

# OUT & About



The Pacific Region  
Outreach Newsletter



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### Upcoming Themes:

- Winter — Centennial
- Spring — Building Good  
Customer Service
- Summer — Refuge Support  
Groups
- Fall — Environmental  
Education

## Outreach Part of Fire Plan

*Region 1 builds relationships with new partners*

By Pam Ensley

The years 2000 through 2002 will be remembered as the start of the National Fire Plan (NFP). The plan emphasizes reducing fire risk to communities and restoring prescribed fire to fire-adapted ecosystems. It has also given the Service two new programs: Wildland Urban Interface and the Rural Fire Assistance Program. To put the plan in motion in the Pacific Region, Deputy Regional Director Rowan Gould conducts weekly NFP briefings to coordinate major fire management goals, ecological services, personnel, contracting, regulatory compliance, fire hiring and staffing, and interagency/state collaboration status.

With strong support from Congress, the Administration, and the Western Governor's Association, the National Fire Plan has provided opportunities for partnership for the Service's National Wildlife Refuge Fire Program and other Federal, State, Tribal, and local fire management organizations.

Region 1 has been experiencing a severe fire season throughout 2002. The Region continues to have a high number of wildland fires and an increase in wildland fire frequency and intensity because of drought conditions in several parts of the region. Live fuel moistures have reached historic lows in Oregon, Washington, and California.

See OUTREACH PART OF... Page 6



Photo by: Bill Moulumbay

Refuge fire engine responds to fire in a community near the refuge boundary.

## Saving Bald Eagle Roosts

*Klamath Basin fire program protects homes, habitat, and eagles*

By J. Susie Donahue

How do you protect forests, neighboring homes, and bald eagle roosts in a national wildlife refuge from the perils of wildfire? By reducing fuels. How do you reduce fuels? Not initially with chainsaws and prescribed fire. You begin with public meetings, education, and other outreach activities.

Bear Valley National Wildlife Refuge in southern Oregon was established in 1978 to protect roosting habitat for Klamath Basin wintering bald eagle populations. This 4,200-acre refuge provides one of the most important winter roosting areas in the United States. Observers have

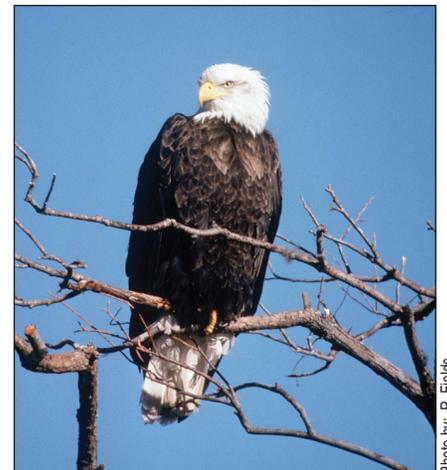


Photo by: R. Fields

Reducing fuels helps protect bald eagle roost habitat.

See SAVING ... Page 16

# OUT & About

Out & About is published quarterly for Region 1 Fish and Wildlife Service employees.

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## SUBMISSIONS

We welcome your submissions to **Out & About**. Regular sections in the newsletter are:

Feature Articles  
Case Studies  
Outreach Accomplishments  
Trainings & Workshops  
Announcements  
Q & A  
Letters to the Editor  
Outreach Resources

Articles should be submitted by E-mail or 3-1/2 inch floppy and run 150 to 500 words. Gear writing to newsletter style; avoid technical jargon. Photos welcome. Publication is not guaranteed, though every effort will be made to use submissions.

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## SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Spring	April 1
Summer	May 15
Fall	August 15
Winter	November 15

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## REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

# On the Fire Line

## Firefighters get boost from National Fire Plan

By Rowan Gould

**T**he U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other natural resource and land management agencies are on the way to solving a problem that been with us for many years — a problem we helped to create. Our long-standing national policy of complete fire suppression has left excessive fuel in our woodlands, created a lingering threat of catastrophic structural losses in communities near wildlands and led to heightened risks to human life.

The disastrous fire season in 2000 and a very damaging fire season this year highlight the urgency of coming to grips with policies of the past.

Fortunately, enlightened thinking and aggressive outreach efforts have spurred a growing awareness of the importance of fire as a natural, necessary ecological process. And today, we have commitment at the highest levels to do something about it!

