2015 PRESCRIBED FIRE IN SOUTHWEST IDAHO

In southwest Idaho, public land managers are reducing the risk of large, severe wildfires, improving wildlife habitat, and achieving other natural resource objectives through the use of prescribed fire and other management programs.

Boise National Forest
Prescribed Fire Hotline
208-373-4208

Southwest Idaho
Prescribed Fire Website
www.rxfire.com

Acres of Treatment Planned for 2015

Southwest Idaho

Prescribed Fires Planned

Total Acres 30,977

Spring 2015 18,562

Fall 2015 12,415

Total Acres of National Fire Plan Mechanical Treatment Planned for Southwest Idaho for 2015 21,228

Idaho Department of Lands

Prescribed Fires Planned

Total Acres 1,867

Spring 2015 0

Fall 2015 1,867

Total Mechanical Treatment Acres 421

Bureau of Land Management

Prescribed Fires Planned

Total Acres 7,890

Spring 2015 300

Fall 2015 7,590

Total Mechanical Treatment Acres 11,660

Total Chemical Treatment Acres 900

Boise National Forest

Prescribed Fires Planned

Total Acres 6,640

Spring 2015 6,312

Fall 2015 328

Total Mechanical Treatment Acres 6,047

Payette National Forest

Prescribed Fires Planned

Total Acres 14,680

Spring 12,050

Fall 2,630

Total Mechanical Treatment Acres 3,750

PRESCRIBED FIRES:

Ensuring the Health of our Wildlands

Longer fire seasons are being noted across the nation and in Idaho the fire season is now approximately one month longer compared to the 1980's. With low snow packs this winter, the need for reducing fuel is heightened, particularly in the wildland urban interface. On average the Boise National Forest has 114 wildfires burning nearly 75,000 acres every year. The combined agencies in Southwest Idaho reduce fuel through prescribed burning and mechanical means on an average of over 50,000 acres with the majority of that in the wildland urban interface.

Public land managers annually use prescribed fire and mechanical clearing to reduce large wildfire severity, improve wildlife habitat, and achieve natural resource objectives.

Substantial progress has been made, particularly in urban interface areas and the number of acres treated annually is steady each year. However, inherent challenges can prevent land managers from igniting prescribed fires on as many acres each year as they believe are necessary. These challenges include weather, the time required to complete prescribed fire plans, and occasionally the impacts of prescribed fires on air quality.

Reducing hazardous fuels through prescribed fire and other tools is one of the key components of the National Fire Plan. In addition, the recently approved National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy looks at a three pronged approach to reducing fires, with a focus on resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities, and effective fire response. A key to this strategy is to reduce fuel concentrations and threats of uncharacteristic wildfires, especially in the wildland urban interface.

Prescribed fires on federal lands must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires extensive analysis of the environmental, economic, and social impacts of projects with public participation. The Farm Bill and Healthy Forest Restoration Act provides an expedited process using collaboration and integration with such things as county hazard mitigation plans, state fuels committee priorities, and direct work with local communities.

Fuel reduction management is a long-term proposition, but through annual programs combining federal, state and private land, and the people responsible or affected, the journey to return much of our forests to a historic condition and reduce the threat to life and property will be achieved.

For More Information

Detailed descriptions of each project are available on our website (www.rxfire.com) along with a local contact number to discuss the project. Prescribed fires must be ignited under certain weather conditions, both to achieve natural resource management objectives and to meet air quality standards. It is difficult to determine exactly when they will occur. Burns planned for each day can be found on line at www.smokemu.org. Individuals potentially affected by prescribed fires are encouraged to refer to this website on a daily basis during the spring and fall burning seasons.

COVER PHOTO: Fire fighters conducting a prescribed burn in the cooler spring season to reduce fuel that enhances protection of large diameter Ponderosa Pine from intense summer wildfires.

Program Success

Creating Fuel Breaks to Maintain and Restore Sage Grouse Habitat

BLM contractor mowing a fuel break along roadside.

Bureau of Land Management

Southwest Idaho has one of the largest intact strongholds of sage-grouse habitat in the Northern Great Basin and is one of the most endangered ecosystems in the United States. Management of wildfire has been identified as one of the key issues in maintaining sage-grouse populations in sagebrush dominated landscapes.

