

Snapshots

February 2, 2007

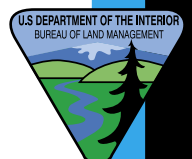
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Sheri Ascherfeld, layout and design*

California

BLM Partners With Remote California Community

In September 2006, the Sanders Fire threatened the community of Fort Bidwell, located in Modoc County, California. Because the Fort Bidwell Fuel Break was completed in the spring of 2006, firefighters were able to use the eastern edge of the fuel break as a staging area for crews and a safe anchor point for fire fighting operations. The southern end of the fuel break helped to slow the spread of the fire enough for firefighting crews to catch the fire before it threatened the community.



Surprise Field Office crews burn piles on the Fort Bidwell fuel break in the fall of 2006.



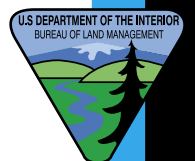
Fort Bidwell fuel break in 1995 (top), 2001 (middle), and 2006 (bottom).

The unique aspect of the Fort Bidwell Fuel Break is the successful, long term partnerships with the BLM's Surprise Field Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Fort Bidwell Tribal Council. The 52-acre fuel break is strategically placed between the Fort Bidwell community and dense forest reservation lands and aims to protect the community from the heavy fuels in the forest. It also separates the community and the wildlands in case a human-caused fire is ignited.

The project is designed to improve site ecology and bitterbrush habitat, which is an important winter forage for mule deer populations. Due to past management, aggressive wildfire suppression, and other factors, western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) is becoming the dominant species on much of the lower eastern slopes and foothills of the Warner Mountains. Western juniper is rapidly increasing on many of the more productive soils and riparian communities.

Warm, dry ponderosa pine communities frequently border more open, shrub-dominated sites. Historical fire frequency in these drier types is about 5-20 years prior to fire exclusion. Frequent, low intensity under burns kept these communities healthy. Litter and larger fuel accumulations were low, and frequent fires maintained open stands, cycled nutrients, reduced pathogens and facilitated infrequent, clumpy, even-aged natural pine regeneration.

Fire exclusion allows succession of small pines, which often grow to pole or sapling size and stagnate. Some stands have up to a thousand of stems per acre. These suppressed understories provide fuel ladders to the overstory and facilitate the spread of pathogens such as dwarf mistletoe, root diseases and bark beetles. Mortality and fuel loading is high, and fires often escalate into stand-replacing conflagrations that original stands hardly ever experienced.



The partnership created several opportunities for everyone involved. It successfully protected the community of Fort Bidwell and it fostered job opportunities for local Native Americans and Tribal Members. The Surprise Field Office BLM hired local Native Americans to work on the Surprise Fuels Crew. The crew consisted of one fuels module leader, one assistant module leader and four seasonal employees.

Contact: Leiskyka Parrott, Biological Tech, Fuels (530) 279-2726

RFA Program Enhances Protection Capabilities of Lake City Volunteer Fire Department

BLM assists Lake City, California, in beefing up fire protection. Fire fighters in the Surprise Valley community of Lake City have a new weapon in their fire protection arsenal, with the addition of a quick attack fire truck acquired through the Bureau of Land Management's Rural Fire Assistance grant program.

Lake City Volunteer Fire Department Chief John Erquiaga accepted keys to the fire engine from BLM State Director Mike Pool during Pool's visit to Surprise Valley on September 21, 2006.

The four-wheel-drive, one-ton truck carries a 200-gallon water tank, a pump and foam unit. It can tackle Surprise Valley's rugged terrain and slog through the mud and snow that face fire responders during the valley's tough winters.

The truck, formerly used in the BLM's fire prevention and patrol program, is valued at \$15,000, said Garth Jeffers, fire management officer for the BLM Surprise Field Office in Cedarville.

"The fire department used a \$12,600 Rural Fire Assistance grant and raised the additional money to pay for the engine," Jeffers said. "The fire department identified the need for a quick attack engine several years ago. We worked with the department and determined that this prevention rig would meet its needs. The engine will be effective at fighting fires in the urban interface, where homes are situated in a wildland setting," Jeffers added.

While they are the primary responders for emergencies in their own community, Lake City fire fighters



BLM State Director Mike Pool presents the volunteer fire department with Rural Fire Assistance grant funding to supplement their equipment and training.

