Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan. May 21

Oregon

Bobar Landscape Project, Ashland Field Office

Since 1995, BLM's Medford, Oregon District has worked to implement planning on a landscape level, which allows managers to meet comprehensive ecosystem restoration goals. This allows integration of forest health, hazardous fuels reduction, and wildlife and aquatic habitat objectives into one project. Landscape projects also allow managers to treat vegetation at a broader scale to more effectively reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires.

The Bobar Project is a recent example of landscape scale accomplishments achieving National Fire Plan goals.

The Bobar project is located within and adjacent to Upper Applegate, a community at risk in the wildland urban interface about ten miles southwest of Medford. More than 100 residents living within or near the project area participated in the project development. Opportunities to treat private property as well as BLM-administered land were recognized early and included in the final plan.

One goal of the Bobar project is to restore the health of the oak woodland and shrubland plant communities of southwestern Oregon.

Hazardous fuel reduction was accomplished on public and private land through coordination between adjacent private landowners, Oregon Department of Forestry, and BLM. The use of National Fire Plan funding, and BLM's indefinite quantities contract, all aided in getting the work completed. At the same time, private land owners allowed access through their property for more economical access to BLM lands which permitted treatment of additional acreage.

The Bobar project involved coordination with the Oregon Department of Forestry and adjacent private landowners.

The Bobar Project will involve 2,600 acres treated commercially, and 2,300 acres of non-commercial thinning. More than 1,000 acres of non-commercial treatments so far have been implemented, reducing fire hazard while at the same time restoring the health of these important oak woodland and shrubland plant communities.

Work is continuing in the project area with another 400 acres currently under contract to be completed by this summer. Specialists prescribe landscape level forest health and fuels reduction treatments to imitate the ecological role that frequent, low intensity fires once played in southwest Oregon. The sequence of steps begin with commercial and non-commercial thinning of conifer forests, oak woodlands and shrublands, then fire is reintroduced through prescribed burning in specific areas.

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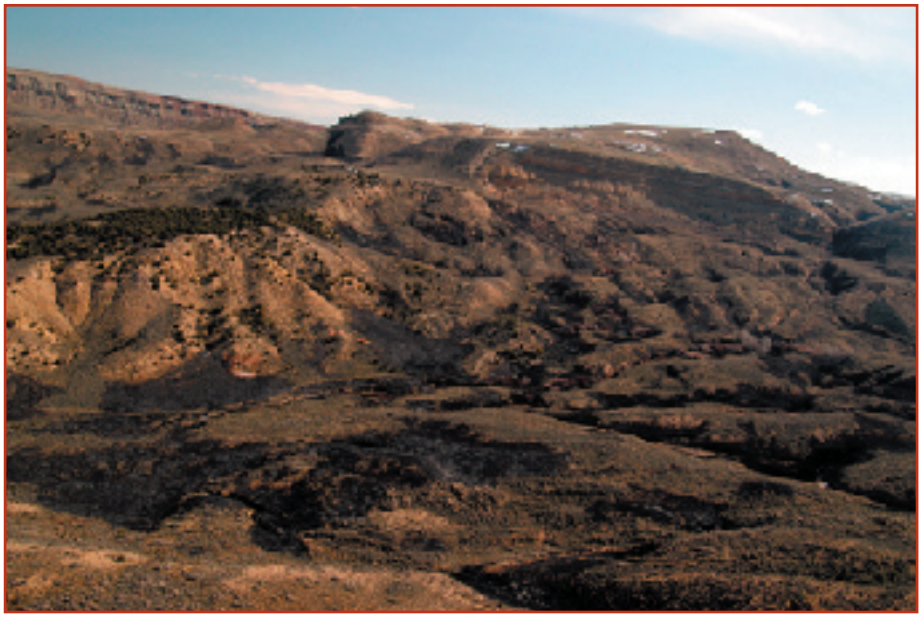
Wyoming

Prescribed Burns in 2000 Showing Benefits to Watersheds and Wildlife

The Rock Springs, Wyoming Field Office conducted three fuels treatment projects in April 2000. Three units-- the East Richards Mountain, Meadow Draw and Telephone Canyon -- were treated using prescribed fire. Approximately 2,100 acres of public land were burned.

