California

Project Protects Giant Sequoias and Neighboring Community

Three Rivers, California, is a community located at the gateway to the Sequoia National Park. Just west of the park and south of the community are BLM lands on Case Mountain that are managed by the Bakersfield Field Office. The north face of Case Mountain contains the

One of many handlines that have been cut through the groves to allow for an understory burn this fall.

Chaparral fields on the slopes below its sequoia groves.

Case Mountain Giant Sequoia Grove Complex. The complex is comprised of six distinct sequoia grove units.

In order to protect the community from fires burning in the thick chaparral fields that surround the town, prescribed fire is needed to reduce the age class of the chaparral. But, to assure the safety of the sequoia groves found above the chaparral near the top of Case Mountain, an "understory" prescribed burn in the groves needs to precede plans to burn the chaparral fields. This would use low intensity fire under prescribed conditions to eliminate fine and medium sized fuels from underneath the forest canopy. An understory burn will reduce the intensity of wildland fires in the grove and reduce the possibility of a catastrophic stand replacement event. An additional benefit of such a burn is one of forest health, Sequoia trees need fire at a low intensity level to maintain their health and provide sunlight and soil access for their seed and regeneration. By fire proofing the sequoia groves, treatment of chaparral fields below will be less hazardous to the trees and fires started there will not spread to the chaparral as easily.

Kern Valley Hotshots cutting line while protecting a young sequoia tree.

Several steps have already been completed on this multi-phased wildland-urban interface project. Between October 2002 and May 2003 the Kern Valley Hotshot Crew constructed handline to break the Case Mountain grove into six units ranging in size from 6 to 35 acres. Previously, the crew had cleared the ladder fuels and accumulated slash from the bases of each of the giant sequoias of to

reduce the risk of basal and crown damage resulting from wild or prescribed fire. With the preparation work now complete, the first of the understory burns is planned for fall 2003 when the fire prescription can be met.

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Two BLM "giants."

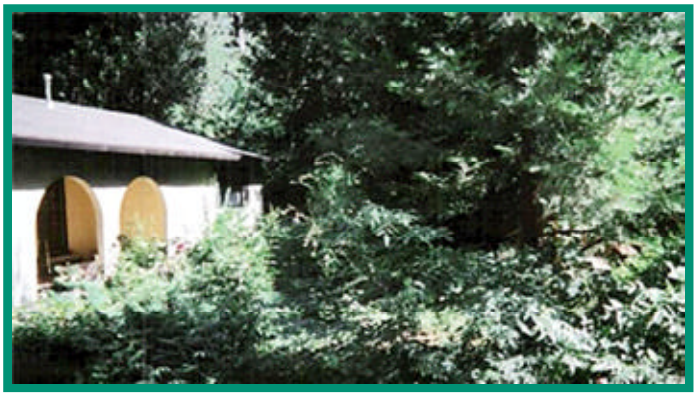
BLM Grants Support Popular Fuel Reduction Programs

The Fire Safe Council of Nevada County, California, is one of more than 120 such community-based groups in California. The council, in operation since January 1998, is also one of California BLM's most pro-active fire prevention/mitigation partners. During the past year, BLM's Community-Based Wildfire Prevention Program has provided funding for several of the council's innovative programs such as Defensible Space Chipping Program and Senior/Disabled Assistance Program.

The Defensible Space Chipping Program encourages homeowners to create defensible space by remove hazardous fire fuels near structures. Homeowners are responsible for thinning vegetation, stacking it at the curb, and encouraging neighbors to do the same. Once an area has at least three to four hours of chipping work committed, the council schedules private chipping contractors to process the materials at no charge to the homeowners. This door-to-door program has been a huge success with 611 individual properties thinned of hazardous fuels in the past year for a total of 340 critical acres in and around homes in Nevada County.

The Council's Senior Assistance Program was created about a year after the chipping program was initiated. As a result of media coverage of the chipping program, the Council began receiving calls from elderly residents who wanted to be fire safe homes but didn't have the means to do one. Initially, council volunteers organized weekend clean-ups to accommodate such requests but soon found the demand for services exceeded their ability to complete them.