A cadre of well-informed, visionary people have developed a way out of this seemingly insurmountable environmental problem. It is called the National Fire Plan.

In August 2000, the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior prepared a report that recommended how best to respond to the devastating fire season of 2000 and reduce the threat to rural communities. That report was approved in September 2000 and called the National Fire Plan. It also presented an estimate of resources needed to implement an effective, long-term fire program.

To make the plan a reality, a comprehensive strategy was released in August 2001 and an implementation plan was finalized in May 2002. The foundation of this implementation plan is outreach; it involved the participation of all affected stakeholders — Federal, State, Tribal and local — together with a common purpose. They agreed that the plan had to achieve these goals:

- Improve fire prevention and suppression.
- Reduce the build-up of fuels that have accumulated from previous suppression policies.
- Restore fire-adapted ecosystems.
- Promote community assistance.

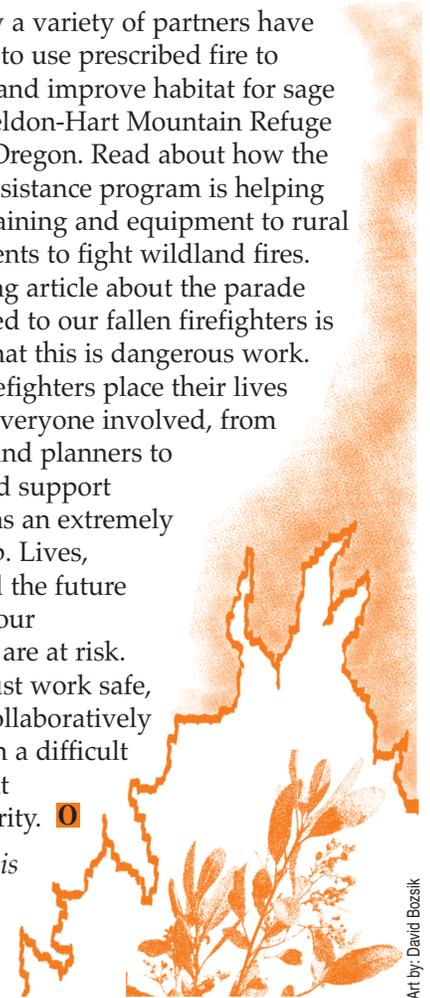
In the past, fire management was considered very task-specific, where one group might focus on habitat enhancement and another tackled suppression. With this strategy everyone is working together, taking a holistic approach to fighting fire.

Congress is also providing huge sums of money to carry out the plan: over \$2.2 billion in fiscal year 2002, and likely similar sums in the future. Scrutiny of this expensive program will be high, with a lot of pressure on our fire teams and supporting functions to be top guns in their field.

This issue of *Out & About* includes several excellent articles that show how outreach is a key component of the Pacific Region's fire program. Take a few minutes to learn how our fire crews in San Diego County in California are coping with the challenges of fires in the Wildland Urban Interface. Find out how a variety of partners have joined forces to use prescribed fire to reduce fuels and improve habitat for sage grouse at Sheldon-Hart Mountain Refuge Complex in Oregon. Read about how the Rural Fire Assistance program is helping to provide training and equipment to rural fire departments to fight wildland fires.

The moving article about the parade float dedicated to our fallen firefighters is a reminder that this is dangerous work. All of our firefighters place their lives on the line. Everyone involved, from fire fighters and planners to managers and support personnel, has an extremely important job. Lives, property, and the future condition of our environment are at risk. Everyone must work safe, smart, and collaboratively to accomplish a difficult but important national priority. 

*Rowan Gould is the deputy regional director.*



Art by David Bozisk

# Remembering Our Fallen Firefighters 🔍

*Parade float brings outreach message and healing*

By Rob Larrañaga, with contributions by Julie Martin

On July 10, 2001, the National Public Radio morning broadcast announced that young firefighters were lost in a blow up in an eastern Cascades forest fire in the state of Washington. The July 6, 1994 evening headlines vividly flashed through my mind: 14 Firefighters Lost in a Colorado Wildfire. This could not be! With so much emphasis on safety in the recent years, it did not seem like this could be happening again.

That it *had* happened was hammered home at the Sundome in Yakima, Washington, as our Columbia National Wildlife Refuge crew and many others waited in a procession of fire engines and Emergency Medical Service (EMS) vehicles several miles long at a memorial service for the four U.S. Forest Service firefighters who died in the eastern Cascades fire. It was evident that we had to learn from this tragedy and should never forget this loss.