The Rapid Eco-regional Assessment of the Northern Basin and Range and Snake River Plain published in 2010 identified Southwest Idaho as a high risk for large scale wildfires. Wildfires in this remote area can grow quickly and affect hundreds of thousands of acres of sage-grouse habitat in a matter of days or within a single burning period. The Long Draw fire (2012) and Buzzard complex (2014) both had multiple hundred thousand acre runs in a single burning period at a rate of spread between 10 and 15 miles per hour.

Fifty foot mowed fuel break along roadside.

Because of the area's remoteness, the high potential for large wildfires, the long response time and limited sites for firefighters to establish safe anchor points to engage wildfires; strategic measures have been taken to protect one of the last remaining large, contiguous sage-grouse habitats.

Proactive fuel breaks such as the enhancement of existing roads and associated vegetation manipulation would serve to constrain fire spread or augment suppression efforts by providing firefighters increased access and safe locations to establish anchor points and engage in wildfire suppression.

Lightning caused wildfires in southwestern Idaho generally involve multiple simultaneous starts and exhaust resources quickly. Strategically placed fuel breaks enhance suppression efforts across districts and state boundaries minimizing response time, provide strategic and logistical opportunities, and would compartmentalize wildfires and minimize fire growth helping to reduce loss of large sagebrush stands.

Under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell and the cohesive strategy for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Boise BLM district has begun to embark on a multitude of fuel break projects to protect and maintain sage grouse habitat by reducing the size and severity of large wildfires.

The first of these projects implemented was the Bruneau Fuel Breaks Project. Last summer, the Bruneau field office commenced with the first treatment by mowing a total of 75 miles (909 acres) along pre-identified roadsides south of Bruneau, Idaho. BLM contractors mowed existing vegetation down to 6-12 inches and a width of 50 feet on both sides of identified roads. Mowing took place in late August and early September. Additional mowing will occur every 3-5 years once shrubs grow back. Application of herbicide may be used in the future to prevent the spread of invasive annual weeds. The Boise district will implement several other fuel treatment projects to maintain and restore sage grouse habitat once they are finished with the planning phase.

DEQ PM 2.5 Monitors in Southwest Idaho

Garden Valley
Idaho City
Ketchum
McCall
Twin Falls
Boise

Based on DEQ's analysis of pollutant indicators and meteorological conditions, a color-coded system notifies the public of the forecasted air quality condition for the following day. When air quality is expected to be good, a green alert is issued; when air quality is deteriorating, a yellow alert is issued; when air quality is poor and expected to deteriorate even further, a red alert is issued. Precautionary measures are prescribed for each type of alert.

Air Quality Index (AQI) Values	Levels of Health Concern	Colors
When the AQI is in this range:	*...air quality conditions are:*	*...as symbolized by this color:*
0 to 50	Good	Green
51 to 100	Moderate	Yellow
101 to 150	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	Orange
151 to 200	Unhealthy	Red
201 to 300	Very Unhealthy	Purple
301 to 500	Hazardous	Maroon

Air Quality Standards in Place

Locally, atmospheric conditions are monitored closely before ignition to maximize smoke dispersion. Factors evaluated include wind direction and speed, atmospheric stability, and long-range weather forecasts. Yet even in favorable conditions, the air may still become smoky, especially at night. Often, although the air is smoky, it still meets federal and state air quality standards.

Idaho's Department of Environmental Quality's real-time air monitoring program collects real-time measurements of ambient levels of air contaminants at more than 20 sites throughout the state. Integrated sampling methods are used at another 10 sites.

DEQ improved its website to provide the public with accurate information from its real-time air monitoring stations around the state. Real-time air monitoring data is located at http://airquality.deq.idaho.gov/

For daily planned Ignitions go to:
www.smokemu.org

For specific project information go to the Southwest Idaho Prescribed Fire Website
www.rxfire.com

Protecting Our Communities at Risk

Integrating a mix of fuel treatments and a community based Firewise effort with private structures is the key to enhance community protection from wildfire.

