



Boise National Forest
*Year in
Review*
2015



Wildland Fire and Fuels Treatment

Boise National Forest - 2015

The Boise National Forest prepared for another busy wildland and prescribed fire year in 2015, working closely with cooperators. The annual Boise County Emergency Response Exercise was held in May in conjunction with all fire, emergency management and law enforcement organizations as part of the simulation. The exercise also included participation by members of the Centennial Job Corps Crew 8 and Camp Crew.

The Forest experienced a below-average fire season in 2015. The Boise National Forest had 82 wildfires totaling 8,166 acres. Nationally, the fire season was longer, more intense and involved significant resource commitment to wildfire response. Drought in key areas of the nation, changing climate and longer fire seasons significantly affected wildland fire suppression efforts. Statistically, 2015 resulted in over 68,151 fires totaling over 10,125,149 acres burned nationally, as compared to 2014, where 63,312 fires totaling 3,595,613 acres burned.

Center photo on this page is an Air Tanker dropping retardant over a wildfire.



Firefighters learn skills needed for fireline work.



The Forest participated in the Boise County Emergency Response Exercise.

Fire resources were active in providing support to our neighbors and other national forests across the country. At one point during the height of fire season, nationwide, the U.S. Forest Service estimated that 55% of its workforce was involved in wildland fire (direct and support) activities. The intensity of the wildfire season was represented at the Boise Air Tanker Base with the pumping of over one million gallons of retardant into a mixture of air tankers (including the Next-Generation Tankers). While this is not a record, it represents an increase over the 10-year average of 821,000 gallons



Firefighter handcrews suppress wildfires on the Forest.

pumped. As of September 2015, over 700 loads of retardant were dropped within a 120 mile radius of the Tanker Base for wildland fires.

The Boise National Forest continues to implement prescribed fire to reduce fuel loading, affect fire behavior and to protect the wildland urban interface (WUI). While the Forest's target completion was 10,640 acres of fuels treatment, 13,208 acres were accomplished. These figures include 3,460 acres of prescribed fire within the WUI; 2,672 acres of prescribed fire in non-WUI; and 5,164 acres of mechanical treatment.

Fire Response

Job Corps Fire Crew 8 – “A Great Team to Be On”

Through partnership with the Boise National Forest, Fire Crew 8 is designed to offer the students training, leadership and mentoring from experienced leaders and crew overhead. This provides positive exposure as a foundation for student placement into federal fire careers. In addition, the Boise National Forest fire management staff provided opportunities for 25 Centennial Job Corps students to learn about different programs within the fire program, including the Idaho City Hot Shots, dispatch, engine operations and the fire cache.

Adam Ortega with Fire Crew 8 stated, “This is a great team to be on!” Perry Savage, another team member from Fire Crew 8 claimed, “The work and knowledge we gained is a great resume builder.”

The fire Camp Crew from Centennial JCCO also had a great year. They were assigned to ten incidents, totaling 73 days. Beginning in May, the Camp

Crew was mobilized to support the Boise County Simulation Exercises and assist with mobilizing the Australian and New Zealand firefighters at NIFC. They finished their assignments in September. The Centennial Camp Crew was recognized by Assistant National Director of Operations, Kim Christensen for their mission achievements within the Job Corps Program and in wildfire support.

Camp Crew student Larissa Peppers shared, “This is very challenging work and I learned a lot about myself [through my participation].” Fellow student George Rinehart summed up his feelings stating, “Doing what we did was very fulfilling.”

Centennial Job Corps and the Boise National Forest are fully engaged in developing Job Corps students in the career field of fire management. These opportunities include “hands-on” learning experiences to build their knowledge, skills and abilities.

Boise Forest Coalition Lends Support

Much of the work accomplished on the Boise National Forest involves partnerships and collaboration. The Boise Forest Coalition (BFC) has actively worked with the Forest, helping to build better projects and provide consensus-based recommendations.

