

Black Ridge Fuels Reduction for Vegetative Restoration and Resource Protection Canyon Country Fire Zone/Moab Field Office

OVERVIEW

Black Ridge is a distinctive hazardous fuels reduction project designed from three perspectives: community wildfire protection, watershed restoration and wildlife habitat enhancement. It has a 30,000 acre project boundary and is situated on the southwestern slope of the La Sal Mountain Range adjacent to the communities of Browns Hole, Pack Creek and La Sal. Within the project boundary is critical deer winter range, culinary water source for a community, a major power line corridor, a major communications site and significant past investments from the 1960's. The Black Ridge Project has been well planned and coordinated utilizing sound scientific research, a variety of resource management input and lessons learned from previous fuels reduction projects. The project will occur in multiple phases over several years. To facilitate this multifaceted undertaking various methods of vegetation manipulation and treatment have been implemented. Phase I began in fall 2010 with bullhog, hand pile, lop & scatter and seeding treatments designed to maintain past chainings, restore grass/shrub lands, form pinyon/juniper savanna and create fuel breaks within pinyon/juniper woodlands to protect WUI communities. Large stands of old growth pinyon/juniper woodlands were utilized as secluded travel corridors and winter shelter for big game herds as they descend the La Sal's to reach the sage steppe. Multiple stock ponds have been cleared and maintained to benefit both cattle and wildlife habitat. Major travel and utility corridors have been cleared to serve as fuels breaks and protect critical infrastructure and public/firefighter access and egress. Additionally, degraded and over grazed sagebrush flats were treated by chain harrow and seeded to improve ecosystem health and wildlife habitat.



GOALS

- Reduce the potential loss to life and property from catastrophic wildfire for adjacent communities.
- Restore ecological resilience to watersheds.
- Preserve and enhance critical winter forage and habitat.
- Preserve wildlife travel corridors.
- Enhance and expand sage-steppe.

TREATMENTS

- Bullhog
- Chain Harrow
- Lop and Scatter
- Thin, Pile and Cover
- Seeding



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COLLABORATION

The Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative (UWRI) has been an integral partner with this project and has contributed funding toward seeding, contracts and equipment rentals. To date, the UWRI has contributed over \$300,000 toward project implementation. Input and project design was a collaborative effort within the Moab Field Office's Fuels, Wildlife, Hydrology and Range staffs. Utah Forestry Fire and State Lands has also worked with the communities of Pack Creek, La Sal and Brown's Hole to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans which have also been incorporated into the design of the Black Ridge project. Due to the large size of the project area, the BLM range and fuels staff have also worked with multiple grazing permittees to design and implement treatments which will not be adversely impacted by grazing activities. Permittees are supportive of the project and have agreed to restrict grazing for a least two growing seasons while restoration treatments establish. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has also set up monitoring locations within the project to study the impacts of treatments on migratory bird habitat and migration patterns.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Excellent partner relationships inside and outside the BLM have shaped this successful and ongoing project. From the planning stage through implementation the Black Ridge Project has been an impressive venture. Contractors performing work knew their expectations, were reliable and finished on time. Treatment design input from wildlife and hydrological perspectives created a project that achieved multiple resource objectives. It seemed that no details were overlooked even down to the clearing of trees around ponds at the appropriate angle of entry allowing bats to swoop in for a drink. Cleared roads will allow firefighters safe ingress and tactical suppression advantages in the event of a wildfire. The communities of Browns Hole, La Sal and Pack Creek now have an added degree of assurance when a wildfire occurs. The treatment areas in the old chaining have the upper hand in returning to a diverse rangeland ecosystem instead of becoming a pinion/juniper monoculture. It is expected, based on previous treatments, that intermittent streams and springs will have increased flows. The success of the Black Ridge Project is the unification of sound land management practices and the application of present scientific research.

BLACK RIDGE ACRES

- Bullhog-----1,354
- Lop & Scatter-----1,308
- Chain Harrow -----156
- Thin, Pile & Cover-----154
- Seeding -----1,627
- Completed area-----2,972
- Ponds Maintained-----3

PLANNED ACRES 2012

- Pile Burn-----154
- Lop & Scatter -----150
- Bullhog -----150



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