Using a variety of fuel treatments near community private structures, Firewise increases community protection from wildfire. This year's fuels reduction program mixes prescribed fire and mechanical treatments.

For more information on the Firewise Program log on to: www.idahofirewise.org

Mechanical treatments use chainsaws or other larger equipment to cut down or remove fuel, which is often followed by burning piled limbs or branches, or area burning *(called underburning)*.

Program Success

Fall 2014 Pile Burning-Boise District

Bureau of Land Management

Silver City Pile Burn

Silver City pile burning was completed in early November with a total of 351 acres of hand piles burned. BLM Boise District fire management employees participated in the burn to restore Owyhee upland forests and reduce potential of large catastrophic fires. Further management of the area will continue this spring.

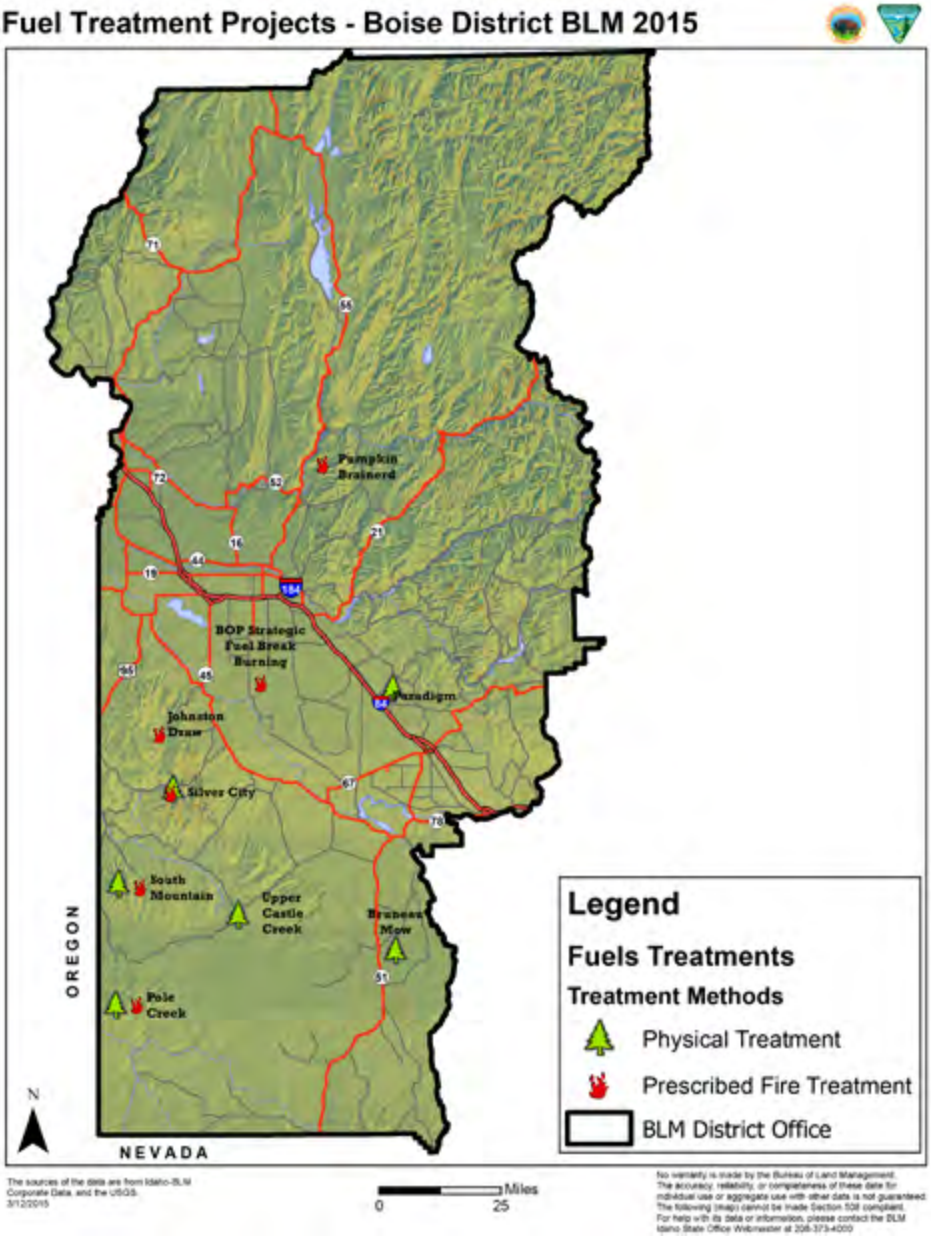
Pumpkin Brainerd Pile Burn

One unit totaling 25 acres of the Pumpkin Brainerd prescribed burn was initiated on November 17th, but further burning was suspended due to air quality concerns.