The BFC was formed in 2010 and brings together multiple interests to craft recommendations for multi-faceted forest projects. The citizen-led group includes representatives from private land, ranchers, industry, conservation, recreation, State agencies and county commissioners, meeting monthly throughout the year. Their objectives include restoring forest health, reducing hazardous fuels, creating economic prospects, providing recreation opportunities and enhancing fish and wildlife habitats.

For the past three years, the BFC has been working on the High Valley Integrated Restoration Area, located about 30 miles northeast of Emmett. The Forest has been working on the environmental analysis and anticipates a decision on the High Valley Project in 2016.

Projects can take from one to several years to complete the collaborative, analysis and decision-making processes. Often, multiple projects are being worked on in any given year. The BFC was also actively involved in the Williams Creek Project, which was the first "Farm Bill" project on the Forest and one of a few nationwide. This project relied heavily on collaboration using an accelerated environmental analysis process authorized by the Agriculture Act of 2014 (Farm Bill). Collaboration, analysis and a project decision were completed in fiscal year 2015, followed by advertisement and sale. Work began on the roads needed to access the area in the fall of 2015.

The BFC recently began working with another Farm Bill project, the Bogus Basin Forest Health Project, and will continue this work in 2016. The work



Coalition Members tour and discuss the High Valley Project.

proposed in this planning effort aims to: remove dead, insect and disease infested timber in a popular recreation area; improve forest health; and create tree diversity.

Restoration

Lucky Peak Nursery

The Boise National Forest's own Lucky Peak Nursery plays a very important role in helping with fire and forest restoration efforts. The Nursery plants and nurtures a variety of seedlings and species to assist in revegetating key areas. Crucial planting expertise and experience is employed at the Nursery to make this happen.

Each year, the Nursery produces over 3.4 million, one-year old trees and shrubs, used in reforestation activities on public

lands in the intermountain-west that were affected by wildfire, timber harvests and other disturbances. In 2015, the Nursery grew over 3.4 million bare root seedlings and over 1.7 million container seedlings. These plants are important to stabilize soils on burned areas; reforest areas that have no natural regeneration; enhance wildlife habitat; and reintroduce native vegetation to key areas. In addition, Nursery staff engaged in 680 hours of conservation education for area youth in 2015.

In January 2015, the Nursery received an order for numerous sagebrush seedlings to support the Twin Falls District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in its restoration efforts in burned areas. After collecting over 2,000,000 seeds per pound, the Lucky Peak Nursery cleaned the seed and put it in cold storage until May.

In May, the seeds were sown in the greenhouse where they quickly grew through October. The staff at the Nursery oversaw their nurturing and growth. In October, the Nursery completed harvesting and packing of more than 400,000 sagebrush seedlings. Sixteen persons working for about 4 days were involved in the harvesting and packing these seedlings into cardboard boxes. Using six vans the seedlings were picked up and delivered to be planted at the burn rehabilitation site.

Background shows sagebrush plantings used for restoration efforts.



Tree seedlings for future forests.

Conservation Education and Engagement

A key focus of the Forest Service are programs to promote #GetOutdoors, working with youth and adults to learn and experience national forests. The Boise National Forest supports numerous programs for youth: mentoring high school and college students; hosting Youth Conservation Corps crews; and working with partners to provide programs in the schools and at other venues. Many employees lend their time and skills to foster effective learning and to outreach to students.

A few of the offerings included:

- The Forest, working with its partners, hosted the first Wild Outdoor Week (WOW!). Ten refugee teens (ages 14-17) from Congo, Thailand, Burma, Nepal, Iraq and Mexico completed hands-on service projects to plant native shrubs, build and install bird boxes and eliminate invasive weeds. Additionally, the teens learned about fire ecology, wildlife habitat, watershed dynamics, fishing, pollinators, native plants and natural resources careers.
- Fifteen youth (ages 10-14) participated in Trout Unlimited's Trout Camp. The youth camped out on the Boise National Forest, learning about fly-fishing and riparian habitats. The Forest's fisheries crew helped out by conducting an electro-shock demonstration for the group.

