



# Gateway Interagency Fire Front

# NEWS

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## **Portneuf-West Bench Fuels Reduction Project: March 8 open house to gather public comments**

POCATELLO – This coming Saturday, fire officials from the greater Pocatello area will want to hear from local residents about how best to protect homes and public lands from severe wildfires.

The Gateway Interagency Fire Front (GIFF), a consortium of city fire departments and Federal, State and Tribal fire agencies, will host a public open house on March 8 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Indian Hills Elementary School. The open house will give the public a chance to learn more about the Portneuf-West Bench Fuels Reduction Project, and ask questions and offer comments on the proposed fuels reduction treatments and locations.

The White House announced the Portneuf-West Bench project as one of ten nationwide pilot projects using the accelerated environmental analysis process proposed by the President's Healthy Forests Initiative. The Bureau of Land Management is taking the lead on writing the environmental documentation, with assistance from the U.S. Forest Service, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Idaho Department of Lands, and other state agencies.

“Even though the federal agencies are tasked with writing the environmental assessment, this is really a locally-driven project,” said David Howell, BLM's Public Affairs Specialist. “We have been working on a proposal for this area for some time, with the assistance of the city and county fire departments involved in GIFF. Getting picked as a national pilot project didn't change that – it just got us moving a little quicker.”

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***Public Open House on March 8 for Portneuf-West Bench Project***

City fire departments have long recognized the need to help local residents reduce hazardous fuels in the Wildland-Urban Interface, those areas where private property connects with public lands and forests. Since the devastating 1987 Johnny Creek Fire burned and threatened homes in Pocatello, GIFF has mounted an aggressive fire prevention campaign that encourages homeowners to reduce fuels near their homes.

Besides reducing threats on private property, the federal and state agencies also recognize a need to reduce fuels on public lands, both to improve the overall health of the land as well as to reduce fire risks.

“People need to understand right up front that we’re not talking about eliminating wildfires in the Interface. Fire is part of nature, and they will happen here in the future. However, we can decide whether that fire will be a fast-moving crown fire or a creeping ground fire. And there are methods we can use to direct fires where we want them to go, and – hopefully – away from homes,” said Howell.

The Gateway Interagency Fire Front is a cooperative endeavor by fire departments in the greater Pocatello and Blackfoot areas, federal fire agencies from BLM and the Forest Service, and the Tribal fire department from Ft. Hall.

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