The Senior Assistance Program was born out of this need and has been an unqualified success. Eligibility for the program are for residents who are over 65 years old, unable to create and maintain their own defensible space, financially unable to hire a contractor, and qualify under the USDA's Rural Development Department's low income definition. (During the past year, the program has expanded to include disabled residents.) Residents that qualify are provided with a licensed private contractor for one day free of charge to clear defensible space on their property. The contractor is available to trim trees and brush, thin trees as needed, remove hazardous limbs, and other hazardous fuel reduction as needed. During the past year, 73



The overgrown property of a local resident prior to participation in Senior Assistance Program.

The same property (note house corner on left) after participation in the program.

seniors have been assisted under this program and many others are scheduled for the coming year.

As a testament to the program's value to people living in the wildland urban interface, one need only look at the number of other fire safe councils throughout California who are developing similar programs based on Nevada County's model. Success is contagious and there is plenty of it to go around with the good ideas and programs originating with the Fire Safe Councils of California.

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BLM-Funded Public Service Announcements Kick Off Fire Season

The California Fire Alliance is an interagency forum in which local, tribal, state and federal agencies coordinate efforts to improve preparations to deal with wildland fire hazards and assist local communities in reducing wildfire risks. California BLM is one of nine member agencies or groups which form the alliance. Recently, as part of the increasing awareness of the need for community participation in wildland fire prevention, the alliance developed and distributed across the state a series of radio and print public service announcements and a video news release during Wildfire Awareness Week, May 5-11. Wildfire Awareness Week is an annual public education campaign spearheaded by the California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection and endorsed by the alliance to encourage Californians to prepare for fire season by providing defensible space around their homes and property.

Funds for the public service announcements were provided by the California Fire Safe Council through a BLM Community-Based Wildfire Prevention Grant. They will be played throughout fire season and to date, have generated more than 6.6 million audience impressions.

The print public service messages thematically focused on different aspects of wildfire prevention and included photographical depictions of actions that communities should take to promote and maintain fire safety. The public service messages communicated key messages about neighbors and communities working together to prevent loss from wildfire, building new or remodeling - it's never too late to make your home and property fire safe, and

Neighbors and communities working together to prevent loss from wildfire ad.

maintaining a healthy forest means reducing fuel to minimize damage from wildfire

Three publications, California Journal, State Legislatures, and Federal Times, were targeted for placement of the print messages over a three-month period based on their content, audience reach, and ability to appeal to the alliance's key state and federal audiences. More than 300,000 audience impressions were generated.

Maintaining a healthy forest means reducing fuel to minimize damage from wildfire ad.

Radio public service announcements were produced and distributed throughout California to heighten awareness of the California Fire Alliance's participation in Wildfire Awareness Week and to encourage communities to take action in preparing for fire season. Key messages were delivered through coverage on 18 stations in the following major markets, reaching more than 6.6 million listeners:

Media Markets	Audience Impressions
Los Angeles (3 stations)	2,280,000
San Francisco (2 stations)	1,060,000
San Diego (3 stations)	1,570,000
Sacramento (3 stations)	770,000
Fresno (2 stations)	620,000
Chico (1 station)	160,000
Redding (1 station)	130,000
TOTAL:	6,600,000

To complement the public service announcements, the alliance produced a video news release that was made available to all California TV stations via satellite distribution. The video was designed to remind California residents that wildfire is a reality in the wildlands. It included a call to action for people to prepare for wildfire season, and it highlighted California's unique approach to wildfire prevention, in which local citizens and government agencies are teaming up to make California fire safe.

Recognizing that all citizens have a responsibility to make their home defensible so that firefighters can safely protect their property, the California Fire Alliance member agencies are creating tools and increase knowledge so Californians can work together to create a fire safe future.

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Building new or remodeling, it's never too late to make your home and property fire safe ad.

Field Trip to Fire Safe Projects Highlights Fire Alliance Efforts

The Placer County Fire Safe Alliance began about 12 years ago as a local fire district discussion panel. Over the years, it's evolved into a countywide, action-oriented organization focused on wildfire safety. Alliance stakeholders now include public agencies representing federal, state and local resource management agencies including BLM's Folsom Field Office, local Fire Districts, community Fire Safe Councils, and private industry representatives. They focus their activities on community assistance, information, and educational programs and conducting fuel load reduction-healthy forest ecosystem projects with the goal of achieving fire safe communities in Placer County. The alliance also serves as a focal point of regional planning and implementation of fire prevention strategies.