- The New Roots Summer Camp involved forest staff and partners working with 12 refugee youth (ages 10-15). The youth learned about native plants, birds, conservation and wildlife habitat and completed a photo display to illustrate their learning and experiences.

- During the winter, Boise National Forest staff and partners worked with local schools to provide lessons on forest ecology and hydrology to over 2,000 fourth to sixth grade students. The classroom sessions were followed by participation in Snow School where students took winter ecology field trips to Bogus Basin Mountain Resort to explore and experience winter ecology in the field, including wildlife tracking and outdoor survival.

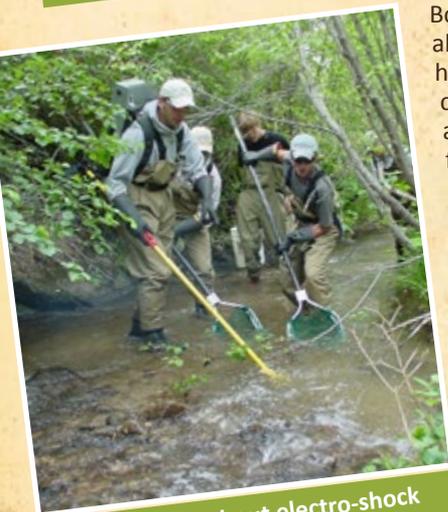
- The Lowman Ranger District, along with its partners, hosted the annual Veteran's Free Fishing Day. The event was attended by 55 veterans and their families/friends. The Boise's Civil Rights team facilitated free transportation for 40 veterans and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game stocked the ponds and issued educational fishing licenses, while the fire department provided lunch for the veterans. Quoting one veteran who participated from his wheelchair, "This is great! I haven't fished in 30 years." He went on to decline to eat because he was having so much fun fishing!



Forest personnel led guided field trips.



Youth assembled bird boxes at Wild Outdoor Week.



Youth learned about electro-shock technology for fisheries studies.



Pictured in the background are students from the Winter Snow School learning to explore the outdoors on snowshoes.

Outreach



Repairs Continue After Flash Flooding and Wildfires

Significant rainfall and flooding occurred in the summers of 2013-2014, causing a rash of damage on the Middle Fork and South Fork of the Boise River. Immediate repair work occurred to remove a mud slide and repair/replace portions of the Middle Fork Boise Road. Additional damage and mudslides along the South Fork Boise River (SFBR) dramatically changed the flow of the river impacting rafters, heavily damaging many trails and moving the Roaring River Trail Bridge. Two years later, work continues to repair and replace key infrastructure that was damaged in the flooding and subsequent wildland fires (Elk, Pony and Trinity Ridge) that burned through the Mountain Home Ranger District.



Above: Elk Creek boat ramp damaged by flooding and debris.

Below: Elk Creek boat ramp after repairs were completed.



These accomplishments include:

- Replacement of the Castle Creek Bridge.
- Replacement of the Granite Creek Culvert.
- Rebuilding of 12 miles of range fence and replacement of two water troughs.
- Hazard tree removal in developed recreation sites.
- Completing 9,000 acres of aerial seeding and 1,750 acres of upland bitterbrush and sagebrush planting.
- Planting 50 acres of riparian vegetation.
- Replacing the Fall Creek Bridge.
- Replacing the Bear Hole Bridge.
- Planting of 2,300 acres in the Feather River (Trinity Fire area).
- Inspecting and opening multiple locations to overnight camping on the lower SFBR that were impacted by the fires and debris flows.
- Repairing fence and improving parking at Willow Creek Trailhead.
- Installing camping facilities at Evans Creek Campground.
- Repairing the Elk Creek boat ramp and concrete high water ramp.
- Improving the portage on the canyon section of the SFBR around the Bounds rapid and creating an awareness video for rafting the Lower SFBR: www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=CRRinmOXKx8

In total, over \$4.5 million dollars were used for burned area emergency rehabilitation (BAER) projects and the Boise National Forest continues to work to repair the damage that these events caused.