The project involves three units totaling 165 acres located northeast of Horseshoe Bend, Idaho. All three units are located in the Pumpkin Creek drainage and involved burning hand piles created by a thinning project to reduce hazardous fuels and improve forest health.

Dry Buck Pile Burn

All 40 acres of machine piles were completed on November 20th. The project is located west of Banks, Idaho and west of the Buck Creek drainage. The project involved burning machine piles created by a logging project to reduce hazardous fuels and improve forest health.



Program Success

Using Prescribed Burning to Restore Fire in Ecosystems

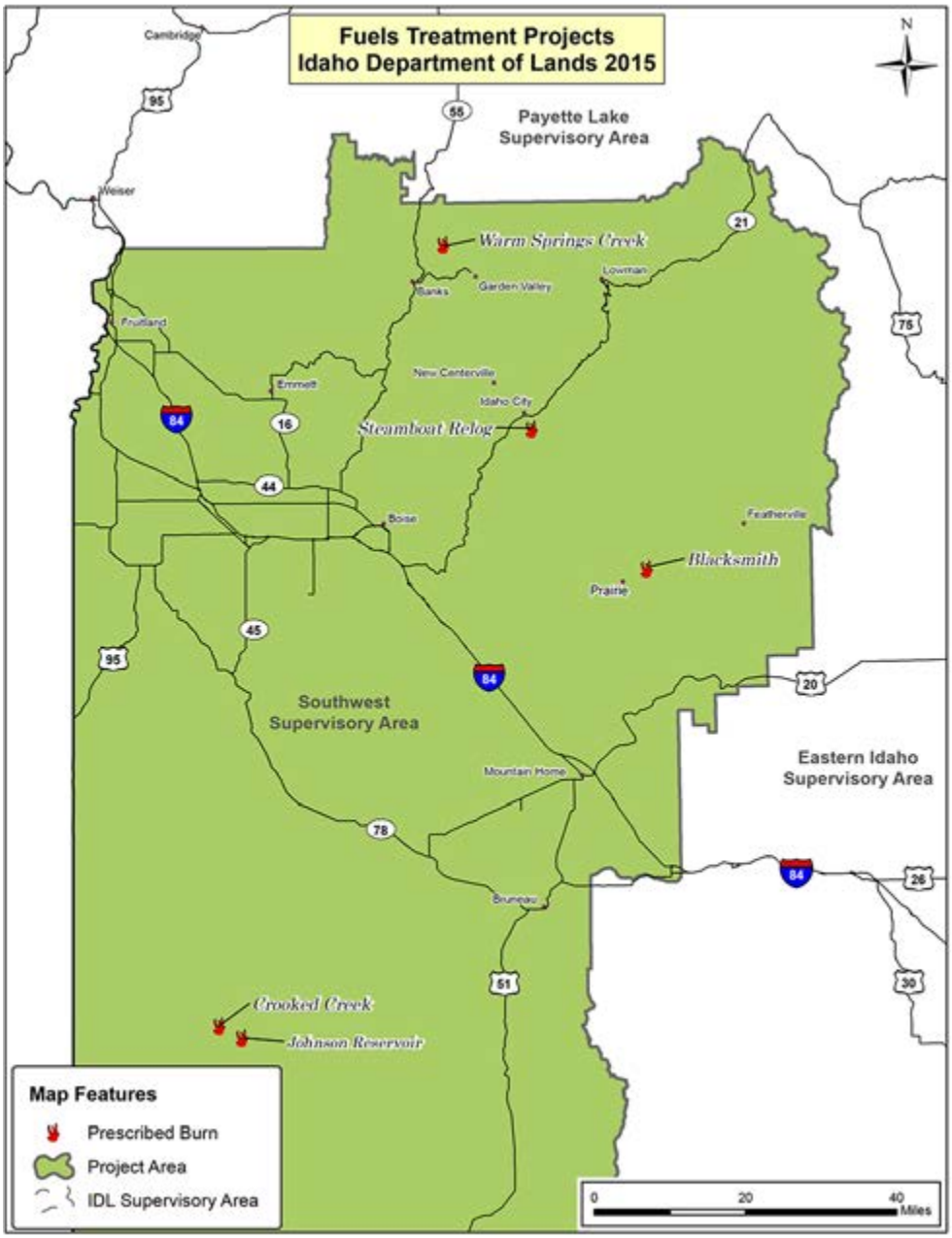
Boise National Forest

The Emmett Ranger District, on the Boise National Forest completed a restoration burn in April of 2014 to help reintroduce fire into the ecosystem.

Two units of the prescribed burn, known as the Rocky Canyon Restoration Burn Project, were completed in conjunction with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

The Rocky Canyon Restoration Burn is located in the Rocky Canyon area, north of Garden Valley. The unit falls within an area not directly accessible by roads. The bottom portion of the unit runs along the Middle Fork of the Payette River. However, where the top portion of the unit meets the ridgeline, an ATV trail allows for increased access.

The Emmett Ranger District fuels crew used aerial ignitions to complete over 1,500 acres of prescribed fire treatment in the Rocky Canyon area.



In the beginning of April, the Emmett Ranger District fuels crew assessed the unit and determined that the ground cover had dried to a level that would allow for the type of low-intensity, prescribed fire they were planning.

Using aerial ignition, the fuels crew ignited the 1,573 acre unit. The north slopes of the area still featured patches of snow. This concentrated moisture helped to keep the burn within the predetermined boundaries of the burn project. A post-burn assessment found that the ignition was successful in reintroducing the area's ecosystem to fire.

