

## Upper Snake River District

*“Our priority continues to be Land Use Planning – to lay a foundation that will guide the District for the next several years. Through proper planning we hope to restore damaged or ailing ecosystems, establish priorities for reducing hazardous fuels and managing wildland fires, and strengthen partnerships with the public and other entities.” District Manager Jim May*

### Land Use Planning

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Land Use Planning continues to be the major workload for the Upper Snake River District (USRD). In FY 2002, the USRD made significant progress on several land use planning projects:

- In June 2002 the USRD, in cooperation with the National Park Service (NPS), launched the scoping phase of the public process to develop a new Management Plan for the expanded Craters of the Moon National Monument. The joint planning team of NPS and BLM staff is working now on developing alternatives, aiming for a release of the Draft Management Plan in 2003. The USRD Resource Advisory Council this year commissioned a subgroup of its members to assist the planning team.
- The District also conducted scoping meetings and began alternative development for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to amend each of its twelve land use plans. The Fire Management Direction Amendments EIS will clarify fire management across the district and help fire managers develop a District-wide fuels and restoration plan. The USRD expects to complete the plan in 2003.
- The Pocatello Field Office initiated a Wild and Scenic River Study of the Blackfoot and Bear Rivers. The study will assist field office staff in preparing a new Pocatello Resource Management Plan, which will cover both the Pocatello Field Office and the Malad Field Station.
- The Shoshone Field Office issued proposed draft amendments to four of its land use plans to consider land tenure adjustment criteria and new designations of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The final version is expected early in FY 2003.
- The Pocatello Field Office completed a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on the expansion of Smoky Canyon Mine, operated by J.R. Simplot Company. The SEIS includes detailed mine plans and appropriate mitigation measures stemming from the issue of potential groundwater impacts from selenium contamination.

## National Fire Plan

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The USRD maintains one of the largest fire programs in the BLM in terms of suppression, prevention, and hazardous fuel management. The District has the largest federal wildland fire-fighting force in the United States, outside of Alaska.

- During FY 2002, the USRD exceeded its targets to complete fuels treatments and Wildland-Urban Interface projects. The District conducted 27 fuels treatments on about 55,000 acres (34,000 acres of resource/hazard reduction objectives and about 21,000 acres in the wildland-urban interface). This number represents 19 percent of all fuels treatments accomplished during the year by BLM.
- The USRD marked its best season in five years for reducing on-the-job injuries in its fire program. The District is staffed at its Most Efficient Level and has met all of the standards for conducting Job Hazard Analyses, Six Minutes for Safety, and Tailgate Sessions. The USRD contracted eight helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft to provide support for fire, which flew many thousands of hours without a single safety incident.
- The Snake River Hotshots received their Type 1 certification during the summer of 2002, and are available as a national resource. The Hotshots and other USRD firefighters, thanks to a light season locally, provided support to major incidents in every Western state, including Alaska.
- The USRD spent \$500,000 on rural fire assistance, which included equipment, training, and prevention projects to better equip rural and city fire departments.
- The Southern Idaho Interagency Fire Center, located in Shoshone, facilitated the sale of 20 surplus BLM engines to rural fire departments. The BLM anticipates that the increased capability to rural fire departments will improve response time to wildland fire incidents, reducing fire size and recovery periods.
- Locally in FY 2002, the BLM fought 151 fires on 32,266 acres (on lands administered by BLM and its partner agencies). The District recorded a low number of fires and acreages during the year despite another year of severe drought conditions. This low number of fires is due, in part, to increased capability of the BLM and city/rural fire departments from funding by Congress through the National Fire Plan. Because of the light activity locally, District engines, crews, and overhead personnel were also sent to support fires in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, and other locations hit hard this year with severe fires.

## Rangeland Management Program

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The USRD continues on-schedule to complete Standards and Guides assessments on all allotments within the prescribed 10-year time frame.

- During the year, the USRD completed 98 Rangeland Health Standards and Guides assessments on more than 438,000 acres. Since the beginning of the Standards and Guides assessment cycle, the USRD has completed assessments on 45 percent of its acres. We also issued 99 grazing permits in FY 2002. Range staff also closely monitored allotments during the year in response to continued severe drought conditions across the District.
- The District has worked cooperatively with the Montana Riparian and Wetland Association to assess the condition of more than 450 stream miles. The project has helped land managers better plan for and predict the effects of grazing, road construction, off-highway vehicle use, dispersed recreation, agricultural use, and homestead development near riparian and wetland areas.
- The Burley Field Office is replanting native vegetation in the German Lake area after completing cheatgrass treatments on 6,500 acres.

## Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species

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The USRD continues to participate in threatened and endangered species management in cooperation with other land management agencies. This includes consulting with them on species not listed as threatened or endangered, in an effort to avoid such listing. These include sage grouse, ferruginous hawks, burrowing owls, sharptail grouse, Townsend's Big-eared Bats, Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, bald eagles, and numerous other plant and animal species. Examples of District successes include:

- *Bull Trout Conservation Strategy.* Despite extreme drought conditions, the District met all riparian standards for Bull Trout on allotments in the Little Lost Basin, a stronghold for bull trout in Southeastern Idaho.
- *Sage Grouse.* The USRD is conducting a pilot project to tie flags to wire fences as a way to prevent injury or death to sage grouse from hitting fences near leks. This project is happening in cooperation with grazing permittees.
- *Ferruginous Hawks.* The Pocatello Field Office documented five nesting pairs of ferruginous hawks in 2002 in the southeast corner of Idaho. Previously only one pair was thought to be nesting in the area.

- *Burrowing Owls.* The Burley Field Office worked with local Boy Scouts to construct and bury ten nesting boxes for burrowing owls. While nesting and fledging young, burrowing owls require up to five satellite burrows.
- *Ute Ladies' Tresses.* The Idaho Falls Field Office completed a thorough inventory of Ute ladies' tresses on the South Fork of the Snake River. New populations of the plant have been discovered and protective measures have been implemented to protect them from livestock and recreation use.

## Noxious Weeds

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The USRD continues to participate in Cooperative Weed Management Associations, and to maintain and improve ties with numerous counties through Cooperative Weed Management Agreements:

- The USRD exceeded its targets for acreages inventoried for noxious weeds (more than 493,000 acres) and weed treatments applied (more than 9,000 acres).
- The Burley Field Office is working with Cassia and Minidoka County Weed Departments and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to treat islands of the Snake River infested with Scotch and Canadian Thistle.
- The Burley Field Office also collected 300,000 beetles from the Lost River Valley and transplanted them to the Goose Creek Drainage as a bio-control to target weeds in remote areas.
- The Idaho Falls Field Office reported a significant reduction of leafy spurge due to the successful introduction of root mining beetles. The Field Office has been collecting and purchasing large amounts of insects, creating one of the largest bio-control programs in Idaho.

## Blue Gill Landslide

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Since 1999, the Burley Field Office has been monitoring persistent movements of the Blue Gill Landslide on Salmon Falls Creek in southern Idaho. This year, the BLM joined with Idaho State University to monitor the 65-acre slide for potential downstream impacts. Idaho State University began using remote sensing technology to construct a digital elevation model of the slide, obtained through a grant from the National Aeronautic and Space Administration, and with additional funding from BLM. Staff from the Burley Field Office, Twin Falls Disaster Services, and

the Army Corps of Engineers have been working together to determine the potential for flooding below the slide, as it has partially blocked a local stream, and to coordinate with downstream residents as appropriate.

## Wild Horse and Burro Program

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The USRD hosted one Wild Horse and Burro adoption this year. The adoption was in Blackfoot, where all 40 wild horses offered were adopted.

## Lands and Realty Program

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In order to keep up with demand for cellular communications, the USRD hired a full-time realty specialist to facilitate cellular tower rights-of-way. The District completed 23 rights-of-way actions for cell phone towers, including utility lines (electrical and telephone) needed to support the new sites. Increased cell phone coverage across the District has produced secondary benefits by increasing communication capability for BLM fire suppression and resource management initiatives.

The District also exceeded its target of planned rights-of-way actions that were scheduled for completion during the year (98 completed out of a planned 82 rights-of-way). The USRD is making progress toward eliminating its rights-of-way backlog, completing 18 rights-of-way in FY 2002 using private contractors.

## BLM/Forest Service Collocations and Partnerships

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The USRD and the Sawtooth National Forest moved closer this year to consolidating two dispatch centers in Idaho's Magic Valley into a joint organization, a venture that is expected to take place in 2003. The District and the Caribou-Targhee National Forest continue to move toward collocating facilities in Pocatello and Malad. The Burley Field Office is exploring possibilities of collocating with the Sawtooth National Forest's Burley Ranger District and the Burley Bureau of Reclamation office.

Partnerships with the Forest Service continue to remain strong. This summer, while the BLM Burley Field Manager took a six-week temporary assignment to Utah, the Forest Service District Ranger supervised both the BLM and Forest Service offices in Burley. This arrangement further enhanced the cooperation between the two offices, which share many common resource issues and serve the same public.