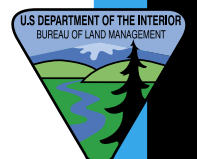
also assist the BLM and other Surprise Valley fire departments on incidents throughout the valley.

BLM is also assisting the Eagleville Volunteer Fire Department. The Eagleville Volunteer Fire Department (EVFD) received a Rural Fire Assistance Grant in the amount of \$13,068.00. Part of the funding will be used to assist the community of Eagleville to put up signs for their address numbers. The department will educate the community on the importance of street addressing and to address according to a few simple guide lines. This will ensure all homes in the area are identified and emergency response is not delayed due to poor address identification.

The EVFD is purchasing ball valves to install on stand pipe fill stations in various locations through out the community. The new valves will have 2/12" hose threads to allow for a quick hose connection and a quick fill of fire engines.

Additional equipment that will be purchased by the department includes radios, flashlights, and a portable pump. Also funding will be set aside for basic training. "For a small fire department, I feel we are fairly well equipped," Bob Staton, EVFD Fire Chief said. "A future need will be grant funding for a new fire hall. Once that is place there will be room for new modern equipment," said Staton. EVFD is one of four fire departments within Surprise Valley that assists BLM in fire suppression and is within BLM's direct protection area.

Contact: Jorge Cervantes, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist, BLM Surprise Field Office, 530-279-2737



Morongo Valley Spared from Wildfire: Good Brush Clearance Practices Save the Day

The 4,500 residents of the Morongo Valley live in a scenic desert community that is surrounded by state and federal lands, including the San Bernardino National Forest, the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, the Joshua Tree National Monument, and a BLM wilderness area. For most of the year, it's a place to see wildflowers in bloom and unique flora and fauna including the rare and endangered Joshua Tree. During fire season, however, it's an area that is prone to devastating wildfires. Heavy rainfall over the past two winters, following five years of drought, has produced large amounts of dead and dying native vegetation, exacerbated by an infestation of parasitic mistletoe.

Rare plant species, desert animals, and humans alike were all jeopardized in July 2006 when the Sawtooth Fire roared through nearby Pioneertown. Started by lightning, this fire ultimately grew to 24,000 acres as it merged with the Heart and Millard fires to create a frightening inferno. Homes were being lost in Pioneertown, and Morongo Valley's ability to fight the fire was affected by having its resources directed to Pioneertown. As if things weren't dire enough, the winds were pushing embers and ashes toward homes in Morongo Valley.

The entire north side of Morongo Valley was evacuated – about 1,000 homes. Depending on their location, many people were out of their homes for several days during the fire's 11-day duration. However, the people of Morongo Valley had a secret weapon: the Fire Safe



Entering the town of Morongo Valley as fires rage in the distance.

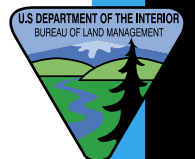
Council. As the result of recent BLM-funded grants, homeowners were well-educated about the need for brush clearance around their homes. Several years of good brush clearance plus a great fire break on the north side of the valley resulted in no homes being lost in that area.

After this experience, Fire Safe Council members have become aware of some new issues that they will need to address, especially evacuation procedures and communication systems. Erosion and flooding will be situations that are carefully monitored as winter rains loom on the horizon, and sandbags have already been delivered. In the meantime, residents are getting used to their new views of fire breaks, blackened mountains, and lack of old junipers on the horizons ... all of which they can view from their own undamaged homes.

Contact: California Fire Safe Council Southern California Region Grants Manager, Cathy Brooke, 626-335-7426



A shadowed Yucca plant with smoke rising from the fire in the background.



Utah

Salt Lake Field Office Supports BLM Honor Guard

Two firefighters from the BLM Salt Lake Field Office (SLFO) are proud to represent the National BLM Honor Guard. Darron Williams and Chris Delaney are key fire management officials at the SLFO who have chosen to honor their co-workers and represent the agency when tragedy strikes. This duty is a labor of love for the people who take the time to train and participate with this team. It is a duty they take very seriously.

“Firefighters protect the lives, homes and property of thousands of Americans, devoting themselves to public service even at their own peril,” said Delaney, BLM Honor Guard Member. “We can only hope that our presence expresses to the family how much their loved one’s meant to all their fire service brothers and sisters.”

