



Bureau of Land Management

Color Country District Fire and Fuels Management

Greenville Bench Enhancement Project

Over the course of three days, August 19 through the 21, 2009 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Color Country District successfully treated 7,073 acres of pinyon/juniper encroached sage brush habitat located approximately five miles south of Beaver, Utah. This prescribed fire was ignited using three helicopters equipped with mounted torches that contain flammable gel (helitorch) with over 40 firefighters using strategic hand ignition techniques. Favorable weather conditions allowed for the prescribed fire to remove the encroaching pinyon and juniper stand on the Greenville Bench west of I-15 and set the stage for improving rangeland health by renewing vegetation communities within the project area.



Helitorch operations were used to generate high intensity fire behavior to meet project objectives.

The project has also significantly reduced wildfire threat to communities located in Beaver County. The burn will improve wildlife habitat, restore critical watersheds and provide for greater firefighter and public safety during future wildfires.

For the project to meet objectives, favorable burn conditions meant burning the unit during high temperatures and low relative humidity with steady winds to achieve the high intensity fire behavior necessary to maintain a crown or canopy fire. Prescribed fires in areas essentially void of understory vegetation require this type of mid season conditions because there is no ground fuel to maintain the fire in the tree canopy.

In order to safely implement the prescribed fire, many acres of mechanical treatments and seeding of fire resistant species, combined with “black lining”, was completed to help ensure the fire stays within the unit. Treatments have been underway since 2002 to facilitate this project.

During ignition operations, three helicopters were strategically directed to place fire in desired locations, creating dark smoke and over 50 foot flame lengths that could be seen for miles. Various hand crews and fire engines were on site to ensure the fire was confined to the planned burn unit. Interagency partners from the National Park Service (NPS), United States Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands (FFSL) were instrumental in the success of this project.

BLM fire managers placed fire information personnel in the community of Beaver, and at key access points to the project area to adequately address concerns of the public along the I-15 corridor. The Greenville Bench enhancement project originated in 2002 and utilizes bullhog, aerial seeding, and black-lining, all designed to create the opportunity to burn the treatment area of phase II that started August 19, 2009. Phase I, a 15,000 acre burn conducted in 2007 was followed up by a black line operation completed earlier in 2008, creating the 300 acre buffer around the entire burn perimeter using thinning slash that was strategically placed and carried fire approximately 60-100 feet inside the burn unit and along the project boundaries using hand ignition techniques.



Now that phase II has been successfully completed, the BLM in conjunction with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) through a partnership known as the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI) will aerial seed and chain the burned site to establish fire resistant forbs, grasses, and shrubs to return the site to a desired management condition. This will provide for enhanced big game habitat, improve watershed conditions, and greatly reduce the risk of wildfire to communities located within the wildland urban interface in the Beaver Valley. Fire managers plan to burn phase III of Greenville Bench in July or August 2010 which will treat an additional 7,300 acres and will complete the ignitions phase of this ongoing project. Black-lining for phase III will take place in the fall of 2009 under cooler and wetter conditions.

Strategic ignition patterns were used to use slope and terrain influences to replace the stands of encroaching pinyon and juniper trees.

The residents of the Beaver Valley have been involved for several years in the planning of this project and are generally very informed and supportive of this effort. Many positive public comments were received, even while conducting the burn during archery deer season. Understandably, several members of the public inquired or commented on the timing of the burn during mid season with conditions conducive to high fire behavior. When explained, most people seemed to understand that these conditions are required to implement these projects in this vegetation type.

For additional information contact Color Country District Fuels Program Manager Paul Briggs at (435) 865-3002.