

Arizona – July 1, 2004



National Situation

Millions of acres of public land in the lower 48 states are experiencing the threat of abnormally severe wildland fire. Unnatural accumulations of hazardous fuels coupled with drought, insect infestation, and disease damage, as well as the continued expansion of flammable exotic species like cheatgrass, create the current situation that gained national attention with the fires of 2000.

From these fires came the National Fire Plan which the Bush Administration is implementing. It moved quickly to establish close working relationships with state, local, and tribal partners in keeping with the Secretary's 4 Cs. The Bush Administration reached agreement with the Western Governors Association and other partners on historic 10-year strategic and implementation plans to restore forest health. The President followed this effort with his Healthy Forests Initiative that reduced unnecessary red tape and needless delays in taking steps to reduce the threats of abnormally severe wildland fires. With Administration backing, Congress passed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act with large bipartisan majorities.

A key to restoring our forests and rangeland is active management that makes them less susceptible to unnaturally damaging fire. From 2001-2004, the Bush Administration has treated nearly 10 million acres. Half of the acres treated are near communities, towns, and cities thereby reducing their vulnerability to wildland fire.

Conditions and Collaboration in Arizona

- Federal agencies and Tribes manage approximately 53 million acres or 73 percent of the land area in Arizona. These lands encompass plant communities ranging from sparsely vegetated deserts to heavily forested mountains which include large expanses of heavily overgrown Ponderosa pine forests ripe for abnormally damaging wildland fires.
- Wildfire potential is currently estimated to be above normal for the entire state through the end of September. Last year, 969 wildfires on federal lands burned 343,499 acres in Arizona. A total of 352,447 acres burned throughout the state in 2003.

Accomplishments in Arizona

Fuels Treatments

- Federal agencies treated 649,677 acres in Arizona between 2001 and 2004.
- Arizona ranks fourth among all states in the number of acres treated between 2001 and 2004.
- Federal agencies treated 230,666 Wildland Urban Interface acres in Arizona between 2001 and 2004.
- Federal agencies plan to treat approximately 200,000 acres in Arizona in FY 2005.
- Between 2001 and 2003, Federal agencies spent \$90,044,000 in Arizona on fuels treatments.
- The Arizona Interagency Coordination Group facilitates collaboration on hazardous fuels treatments. All of the five federal agencies (Fish & Wildlife, Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs) and State Forestry are members.

(Note: 2001-2003 data is actual, 2004 data is planned).

Stewardship Contracts

- Stewardship contracts allow the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service to enter into contracts that permit service providers to keep what they remove from the land as partial payment for removing it. For example, a contractor could keep biomass from a hazardous fuels reduction project for subsequent use as a fuel to generate electricity or as a raw material for manufacturing.
- During 2004, BLM will use its new authority to implement two stewardship contracts. The two Arizona contracts cover 85 acres with a service value of \$47,000 and a product value of \$2,000.

Volunteer and Rural Fire Assistance

- The Forest Service provided \$6,225,898 to assist communities in Arizona for volunteer and rural fire activities during 2001-2003.
- Between 2001 and 2003, DOI bureaus provided \$1,488,825 for 122 awards in Arizona for rural fire assistance.

Fire Suppression

- Federal agencies spent \$248,674,116 for fire suppression in Arizona between 2001 and 2003.

Burned Area Rehabilitation

- Federal agencies spent \$16,662,576 in Arizona to treat 322,297 acres on 153 post-fire restoration/rehabilitation projects between 2001 and 2003.



Healthy Forests Restoration Act in Arizona

- BLM is planning 22 Healthy Forests Restoration Act projects in Arizona for 2005, covering 2,522 acres. Project emphasis is on hazardous fuels reduction in the wildland urban interface and restoration of forest and rangeland health using the environmental assessment process created under the act.

