

The National Fire Plan in Central Oregon.

In Central Oregon the Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests and Prineville District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are working together to reduce excess fuels on our lands and return fire to ecosystems dependant on fire. We combined our fire fighting organizations to help us catch fires before they become uncontrollable and last summer, with our partners in the Oregon Department of Forestry and rural fire departments, we had almost 98 percent success.

Resources provided by the National Fire Plan (NFP) are key to our success. It provided us new dollars to hire additional fire fighters and upgrade equipment. The NFP also gives money to State and rural fire departments. Almost 5 million dollars were provided to Oregon's Rural Fire Assistance program for 66 rural/volunteer fire departments, including one in Crook County, and to other State and local fire prevention/protection programs. Grants to local governments and private landowners are used to help reduce fire danger to our communities. Two examples are using goats to control fuels around Bend and a fuel reduction program at Crooked River Ranch.

Critical to the NFP is reducing fuels within the wild land/urban interface, or 'WUI'. We have been working with local governments to do treatments in the WUI for years and now we can do more. Last year, the BLM treated over 15,000 acres with prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. Approximately 1/3 of those acres was within the WUI. Our non-WUI projects improve wildlife habitat and to return fire to the ecosystem.

To guide treatments we produced the Central Oregon Fire Management Service Fire Management Plan (COFMS). The COFMS Plan identifies communities at risk from wildland fire and highlights ecosystems 'out of whack' compared to historical fire frequency. We are now using this assessment to set priorities for new treatments. More fuels treatments are planned for next year.

Unfortunately, the best time to do prescribed burns in much of our area coincides with hunting season. The 2003 Oregon Hunting Regulation Synopsis will have information on which hunting units have burns planned, and a phone number to call for information.

I am excited about one new project. The BLM is designing a fuels treatment/forest health project for Little Canyon Mountain in Grant County. The town of Canyon City is at the base of Little Canyon Mountain, and Grant County residents are understandably concerned about a fire sweeping down from BLM land into their town. To see how the BLM develops a treatment of this type please visit our website at <http://www.or.blm.gov/Prineville/LCM/home.htm>.

Projects like this and others supported by the National Fire Plan are important steps to reducing the threat of fire in Central Oregon and the West.