To keep their memory alive, and to get the public to think about the risks that firefighters take daily on their behalf, we decided to tailor the theme of our parade float to their memory for the Adams County Fair in September 2001. The registration form described the theme simply: Remembering Our Fallen Firefighters.

There would have been huge excitement building up to the fair had it not occurred soon after the September 11 attacks on

America. But it seemed that our chosen theme was more appropriate than ever, as we expanded it to include the memory of our own Rich Guadagno and the many other firefighters and EMS personnel in New York City who lost their lives.

At a time when folks felt so helpless, this was an opportunity to divert our energy into a project that would begin our healing process, and perhaps the healing process of our community.

Our fire engine with its Columbia National Wildlife Refuge sign was followed by four of our fire crew dressed in full attack gear, handing out candy. This instantly got people on their feet to salute our American flags and shout “thank you firefighters, we love you,” which we could even hear over the patriotic music playing on our engine’s public address system.

Don’t ever underestimate the outreach impact of a fire engine and firefighters! We received a First Place in the Commercial Floats division and proudly display this plaque with the one we won in 2000 for our fire engine entry. The most treasured award, however, came from the cheering bystanders who recognized each of us and helped us honor those we have lost.

*Rob Larrañaga is the deputy project leader and Julie Martin is a lead forestry technician at Columbia NWR.*

*“Don’t ever underestimate the outreach impact of a fire engine and firefighters!”*



Photo by: USFWS

*Parade float with firefighters in full attack gear got people on their feet!*

## Managing Sage Grouse Habitat

*Fire may help when there's too much of a good thing*

By Mike Gregg

*"...a diverse group of partners has emerged, bound by their shared concerns for sage grouse."*

What do the Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State University (OSU), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nevada Division of Wildlife, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Nevada Bighorns Unlimited, Nevada Chukar Foundation, and the Beatys Butte Grazing Association have in common? How about sage grouse.

For several years, this unusual consortium of partners have done research on sage grouse habitat needs and monitored the effect of prescribed fire on sage grouse habitat and populations.

Sage grouse depend on sagebrush for food and cover throughout the year. Not surprisingly, their distribution is associated with the distribution of sagebrush in the western United States. During the past 50 years, populations of this ground-nesting bird have declined dramatically due to loss and degradation of habitat associated with development, overgrazing by domestic livestock during the late 1800s, suppression of natural wildfire, and introduction of exotic plants.

Research on sage grouse habitat needs has been conducted at Oregon's Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge since 1987 and at Nevada's Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding Bureau of Land Management lands since 1998. One aspect of the research has looked at using prescribed fire to manage sage grouse habitat.

Using fire as a management tool is controversial because fire kills sagebrush, the

very plant upon which sage grouse depend for survival. Why even consider a prescribed fire program? Because too much of a good thing may not, in fact, be good.

Our research shows that too much sagebrush can displace native grasses and forbs that are important to sage grouse reproduction. The birds need these habitat components close to their nesting shrubs to provide food or conceal their nests. When juniper and sagebrush densities are too high, the balance of these important herbaceous components is disrupted. In some areas, prescribed fire may help recast the balance; however, the verdict is still out on the use of prescribed fire to manage sage grouse habitat. Continued research will be necessary.

Sheldon-Hart Mountain Refuge Complex and OSU have taken the lead in conducting this important research. This partnership has steadily expanded due to the program's success and ongoing outreach. After many calls, meetings, and proposals, a diverse group of partners has emerged, bound by their shared concerns for sage grouse.

To maintain and build on this interest, each year the refuge and OSU organize a summer field tour at one of the study sites for all cooperators and other interested individuals. The field day is a consummate outreach opportunity, providing the chance for all involved to exchange ideas and information. 

*Mike Gregg is wildlife biologist Sheldon-Hart Mountain NWRC.*

*Prescribed fire thins excess sagebrush to benefit sage grouse (right) and other species.*



Photos by: USFWS

## When It's a Burning Issue

*Working with the media in stressful situations*

By Dick Birger

Wildfire is always spectacular and it usually draws media attention. Fire is also a natural event over which land managers exercise tenuous control, at best. Together these elements can produce a lot of adrenalin. Having worked as a Fire Information Officer with two national Type 2 Incident Management Teams, I have watched real experts working under stress and would like to share some tips for working with the media in volatile situations:

### CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPOKESPERSON

A knowledgeable person with authority must be immediately accessible to the media and remain so. This is critical at the beginning of an incident: Normally, the project leader or highest ranking official should be the spokesperson. Later on, another person (not a series of people) may fill in, but only if the original person in charge remains available.