The projects were designed to improve watershed condition in the Red Creek Basin which has several streams that



The Mosaic burn pattern on Meadow Draw, Rock Springs, Wyoming, in May 2004, illustrates the effect of the successful prescribed burn.

support populations of Colorado River cutthroat trout, a sensitive species, and important habitat for elk, pronghorn, mule deer and moose. Secondary objectives included improving wildlife habitat through release of important mountain shrub and aspen communities from competition by sagebrush and juniper, increase in primary production, and increase in vegetative diversity.

Increased vegetative diversity benefits are maximized by achieving a mosaic pattern that expands the amount of "edge." "From the standpoint of creating a mosaic pattern of grass and sagebrush communities and creation of edge, we were very successful" said Thor Stephenson, rangeland management and fuels specialist and project resource advisor of the Rock Springs BLM Field Office.

Cedar Draw Fuels Reduction and Watershed Restoration

The Cedar Draw Fuels Reduction Watershed Project began in the summer of 2003. Cedar Draw is an intermittent tributary to the Little Powder River located in northern Campbell County, Wyoming, approximately 19 miles North of Gillette.

Wildland Fuels and Rangeland Management Specialist Steve Hannan said, "There were two main objectives of this project. One objective was to thin the junipers and reduce fuel loading, and the second was to improve the watershed stability and function of Cedar Draw."

BLM hired contractors who mechanically thinned junipers on 40 acres of land adjacent to the Cedar Draw stream channel. Removing most of the junipers along the stream channel will result in increased cover from grasses and wetland vegetation and faster growth and improved health of cottonwood and willow trees within the treatment area. Thinning will also remove accumulated dead woody material and ladder fuels which will make this area less susceptible to fire damage or loss.

The contractors then used some of the thinned junipers to build tree revetments to help stabilize the stream bank until the herbaceous vegetation is established. Revetments help prevent erosion by stabilizing the stream bank and acting as sediment traps. The revetments consisted of 30-foot sections of juniper trees overlapped and anchored with six foot steel posts driven into the stream bank. A total of 60 revetments were strategically placed along one half-mile of the river.

Stabilizing the stream bank will also help reduce sediment deposition and flood damage into the Little Powder Hay fields located where Cedar Draw meets Little Powder River.

Materials that were not used in the revetments were hand piled and burned in the winter of 2004. Approximately 100 piles were burned by the Buffalo Field Office Fuels Crew.

Hannan said, "We are encouraged by the early results, especially the response of the herbaceous wetland

A view of Cedar Draw drainage prior to treatment.

Close photo of the fuel

A view of the area following juniper cutting.

vegetation. The strip of green vegetation along Cedar Draw will create an effective fire break and reduce the sediment flow into Little Powder River from Cedar Draw."

BLM fuels crew used a mixture of native grasses to seed the sites where the piles were burned and will monitor for the encroachment of noxious weeds. The hydrology staff is monitoring surface water in the stream to determine how effectiveness of the revetments.

View of a revetment in the stream channel.

Surplus material was burned.

California

Healthy Forests Initiative Expedites Implementation of Collaborative Fuels Project

The Surprise Field Office, located in the far northeastern corner of California, is working in collaboration with state and local partners to implement wildland-urban interface projects to protect community values.

One such project was expedited through the National Environmental Policy Act process with the use of a categorical exclusion authorized under the Healthy Forests Initiative. The environmental compliance process took less than ten months to complete, compared to several years that would have been necessary prior to the initiative being implemented.

The Emerson-Eagleville Fuel Break project was successfully completed in 2004. A 17 acre, 7,513 foot long, 100 foot wide fuel break was collaboratively planned and implemented by BLM's Surprise Field Office, Modoc Fire Safe Council, private landowners, Eagleville Volunteer Fire Department and the California Department of Corrections, Devils Garden Crew. The primary goal of the project was to protect the community of Eagleville, an area at risk for catastrophic wildfire, by reducing the risk of wildfire spread and increasing defensible space on private lands adjacent to a BLM Wilderness Study Area and U.S. Forest Service land.

To lessen project impacts and protect community values such as an attractive viewshed, project designs included the use of natural fire breaks like sparsely vegetated areas, wet meadows, and rock outcroppings. "Majestic"

juniper trees more than 200 years old were retained while overgrown sagebrush and juniper trees were removed. Thinning the understory will help protect and maintain visual quality of the viewshed, decrease hazardous fuel loading, increase native grass and forb growth, and enhance wildlife habitat diversity.

California Department of Forestry and Fire,and Department of Corrections crews burn piles within the fuel break area.

The Surprise Field Office is one of many BLM field offices in California using the Healthy Forests Initiative and Healthy Forest Restoration Act to implement crucial fuels projects within the wildland urban interface and around communities at risk.

