



Taos Field Office Rural Fire Assistance Protecting Communities and Building Partnerships

Reciprocity is the standard operating procedure for the Taos BLM office. Assistance agreements and rural fire assistance are key components of the program and an important way for the field office to be a good neighbor. The Taos field office manages more than 700,000 acres throughout north-central New Mexico. This BLM land is scattered over an extensive area and is adjacent to dozens of small communities throughout the Rio Grande and Chama River valleys, the Tusas Mountains, and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Potential fire hazards found on BLM lands pose risks to the surrounding communities, and assistance agreements and rural fire assistance programs help provide solutions in mitigating those risks. More than \$230,000 has been granted to 17 different fire departments by the Taos field office over the past few years.

One of these fire departments is the Taos Volunteer Fire Department with six full time employees and 16 volunteers on call for emergency response. Running the department is an expensive task, and requires funds for training personnel, replenishing safety supplies and tools, maintaining facilities, and keeping four fire engines in top condition. Operating budget comes primarily from the Town of Taos. However, the town funds operations only for structure protection. Funds for wildland fire response, which pay for wildland fire training and wildland fire specific equipment, must come from reimbursement for wildfire responses and BLM grants such as rural fire assistance.



Shown from left to right; Taos BLM Engine Foreman Kyle Sahd, Taos Valley Fire Department staff members Gerard Martinez, Eric Montoya, Bobby Joe Spears, Paul Allen, Leroy Gonzales, and Fire Chief Jim Fambro.

Relations between BLM and the Taos

Volunteer Fire Department began in 1998, when they began sharing resources for local wildfires, exchanging equipment and personnel for a variety of suppression needs. Since that time, the volunteer department has supported BLM in suppression operations, implementing prescribed burn projects for hazardous fuels reduction, and wildlife habitat improvement. In addition to resource sharing and funding through the Rural Fire Assistance Program, Taos BLM has offered advanced fire training for department members, strengthening the local skill base to assist in fire management operations.

Taos Volunteer Fire Department Chief Jim Fambro said, “I think that we have a great relationship (with the Taos BLM) and it’s sad that other agencies are not as cooperative, because we don’t have near the relationship with other federal and local agencies - not just during the fire season but year-round.”