Danskin OHV Trails Reopened for Motorized Use

The Pony Complex Fire occurred in 2013 and severely affected areas of the Mountain Home Ranger District, burning infrastructure features such as bridges, culverts and signs. Additionally, the burn and loss of vegetation and increased erosion on trails complicated the clean-up of the Danskin Trailhead, subjecting the area to an extended closure. This work included repairing damage to trails, replacing culverts and replacing/repair of two trail bridges.

The Mountain Home Ranger District reopened the Danskin OHV Trail system in June for motorized use after completing extended

trail work and clean-up of the area after the fire. This system encompasses 60,000 acres and provides more than 150 miles of Off-Highway Motorcycle (OHM) and All-terrain Vehicle (ATV) trails in a mountainous, high desert setting and is open from April 11 to December 31, if conditions allow.

Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM) are updated annually and identify the trails that are designated for motorcycle and ATV use. The updated version is usually available in May and is free. All MVUMs for the Forest are available online on the Forest website and through Avenza Map Store to download for free. It is important for forest users to use the annually updated maps as changes may occur throughout the previous year.



Employees working to replace the burned Danskin Bridge.

Greater Sage-Grouse on the Boise (GRSG)

In September, the Forest Service signed the Greater Sage-Grouse Record of Decision for the Great Basin Region (Idaho, southwest Montana, Nevada and Utah). In total, this affects about 165 million acres across 11 states in the West. The Decision approves amendments to existing Land and Resource Management Plans in Idaho, including the Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. On the Boise National Forest, the decision effects approximately 83,400 acres located on the Mountain Home Ranger District.

As part of the decision, sage-grouse habitat received various designations such as "Priority Habitat Management Areas" (PHMAs); "General Habitat Management Areas" (GHMAs); and in Idaho only, "Important Habitat Management Areas" (IHMAs). The qualifying lands on the Boise National Forest are designated GHMA (approximately 62,000 acres) and IHMA (approximately 21,000 acres). Lands that comprise generally moderate to high conservation value habitat and/or greater sage-grouse populations are classified as IHMAs and have special management direction to continue to maintain redundant, representative and resilient populations. Lands that are either occupied by GRSG seasonally or provide year-round habitat are classified as GHMAs.

After wildfires, non-native invasive species such as cheatgrass, spread rapidly and dominate native vegetation. Not only does the conversion to this highly flammable grass affect the frequency of repetitive fire, it makes re-establishment of sagebrush and more diverse native plants difficult. This results in increased intensity to wildland fires, degraded rangeland ecosystems and it affects the land's ability to provide habitat necessary to sustain the GRSG.



Close-up view of male greater sage-grouse.

The Decision calls for a phased implementation (working at the local level with the State, permittees and other stakeholders) and it allows time to gather additional site-specific information that may be needed. Forest staff are all learning a lot about the needs and potential actions involved with the implementation of the Decision. However, some of the first steps call for collecting sage-grouse habitat data across the Mountain Home Ranger District to provide needed data on sage-grouse nesting, brood-rearing and winter habitats.

Sustainability



Forest Health and Restoration Projects

Public land managers use vegetative treatments like harvesting, thinning, prescribed fire and mechanical clearing to reduce large wildfire severity; improve wildlife habitat; affect insect and disease infestation; and achieve other natural resource objectives. Promoting forest restoration and creating resiliency are key drivers for vegetative treatments.

The Boise National Forest is active in promoting healthy forest treatments using a variety of tools to address



This is an example of post thinning and prescribed fire treatment.

the required environmental analysis and on-the-ground needs for each project. These include the use of the Agriculture Act of 2014 (Farm Bill) Authority, stewardship contracting and collaborative efforts.