The Healthy Forest Initiative was created to help implement core components of the National Fire Plan's Ten-year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan by improving the regulatory process in ways that ensure more timely decisions, greater efficiency, and better results in reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires by restoring forest health.

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BLM's Matt Brown with the California Department of Forestry and Department of Corrections crew leader working on the Emerson-Eagleville fuel break.

Fire Safety, Ecosystem Restoration, and Biomass Energy in Lassen County, California

The Bureau of Land Management's Eagle Lake Field Office is working closely with local communities to implement projects identified in their new community fire plan. The Stones-Bengard Project addresses fire hazards around the community, ecosystem restoration, and biomass utilization.

The 700-acre project will reduce fuel loading, improve wildlife habitat, and provide local jobs and wood biomass fuel for two lake-side communities, one of which is listed as a community at risk.

The project area is a thick monoculture of western juniper which is not only a serious fire hazard, but restricts the growth of grasses and forbs and offers poor quality wildlife habitat. Hand thinning will be completed on 100 acres of the project area adjacent to homes, businesses and other developments. The other 600 acres will be mechanically thinned. The harvesting and chipping program will provide local employment opportunities and a source of electricity for the community. The Honey Lake power plant, one of three wood fuel powered plants in Lassen County can produce enough electricity to supply more than 20,000 households.

Care will be used in both areas to preserve the scenic qualities valued by community residents. In later years, project planners envision using cattle grazing to control brush and grass re-growth, further reducing the fire hazard. The

The Diamond Mountain Hotshots recently completed hand treatment of an eight-acre portion of the project.

desired future condition will greatly enhance firefighter safety, community protection and a more diverse landscape.

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Bedtime Story Used as a Defensible Space Teaching Tool

The Student Conservation Fire Education Corps Team in Redding, California, has transformed a common bedtime story into an exciting fable teaching both young and old the necessity of defensible space

Turtle Bay Exploration Park in Redding invited the interagency Fire Education Corps team, hosted by BLM's Redding Field Office and California Department of Forestry and Fire, to set up a defensible space booth and give a power point presentation at the Forest Festival on October 25, 2003. Each year, the Forest Festival offers insights into forests and the importance of sustaining them. Interpretive forest tours, forest crafts, and sustainable forest demonstrations were all part of the fun, family-oriented activities offered. Because defensible space directly affects forest health and because activities were focused on family and fun, the Fire Education team also performed a revised "Three Little Pigs" to demonstrate firesafe building and landscaping.

The script of the revised "Three Little Pigs" uses many of the same phrases and the original plot line of the children's story though the first departure from the original is that the revised "Three Little Pigs" uses slightly different building supplies. Where the original three little pigs made their homes of straw, wood, and brick, the revised pigs use wood, vinyl siding, and brick to demonstrate the increasing levels of defense in each material. The revised story has a moral that also stresses not only the importance of building supplies but includes the importance of landscaping around structures. Relying on advice from their mother, the three little pigs in the firesafe version all have increasing levels of proactive interest in clearing brush and dead trees around their homes.

The story wraps up in much the same way as the original version: the third little piggy builds his home with brick *and* creates defensible space by cutting dead tree limbs, clearing brush, moving the firewood pile, cleaning gutters, and raking and watering the lawn. Team Redding wanted to be sure that their skit distinguished a difference between healthy fires and fires that do more damage than good. Therefore, the wolf character from the original story is actually represented by as fire that has grown too big to be good. The fire consumes the first two pig's homes, but once the third piggy creates defensible space and reduces the fuels, the Big Bad Fire transforms back into a Healthy Fire that benefits the forest.

To create the "set," Team Redding looked to Home Depot for supplies. Victor Russo, Home Depot's local Team Depot contact, coordinated the donation of particle board, spray paint, and hinges that were all used to construct the three houses mentioned in the story. Various local business supplied cardboard which was used to create trees and brush while SCA donated the supplies used to create the pig costumes.

Back at the booth after the skit, team members remained in costume and set up one of the prop houses to display an example of a home in extreme fire danger. Participants were then encouraged to move the brush and trees, place tools, and clean "gutters" to the point where they felt like the home was safer from the threat of fire. With four-foot tall houses and trees, the interactive event proved to be entertaining and educational. Children and adults alike were able to take what they saw in the skit and explain defensible space to the "little piggies" that hadn't quite learned their lesson.

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