President Bush discusses his Healthy Forests Initiative on a visit to the site of the Aspen Fire

Healthy Forests Tools in Arizona

- In 2004, DOI bureaus will use the streamlined environmental assessment in Arizona on 5 projects covering 6,000 acres. They will use the simplified decision process for environmental analysis (categorical exclusions) on 18 projects covering nearly 13,000 acres. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides that when prior analysis demonstrates a category of actions will not have a significant impact on the environment, subsequent actions of the same type may be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis; meaning they do not have to fall under an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement before implementation.

Success Stories in Arizona

HFI Pilot Environmental Assessment—Weaver Mountain

This effort reduces excessive fuels in interior chaparral vegetation in order to improve wildlife habitat and livestock forage and reduce the potential for severe wildfires within the 14,000 acre project area. BLM completed the environmental assessment in August 2003. The project will take several years to complete. In the spring of 2004, managers treated 1,100 acres with prescribed fire and plan to do another 900 acres this fall.

Moving Forward with Old Fashion Methods

A recently approved grant designed to assist the Pine Lake community in the Hualapai Mountains with drought conditions and bark beetle infestations is providing dollars to complete wildfire risk reduction treatments. The Pine Lake Community, including local residents and county, state and federal governments, is working together on this project.



The Forest Service funded grant is a 50-50 cost share between Forest Service and Pine Lake community residents. Firefighters are burning brush piles created by area residents as they remove excess hazard fuels from their property. A second burn was conducted to enhance the effectiveness of an existing fuel break on the south end of the community.

Some of Pine Lake's cost share is homeowner labor as they complete treatments outlined during a collaborative multi-agency risk assessment completed for their property.



Robert Taghon, a recent arrival to the area, and his two sons are expert loggers and equestrians with ample draft horse logging experience. Using horses and their private portable sawmill, the family is removing hazardous excess fuel from steep terrain, and will cut useable logs into lumber for resale to offset the cost

to residents.

Prescribed Burns Used To Improve Habitat

Three interagency prescribed burns in 2004 were designed to use fire as a substitute for regular flooding on the Imperial and Havasu Wildlife Refuges. Regular floods no longer remove buildup in cattail and bulrush marshes, the preferred habitat of the endangered Yuma Clapper Rail. The 1,044-acres of burned area will improve habitat for the bird, according to the research of US Geological Survey biologist and



University of Arizona Professor Dr. Courtney Conway. The burns also broke up hazardous fuels in the refuges. The burn partners were the Bureau of Land Management Yuma Field Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs Fort Yuma Agency, and the Arizona Fire District of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Research gathers post-fire data

USDA Forest Service scientists from the Southwest Forest Science Complex (SFSC) in Arizona are providing land managers with post-fire data from predictive models in order to prevent erosion and catastrophic flooding. The scientists, funded by the National Fire Plan, are creating models to help assess post-fire emergency rehabilitation conditions. The models are also used in continuing research on erosion's effects on wildland fire, vegetation treatments, hydrology and geomorphology. The SFSC has collaborated with the Joint Fire Sciences Program (JFSP) to link a study done on the effectiveness of contour-felled logs retaining soil in high-severity burned areas to research on post-fire watershed responses.

BLM Works With Community to Create Fire Breaks

BLM fire staff met with community leaders and concerned homeowners last summer in the southeastern Arizona town of St. David. The focus of the meeting was to discuss fire breaks recommended in the recently completed community wildfire hazard assessment and mitigation plan. One of the landowners wanted permission from the BLM to reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to a home located within 20 feet of public lands. After completing a hazardous fuels reduction categorical exclusion (CX) for two landowners adjacent to BLM lands this winter, a fire break was established a month later by Safford/Tucson Fire Management Zone fire crews. A Healthy Forests Initiative CX was recently written for eight more fire breaks, which were recommended in four of the community mitigation plans.



National Park Service Teams Up With Training Academy to Reduce Fuels

Fire crews from Zion National Park, Kaibab National Forest and the Southwest Area Fire Use Training Academy helped the Grand Canyon National Park with two prescribed fires during the Fall of 2002. On the South Rim, the 406-acre Hanse burn and the 2,973-acre Watson burn were two of the large-scale fuel management projects that continue at Grand Canyon National Park to abate dense forest vegetation. In addition, crews burned 264 acres of slash piles on the Park's North Rim as a continuation of the Bright Angel Project. The Park's fire effects crew has collected data from six monitoring plots within the burned area to determine if fuel and vegetation objectives were met.

