approached, work by BLM and other firefighters and an air tanker had minimal effect on the 5-acre blaze. With evening approaching, the fire was rapidly moving to the southwest, toward several communication towers.

About 6:00 p.m., when the fire reached a 50-acre fuels break created only months before, the show was over. Minor clean up the next day was all that was required.

Credit goes to the BLM-Las Cruces field office, which joined the Forest Service, New Mexico State Forestry and others in clearing small diameter ponderosa pine, pinon pine and juniper around the small community at the southern tip of the Gila National Forest.

The project cleared about 150 acres last year. Additional fuels reduction of about 70 acres is currently underway, and work on about 800 more acres is planned. "Sometimes relatively small, strategic acts bring big results," said Amy Lueders, BLM-Las Cruces field office manager.

The Las Cruces BLM field office is expanding its aggressive fuels reduction program near the small Otero County community of Timberon, where drought conditions have accelerated die-offs of pines attacked by bark beetles. About 330 acres are being thinned around the community nestled in the southern end of the Lincoln National Forest.