In May 2015, the Williams Creek decision was signed. This project was developed in collaboration with the Boise Forest Coalition (BFC) and it was the first project on the Forest to implement the Farm Bill authority. The sale was sold in September and the purchaser began working on the road system in the fall. This project includes provisions in the sale contract to allow for thinning of small diameter trees as part of the treatment.

Analysis and collaboration continued for the High Valley Integrated Resource Project. Working with the BFC, this project aims to improve wildlife habitat; reduce hazardous fuels; improve forest health and watershed function. The Forest expects to issue a decision on this project in early 2016.

The Becker Integrated Resource Project continues to be under analysis and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was released for 45-day comment in September. This restoration project proposes work to improve forest, soil, water, riparian, aquatics, wildlife and recreation conditions within the analysis



Mastication of brushy fuels or vegetation, is used to remove limbs and brush.

area. A key element to this project is providing for the long-term health of the forest surrounding the State's popular yurt system.

In the beginning stages of analysis, the BFC began working on the Bogus Basin Forest Health Project in 2015. This project proposes to remove dead and dying, insect and disease affected trees within the Bogus Basin Recreation Area and on surrounding National Forest System lands. Some of the key drivers of the project are aimed at improving the health and resiliency of the forest; addressing public safety concerns posed by dead and dying trees; and creating species diversity to maintain a forest cover in the area for the recreating public.

Resilient

Prescribed fire is used to remove woody debris and fuels (vegetation).

2015 Another Great Year



Cecilia Romero Seesholtz
Boise National Forest
Supervisor

The Boise National Forest was able to accomplish some great work because of the knowledge and skills of employees; dedication and interest of volunteers; and the commitment of partners to work together. I am very proud of the work we

were able to accomplish "on-the-ground" and the effort and dedication employees put into maintaining and building relationships with others.

The enclosed information highlights some of our accomplishments and I think that readers will enjoy learning more about them. Of course there are other numerous examples of great work accomplished in 2015 that promoted forest health and created resilient landscapes; enhanced career opportunities for students and veterans; restored landscapes affected by fire; advanced the use of new tools in planning and implementation of projects; and developed or maintained relationships; however, these highlights will give you a "sample" of the type of work we are accomplishing.

I am really proud to work alongside employees who care so much about the restoration and sustainability of the lands we are entrusted to care for and I very much appreciate the relationships we have with others who share a genuine interest in their national forests.

"Together we have really made a difference. I look forward to another great year in 2016."

Managing our Energy Footprint on the Boise National Forest

Much of the work accomplished on the Boise National Forest is seen on-the-ground and is based on being good stewards of the land and managing forest resources for sustainability. However, not all stewardship occurs "out on the Forest." Managing forest facilities,



Our employees check utilities at Forest Service facilities.

utilities and equipment is the hidden work that occurs in order to maximize work accomplishment in-the-field.

The Forest Service has been a leader in efforts to conserve energy. Programs such as "Power-it-Down" by turning off lights, shutting down computers, managing how much energy is consumed during weekends and off-hours, has resulted in significant savings nationwide in the Agency.

One of the efforts completed in 2015 involved the Utility Bill Cleanup effort. This was a nation-wide plan to identify and thoroughly review all current utility accounts for the Forest Service to better understand, manage and monitor our utility consumption. This effort is part of

the Agency's Energy Cost and Consumption Reduction Plan, designed to promote efficient use and spending, while complementing the Agency's conservation mission.

During the summer of 2015, a team of four forest employees visited and documented 126 different utilities across the Boise National Forest. They documented the location and condition of various utilities

and accounts; determined if discrepancies in billing and services exist; and explored opportunities to reduce consumption and costs associated with utilities across the Forest.

All totaled, the Forest Service estimates that a savings of almost \$4 million can occur with participation in this effort by all the national forests, grasslands, research offices and facilities.

Stewardship



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