



The Foothills Observer



*A forest stewardship and wildfire mitigation newsletter for the rural landowner
provided by the Fremont County Wildland Fire Mitigation Program*

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Fremont County Develops Wildfire Mitigation Program

County receives cost-share grant

The Fremont County Wildland Fire Management Program was established in the fall of 2000 to develop a cooperative plan to lessen the likelihood of severe wildland fires in the Wildland/Urban Interface. A number of cooperators at the county, state and federal levels are actively involved in the program.

The program's emphasis on private lands has been on developing fire mitigation plans for subdivisions and homeowners. The goal of these plans is to make private property more defensible from a firefighting standpoint. These plans will focus on improving subdivision infrastructure and reducing fuel loads and improving forest health.

Homeowner plans will focus on individual home sites and will offer recommendations to residents for making their properties less susceptible to wildfire. Cost-share monies are available to homeowners for fuel mitigation and forest health activities that are recommended in the plan. The Wyoming State Forestry Division provided the county with a grant to cost-share these activities.

A program informational packet was mailed out to all residents in the Union Pass, Lander foothills and South Pass area that described the fuel mitigation and forest health activities that are available for cost-share.

A post-card was also included, which was to be returned to the Program Coordinator if the resident wanted a fuel mitigation plan written for their property. If you did not receive a packet and would like one mailed to you, contact Mark Ellison at (307) 856-8655.

Wind River Ranger District Update

By Mike Gagen, Assistant Fire Management Officer

The summer of 2001 was yet another drought year; in fact it was the worst drought year on record for Fremont County. Unfortunately the predications for this year are not much better.

On the brighter side, even with the lack of rain and the dry fuel conditions, the Wind River Ranger District experienced only fourteen wildfires. These wildfires ranged in size from 1/10th of an acre to 2 acres. The largest fire on the District was the Dinwoody Fire, which grew to 2,432 acres. Lightning started eight of these fires with the remaining six being caused by human activity.

Thanks to the combined efforts of the district's fire personnel, the Dubois Volunteer Fire Department, the Fremont County firefighters and private individuals quick reporting of possible smoke, the size of these fires remained small.

I have just completed my first year on the district and

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Dubois Area Fire Mitigation Coordinator Making Headway

Mike Milton was hired by the Fremont County Fire District as the Fire Mitigation Coordinator for the Dubois area in the spring of 2001. Mike is a long-time resident of Union Pass and is the Chief of the Dubois Volunteer Fire Department. He has a great deal of training and experience in wildland and structure firefighting and has proven to be a real asset to the Fremont County Wildland Fire Management Program.

Even though the program is only in its infancy; Mike has accomplished a lot in his first summer. A number of landowner meetings were conducted in the winter and spring to inform residents of the various agencies involved in the program.

The U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and Wyoming State Forestry Division are all actively involved in fire mitigation projects in coordination with Fremont County.

Mike has been primarily involved in doing wildfire risk assessments of home sites on Union Pass. The information he gathers for assessments is included in a Wildfire Mitigation Plan that is provided by State Forestry.

The wildfire risk assessment involves completing a FireWise Hazard Severity form along with a Defensible Space Inventory for each home site. The FireWise form gives a rating for each of the following categories within a home site:

- Means of Access
- Vegetation
- Topography
- Building construction
- Available fire protection
- Placement of utilities

The ratings are then totaled and a fire hazard rating for the home site is determined. Hazard ratings fall into low, moderate, high or extreme. The majority of the evaluations completed to date have placed most home sites in the high hazard category.

The Defensible Space Inventory is a comprehensive inventory of features within the property that are critical

to the property's defensible space. The information gathered in the inventory is then evaluated and recommendations to make the property less susceptible to wildfire are included in a Wildfire Mitigation Plan for the landowner.

If you have not already requested a wildfire risk assessment and would like one done on your property, please contact State Forestry at (307) 856-8655.



Union Pass Residents Busy This Summer

Community slash pile grows as residents clean up their properties.