Large-scale fuel management projects at Grand Canyon National Park continue to abate dense forest vegetation that resulted from nearly a century of fire exclusion. They are addressing one of the National Fire Plan's key elements, the reduction of hazardous levels of vegetative fuels.

Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site

In 2003 the Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site provided \$12,000 in National Fire Plan Rural Fire Assistance Grants to their community partner, the Ganado Fire District. The Fire District used the money to purchase needed equipment and field supplies for firefighting, as well as community education and prevention materials for programs designed for both children and adults. One hundred smoke alarms, provided for community members in need of these devices, were purchased with the remaining funds.

Forest Uses Biomass

The Eager, Arizona, biomass plant uses fuel from the surrounding Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests and is an integral component in the utilization of the abundant small-diameter trees in the forest. The Forest has been zealous in assisting the wood products industry with developing markets for such trees in order to help pay the cost of forest restoration activities. The Forest is cleared of much of the thinning debris, which negates the need for subsequent burning of any residual slash. Smoke from prescribed burning is often an irritant to residents in the Wildland Urban Interface.

Goats Aid in Reducing Fuels

Six hundred goats were brought from the Navajo Nation in Northern Arizona to retreat a project site adjacent to Ponderosa Park near the City of Prescott. The 2003 project, identified as an experimental vegetation maintenance project, used the grain-fed goats to reduce dense chaparral that had regrown after a brush crushing treatment in 1998-1999. Fuel loading was reduced, which will bring the area to manageable levels for some time to come, and the Navajo rangelands received the benefit of lessened animal impact.

Paradise Fuel Break Helps Control Transient Fire

The Transient Fire occurred on February 5, 2004 and covered a total of eight acres on Bureau of Land Management land within the Yuma Field Office. This fire was located on the north edge of Yuma, Arizona along the Colorado River. It was human caused and started next to a trailer park within the city limits of Yuma. The one acre Paradise fuel break created in April of 2003 allowed the western spread of the fire to be contained and controlled. Without the fuel break the fire would have likely have spread through another ten acres of high quality riparian habitat that is used by the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) for migration habitat. The fuel break allowed firefighters to safely utilize a hose lay to knock down the western spread of the fire before it could spot into fuels further west or across the river into California where the Riverland Resort trailer park would have been threatened.

Fuels Treatments Reduce Fire Impacts

White Mountain Apache Reservation--Rodeo-Chediski Fire (2002)

The Rodeo Fire began on June 18, 2002 and quickly spread beyond containment attempts. The Chediski Fire began on June 20, 2002 and by June 23rd had joined with the Rodeo Fire to become the largest fire in Southwest recorded history.

It is estimated that about 60% of the timber on the Tribe's burned acreage was killed by the fire. This has amounted to about 466 million board feet of dead and/or dying timber. In contrast, the Tribes calculated annual allowable harvest is 55 million board feet, (salvage volume is equal to 8.5 years of harvest).

However, it was shown and documented that various fuels treatments were highly successful in modifying (reducing) fire intensity throughout the burned area. The most successful treatments included forest thinnings as well as prescribed fire as well as past timber harvests that proved highly effective in reducing fire intensity.

Examples include:

Limestone Ridge

In 1982 and 1983, commercial timber harvest (selection) took place as well as forest thinnings (1980) and prescribed burning (2000-2001).



*Limestone Ridge, hazard fuels reduction fuels treatment (left)
Under-burned (ground fire) during Rodeo-Chediski fire*



Chuck Box Forest Management Unit

Commercial timber harvest (selection) took place in 1996 and 1997. In addition, forest thinnings took place (1997), and prescribed burning (1999). Surrounding untreated stands exhibited high intensity crown fire behavior.