By returning fire to the ecosystem, fire is once again playing a role in reducing the naturally accumulated fuels. Reducing the ground vegetation near the trees helps to minimize fire behavior during the hot, dry summer months.

Depending upon conditions, the Emmett Ranger District hopes to burn one more unit in this area during the 2015 spring burning period. The new unit within the Rocky Canyon area would total nearly 2,000 acres.

Program Success

The Right Dose: Prescribed Burning Near Bogus Basin Demonstrates the Need for Ideal Conditions

Boise National Forest

The dark skies toss tiny snow flurries haphazardly about the Bogus Basin Mountain Recreation Area parking lot. Armed with drip torches, a devise used to ignite prescribed burns, a handful of Boise National Forest wildland firefighters descend down a ridgeline with the goal of completing tree-well burning over a few hundred acres.

Tree-well burning means igniting the area around the base of trees in order to burn off the duff layer, the vegetation and organic matter covering the forest floor. In doing so, the trees are better protected in the event of a wildfire, as the fire would have a lower concentration of fuels to consume around the trees' base.

The firefighters light a few test-fires, to see how the ground cover will burn. Within a few minutes, they call off the day's prescribed burn due to too much moisture in the fuels. While a layer of snow on the ground is ideal for tree-well burning, to help extinguish the fire and keep it from creeping beyond the intended burn area, too much snow combined with cold temperatures means that the fuels under the tree will not burn effectively enough to meet the project's objectives.

Tree-well burning in the Bogus Basin area will help to prevent an uncharacteristic intense wildfire from burning near the popular recreation area.

Returning to the site the following week, the firefighters once more ignite a few tree-wells to test the ignition capacity of the fuels.