In recent years, the alliance has been a recipient of several BLM Community-Based Wildfire Prevention grants, as part of the wildland urban interface program. In 2002, the alliance received funding for a community educational publication, to develop a Defensible Space Inspection Program and to hire a full time coordinator to facilitate their many programs designed to reduce the risks of wildfire danger to life and property in their county.

Participants in the "Fire Safe" Field Trip included Stacey Lybeck (right center) from Sen. Boxer's office in Sacramento and Brian Jensen (to her right) from Cong. Doolittle's field office in Granite Bay.

The first stop on the field trip was at the site of a shaded fuel break demonstration site where residents can learn about how to protect their property from wildland fire.

An Executive Coordinator, Stuart Feldman, was hired in November of 2002. He is responsible for the operation of the alliance and its programs that include public information and educational programs, management of Placer County Community Fire Safe Councils, tracking Placer County's chipper program, the community "Koffee Klatch" program, assisting the Coordinator of 2002 Community-Based Wildfire Protection, working with program grants for 4291 inspections, Realtor Information-at-Sale Pilot Program, and Senior-Disabled Defensible Space Assistance Program.

In an effort to highlight the numerous projects the alliance coordinates, and to demonstrate their results, several members of the suggested hosting a "Fire Safe" field trip. On May 9, 2003 the trip became a reality when the alliance hosted representatives of all three levels of government including staff members from the offices of Senator Barbara Boxer and Congressman John Doolittle. The attendees received a comprehensive overview of wildfire prevention efforts while visiting a number of alliance–sponsored fuel reduction projects. All participants left with a better understanding of how the Placer County Fire Safe Alliance is working closely with its federal partners, including the BLM, to successfully implement actions that will lead to

Educational displays about the Alliance's activities were available prior to the field trip.

healthier watersheds, enhanced community protection, and diminished risk and consequences of wildfires.

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SCA Fire Education Team Assists with Fire Safe Council Community Protection Project

Myers Canyon, located in the Kern River Valley near Bodfish, California, is adjacent to BLM lands. Property owners who live there have witnessed many nearby wildfires including the Deer and Bodfish Fires which burned over 45 structures and homes last summer. Fortunately the Kern River Valley has a very active Fire Safe Council that is working hard to promote and complete fire prevention activities and fuel reduction projects to create more fire safe communities. In support of their efforts, BLM's Bakersfield Field Office is hosting a Student Conservation Association Fire Education Team this summer to complement the work of the Fire Safe Council and assist in educating local communities in fire wise practices.

June 27

The Student Conservation Association team members arrived in the valley the last week of May. They immediately began one of their fire education projects - door to door canvassing in the Myers Canyon area as well as other communities in the wildland urban interface that are adjacent to BLM lands. With the assistance of community fire safe advocate Emily Diggles, their goal was to provide fire information and educational materials to homeowners to encourage each property owner to clear for defensible space.

On Saturday June 7th, the Fire Safe Council sponsored the Myers Canyon Chipping Day project with the assistance of the team. Using a chipper purchased by the council through a BLM grant, the Kern County Fire Department fuels crew, boys from the Kern County Probation Department's Camp Owens, council members and the Student Conservation team spent their day chipping roadside piles of chaparral and woody materials to help make the Myers Canyon community fire safe.

SCA Team Member, in yellow shirt, helps move brush to chipper.

June 27

The event was a success and an excellent example of cooperation and collaboration between many local stakeholders. Over one hundred piles consisting of approximately 13,000 cubic feet of cut and stacked vegetation was chipped and can now be used for mulch and erosion control in the area. The community showed their appreciation by providing pizza and soda to the crews.

With a full summer of fire education opportunities ahead of them, with the support of the Kern River Valley Fire Safe Council and community advocates such as Emily Diggles, the Student Conservation Association Team is already helping to make the Kern River Valley a safer place to live.

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Community fire safe advocate, Emily Diggles (center) provided inspiration and guidance throughout the chipper project.

BLM host Debbie Santiago (2nd from left) surrounded by SCA Team members at the scene of last summer's McNally Fire during orientation to the area.

Crew members feeding chipper.