Tragically, the 2006 fire season stole the lives of many firefighters. Williams stood beside comrades in San Bernadino, California, bearing 28 flags representing county, state, and federal firefighters to recognize the heroism and sacrifice of the five fallen firefighters of the Esperanza Fire. Two weeks prior to that he and Delaney presented a ceremonial flag to the family of a Utah fallen firefighter, Spencer Koyle. Williams and Delaney paid tribute to a Utah firefighter, Spencer Koyle’s sacrifice in his hometown of Holden in August. In the fall of



The BLM Honor Guard placed a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Washington D.C.

2006, Williams represented the BLM National Honor Guard at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington, Virginia.

Today’s BLM Honor Guard consists of 11 members, including Williams and Delaney of the SLFO. We are very proud and supportive of their service.

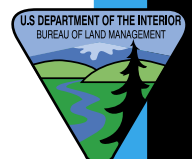
Contact: Darron Williams at 801-977-4381 or by e-mailing Darron_Williams@blm.gov.



Christine Schepp of the National Interagency Fire Center.



Chris Delaney, right, Assistant Superintendent of SLFO Bonneville Hotshots represents our respect at the National Fallen Firefighter Memorial, Emmitsburg, Maryland.



2006 Emergency Stabilization in Color Country BLM

Thousands of acres were blackened during 2006 summer wildfires. In the aftermath, the Cedar City Fuels program implemented emergency stabilization and post-fire rehabilitation plans for public lands in Beaver, Iron, Garfield, Kane and Washington counties.

This year, approximately 171,000 acres were treated during emergency stabilization and post-fire rehabilitation work. Emergency stabilization and post-fire rehabilitation work improves public lands that are unlikely to recover naturally from the effects of wildfires. Emergency stabilization treatments are essential to protecting the lives and properties surrounding burned areas.

This work, often implemented over the course of several years following a wildfire, includes invasive plant treatments, replanting and reseeding with native or other desirable vegetation, road and trail rehabilitation, fence replacement, wildlife habitat restoration and reforestation. Emergency stabilization and post-fire rehabilitation is done to support the goals set forth by the National Fire Plan.

One of the first steps in emergency stabilization is the replanting and reseeding of blackened areas. The Cedar City Fuels Program had an all-time record year in both the amount and variety of seed purchased. This year, over 20 species totaling 880,000 pounds of seed were purchased, during two seed buying trips. Seed was delivered from locations around the country over a two-week period, in October and then again in December. After delivery, our fuels and fire crews



Seed being loaded into planes by contractors for aerial broadcast.



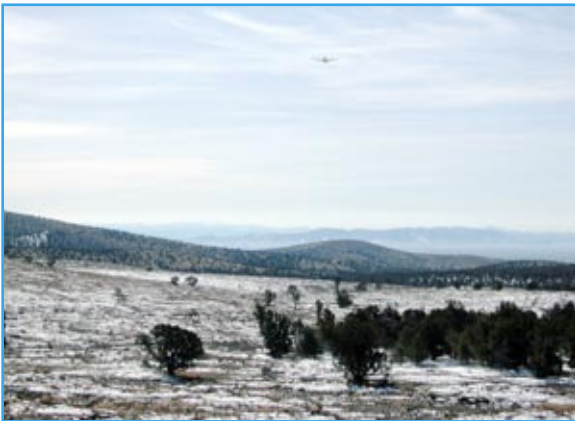
Fuel and Fire crew members worked along-side contractors mixing seed to specification.

worked along side contractors to get the seed mixed and ready for application. In October, the seed mixing was completed in six days, with approximately 50,000 pounds mixed each day.

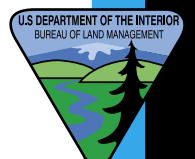
Aerial broadcast of seed on 136,000 acres took place over several weeks and was accomplished before the first significant winter storm. Over 35,000 acres were chained in order to ensure seed was covered and to minimize loss from weather and wildlife. Due to the amount of rangeland managed by the Cedar City Field Office, replanting and reseeding of burnt areas is our main focus during stabilization.

Though stabilization efforts are winding down, rehabilitation measures are in place and ready to be implemented this spring. We hope to have green lands again this spring.

Contact: Brent Spackman at 435-865-3029.