After roughly a dozen test starts around tree bases, the burn boss determines that unlike

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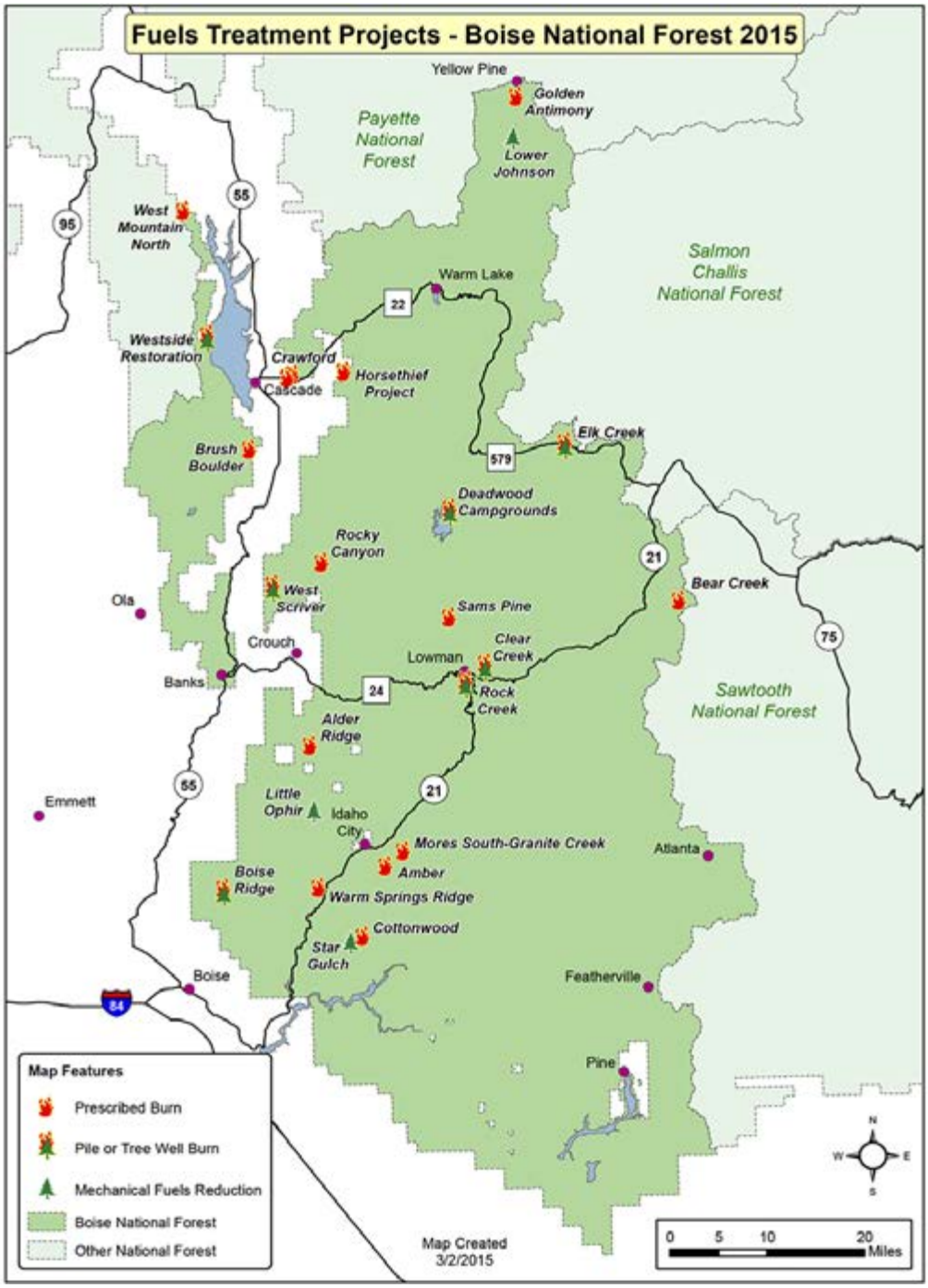

Program Success

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the previous week, these starts show that the fuels load is too dry.

Without an adequate blanket of snow covering the ground, the test-starts are beginning to creep beyond the drip line, the area beneath a tree's branches. Extending outside of this area means increased mop-up efforts and consumption of fuels. Once again the prescribed burn is called off after it's determined that the dry conditions will not allow firefighters to meet the project's objectives.

Prescribed burning is dependent on three main elements: moisture content in fuels, temperature and wind. Firefighters do not complete burns unless all three line-up in accordance with the projected outcome and expectations of the project.

