



Gateway Interagency Fire Front

NEWS

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Portneuf/West Bench Fuels Reduction Project: Comment Period closes on March 31

POCATELLO – Residents and organizations interested in commenting on the Portneuf/West Bench project have until Monday afternoon to submit their comments as part of the public process.

About 60 to 70 people came to a March 8 open house featuring member agencies of the Gateway Interagency Fire Front (GIFF), and more comments have been received in the mail. Gathering public comments is a requirement of the environmental analysis process currently underway by the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service.

In addition, local residents are encouraged to continue conversing with neighbors and fire officials about the need to reduce hazardous fuels around homes. Officials from fire departments in the Pocatello area have been visiting homes and offering suggestions for improvements that will help slow future wildfires in the Wildland-Urban Interface. (The March 31 deadline does not apply to homeowner consultations, which are expected to be ongoing.)

The White House announced the Portneuf/West Bench project last December 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 federal and state agencies.

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

“Our main message will continue to be that this is not solely a federal project, or a city fire department project. It’s all of us working together that will make this project successful, and that includes homeowners, too,” said David Howell, a spokesman for the project.

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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