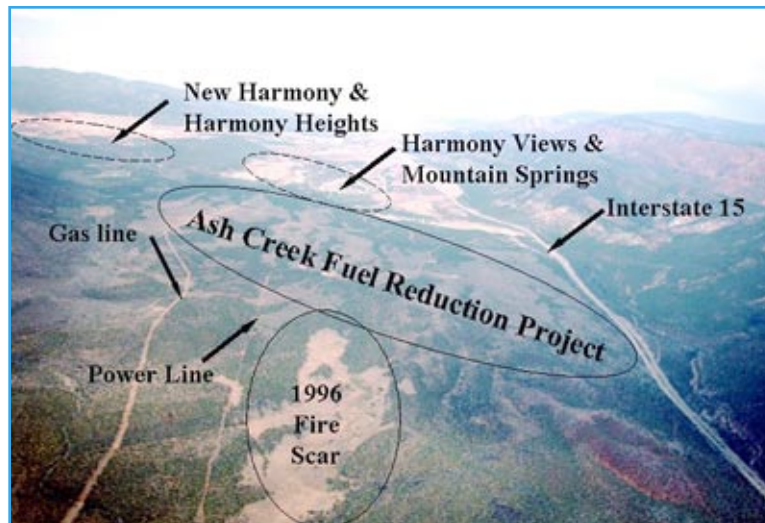
Ideal weather conditions for aerial seeding.



Vegetation Prescriptions in the Cedar City Field Office

The BLM Cedar City Field Office is working towards the completion of the Ash Creek vegetation project and recently conducted a prescribed burn. This project consists of utilizing an existing seeding project from the 1960s to create a fuel break on approximately 1,600 acres of BLM administered lands stretching from I-15 on the east to the Dixie National Forest boundary on the West. This project was initiated in 2001 and began with hand thinning of pinyon and juniper trees from 1,200 acres within the 1960 seeding. The next step of the project was completed in 2004 with the aerial application of a chemical Tebuthiuron (Spike) to reduce some of the shrub (oak and sage brush) component within the project area. Prescribed fire was used on 500 acres of the previously treated area was to remove the debris/slash from the thinning work and reduce fine fuels and shrubs within the treatment areas. The above treatments serve to “release” the seeded perennial grasses and forbs which stay green and fire resistant much longer than the cheat grass that prevails on the adjacent landscape.

Just prior to Thanksgiving, the Cedar City BLM utilized personnel and equipment from the Dixie National Forest, Utah Forestry Fire and State Lands and were able to complete 500 acres of prescribed burning. This phase of the project was delicate due to the close proximity to homes and development properties. Many residents expressed concern and watched closely, while others expressed confidence



An aerial photo of the project area showing the significant impacts it will have on the communities surrounding New Harmony.

and support for the project. Public notifications were made and the project came off without a hitch.

New Harmony and the surrounding areas have been threatened by large scale wildfires for the past several years. The summer of 2006 was no different. The Ranch Fire threatened this area for several days. The fuel break was tested and proved instrumental in slowing the fire’s progress. Firefighters were able to better protect property. Homes were saved because this fuel break influenced the movement and rate of spread of this fire.

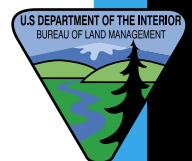
Additionally, the Ash Creek project area is critical big game habitat. Prescribed fire aids in diversifying the age class of vegetation required to sustain Mule Deer through the winter months. The fuel break also serves to prevent the majority of this habitat being lost to a single wildfire event. This will benefit wildlife and livestock in the area by increasing forbs and grasses.



Firefighters use drip torches to ignite vegetation on the Ash Creek Fuels Reduction project.



The 2006 Ranch Fire is moving dangerously close to the communities surrounding New Harmony, Utah.



The Ash Creek Fuels Reduction Project was designed with the Color Country Interagency Fuels Committee as part of an “Interagency Focus Area” to reduce hazardous fuel loads on public lands surrounding the communities in the area of New Harmony, Utah. The project was designed in conjunction with the Dixie National Forest, Zion National Park and Utah Forestry, Fire and State Lands. These agencies have each developed and

implemented similar projects adjacent to or near Ash Creek. This chain of projects provides a “place to fight from” that in turn provides a measure of protection for firefighters, residents, and wildlife of the New Harmony Area.

Contact: Paul Briggs at 435-865-3002



Existing homes and new construction of homes is in close proximity to the Ash Creek Fuels Reduction project. This area is growing at an exceptional rate. The fuel break is necessary for firefighters to protect lives and property.