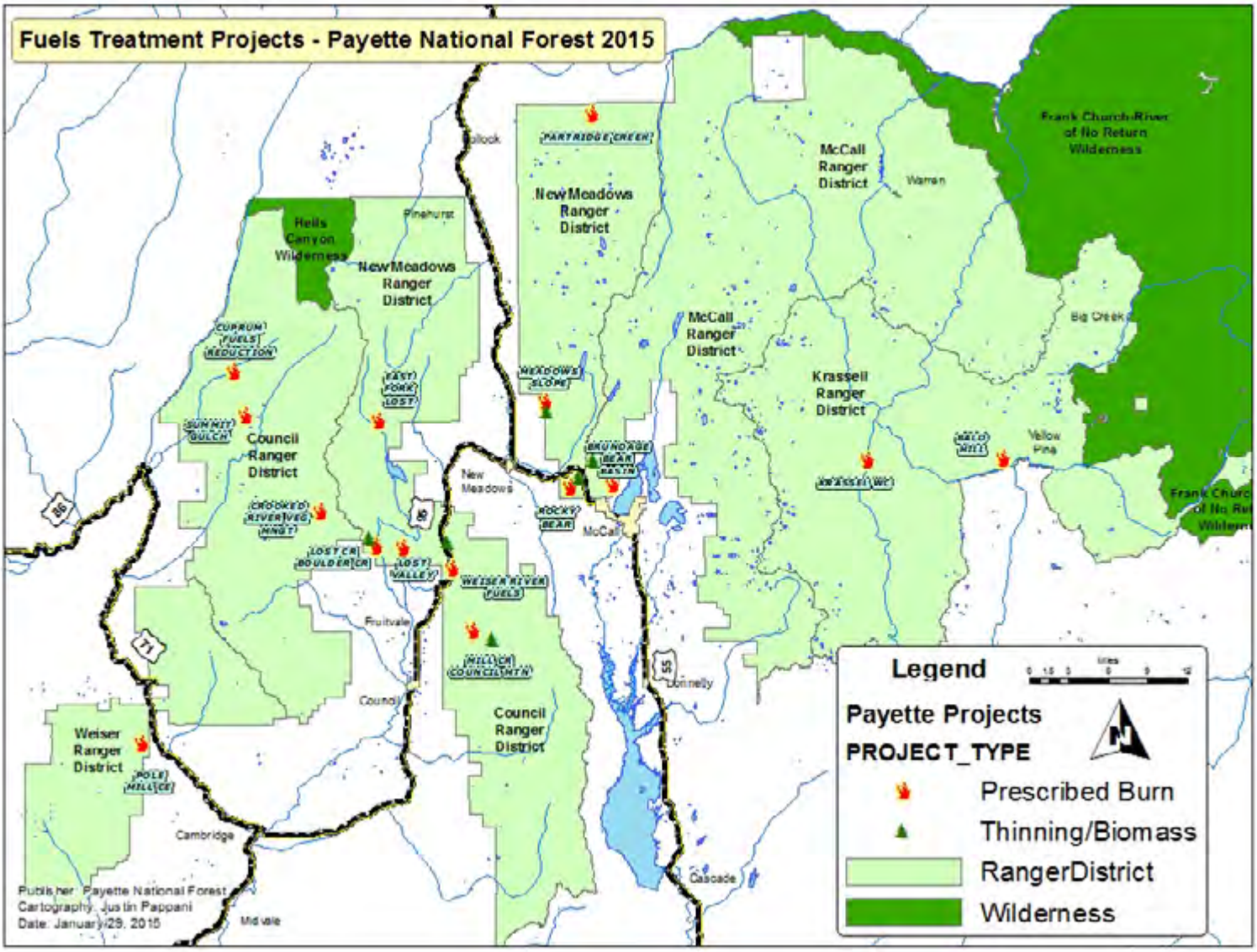
Prescribed burning at Bogus Basin is planned for this spring.

Prescribed Fire

It's Good Medicine for our Public Lands

Boise National Forest Prescribed Fire Hotline

208-373-4208

Southwest Idaho Prescribed Fire Website:

www.rxfire.com