Many residents in the Union Pass area were very busy this summer cleaning up their properties, as evidenced by the huge slash pile that now sits in Burke Johnson's meadow. Burke gave permission to Mike Milton to oversee a community slash pile in the meadow. Residents can now haul their forest slash (tree tops, limbs, logs, leaves and brush) to this pile instead of hauling them to the landfill or trying to burn the slash themselves. Burke is allowing residents to haul their slash to this site; however this right will be revoked if any thing but slash is dumped in the pile. Garbage of any kind and construction materials are not allowed!

The slash pile is a great service to the residents of Union Pass and has made slash removal much easier and less costly. The residents who have hauled slash to the pile this summer realize that they can get more done on their properties if they do not have to haul the slash to the landfill. Many residents have thinned out

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have had the chance to meet many people around the county. Funding provided through the National Fire Plan has allowed me to add four permanent employees to my staff: Carl Jungck was hired as our Engine Supervisor and Andy McWilliams was hired as the Assistant Engine Supervisor. Carolyn MacIntyre was hired as our Hand Crew Supervisor and Mark Schante was hired to be her assistant. These folks will be working during the fire season and if funding is available they will continue working during the winter months.

Some people have asked for an update on the proposed Crooked Creek project. This project will reduce the heavy fuel concentrations adjacent to the Crooked Creek home developments. Forage for livestock and wildlife would also improve. The scoping statement was sent out last spring and much input was received from landowners and other interested individuals and groups. Now that fire season is over, I am reviewing these comments and will complete analysis and planning with proposed implementation during the 2003 season. I want to thank everyone for the comments and interest in this project.

Last summer clearly showed there is a legitimate concern with protecting private homes and structures in the Warm Springs / Crooked Creek area. The Dubois VFD suppressed two fires along the Union Pass road; one started by lightning and the other was human caused. Both fires were located mid-way up the mountain and if they had grown in size both would have had high potential to threaten the subdivisions. Along with the Dubois VFD, the Wind River fire crew also suppressed a human caused fire above the Little Warm Springs subdivision. By reducing the fuel loading both in and along the subdivisions, fire suppression work will become safer and more successful.

Thanks again for all the fire reports this past summer. These reports allowed us to get to the fires while they were small. Please give me a call at (307) 455-2466, if you have any questions regarding the proposed Crooked Creek fuel reduction project.

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trees, picked up downed logs, removed dead trees and thinned out sagebrush around their home, making their properties less susceptible to wildfire and improving forest health.

The Dubois Volunteer Fire Department burned this slash pile on New Year's Eve. In the past, it was tradition to have a slash-burning party on New Year's Eve, this year the tradition began anew.

COOPERATORS' CORNER

This is a call for others to become involved in this newsletter. We are looking for articles for future issues. If you would like to contribute an article or pictures, it would be much appreciated.

Who can contribute articles? Anyone who lives in the foothills of Fremont County and has an article or pictures that relate to the subject matter of this newsletter. Articles about work you have done on your property or subdivision would be an example. We are especially in need of pictures of landowners doing the work to make their properties more defensible. Before and after pictures of properties that conduct fuel reduction activities would be very useful. We would also like to include a calendar of events page so subdivisions, fire departments, and other organizations can post meetings or events. So send us these dates so we can spread the word.

We are fortunate to have many government cooperators involved with the Fremont County Wildland Fire Mitigation Program and we would like to encourage all of them to become involved in this newsletter. Any articles or pictures that can be contributed would be much appreciated. Articles about future projects in the wildland/urban interface would be very informative. Also educational articles related to thinning, prescribed burning, fire suppression techniques, etc. are needed. Pictures and brief descriptions of wildland fires that occur in Fremont County would also be a good addition.

If you or your organization would like to contribute to this newsletter, please send all articles and pictures by e-mail to: mellis2@state.wy.us. Or for those without e-mail, send to: Mark Ellison, Wyoming State Forestry Division, 305 S. Smith Road, Riverton, WY 82501.



The Union Pass slash pile measured at least 50 feet x 50 feet by the end of the fall. Residents were busy all summer thinning and pruning trees, picking-up slash, removing sagebrush and cutting down dead trees. They were able to haul these materials to this community slash pile in Burke Johnson's meadow to the east of the Crooked Creek Guest Ranch. The slash pile was ignited on New Year's Eve and burned-up without incident. The Dubois Volunteer Fire Department monitored the burn.

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