### RESPOND QUICKLY AND SUCCINCTLY

There is an old saying that *"Given a head start, a lie will outpace the truth."* If you don't tell what is happening or answer questions in plain words at the outset, the outcome will usually be worse than any accurate information you may have provided. Remember, bad news usually never gets better with age. If the news is bad, get it out as quickly as possible.

### RESPOND QUICKLY AND PLAN AHEAD

It is absolutely crucial to keep everyone above you aware of events as they unfold. Anticipate what is going to happen and develop contingencies to ensure no one is surprised. If there is any hint that something is going to take a bad turn and receive the media's attention, develop the Service's response before speaking with the media. News is time dependent; you can't wait.

### DON'T FORGET INREACH

Remember that while there should only be one voice for the agency, *all* staff members need to understand what has happened, what our message is, and what we are doing to get our message out.

### KEEP THE MESSAGE CONSISTENT

As staffing or conditions change, it's easy to fall behind on current conditions. If something has changed from your previous position due to new facts or new circumstances, acknowledge it, explain it, and move on. Have just one spokesperson who receives the updates and controls what is being said and how it is presented.

### WATCH WHAT YOU SAY

If you don't know an answer, say so and quickly get the correct answer. Some reporters may try to put words in your mouth: Never speculate! Try to use neutral words and *always* avoid acronyms, scientific terms, and government jargon. Remember that nothing is ever off-the-record. If it can't be on the nightly news or in the morning paper, don't say it.

### RELATE TO YOUR AUDIENCE

Think of your audience as you formulate your message. Don't overwhelm them with facts and figures. Visual images are more important than words. The value of what you are saying will be judged as much by how you look (gestures, clothing) and present the message as the message itself. Relax so people can see you as a real person, not a bureaucrat. Try to do interviews outside and use appropriate "props" when you can, as long as they don't detract from your message.

### DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Meet the press before you have to "Meet the Press." Establish a good reputation with the local media when things are going well. Share good feature stories with them so they get to know you and your role before a newsworthy incident occurs. You will receive the benefit of the doubt when you are on the firing line. If the networks and other national media appear, they often initially depend on local affiliates. This can save you stress early on when you're feeling the heat the most. **O**

*Dick Birger is the project leader at Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex.*

*"If the news is bad, get it out as quickly as possible."*

## Fire in the “WUI”

*Fighting and preventing fires in urban Southern California*

By Bill Molumby

How do you balance the protection of over 12 critical habitats and 23 federally-listed threatened and endangered species with the protection of private property? The Southern California fire management staff operates within a complex web of environmental groups, government officials, regulatory agencies, and private property owners in a zone called the “Wildland Urban Interface” (WUI) to accomplish that goal.

A WUI is any location with human-made structures in close proximity to wildland fuels at risk of fire. A dramatic example of a WUI zone is San Diego National Wildlife

Refuge, which is a land-locked island of habitat surrounded by development.

This refuge was primarily established to protect threatened and endangered plant and animal species within the Multiple Species Conservation Plan, a habitat conservation effort by numerous local, state and federal jurisdictions in eastern San Diego County.

Most of this planning area is covered with Southern California chaparral, known for historically large and disastrous wildfire conflagrations. Numerous homes and subdivisions within the refuge boundary

*See FIRE IN THE “WUI”... Page 7*

## Outreach Part of...

Continued from Page 1

To cope with these conditions many refuges, along with neighboring fire partners, anticipated above normal fire activity throughout the summer and late fall and received severity funding authority. This has provided additional fire staffing and equipment to improve initial and extended attack response capability on refuge land and neighboring partners lands.

This year Region 1 reduced fire risks to many communities by completing Wildland Urban Interface projects on approximately 25,000 acres. These prescribed fire and mechanical treatments projects are largely work that private contractors are completing. Local businesses benefitted, as contractors in these communities received approximately \$3 million to accomplish the work. Projects are chosen from partnering agencies’ priority lists.

Another success, the Rural Fire Assistance Program, has been well received by rural fire departments in small communities. The Region distributed \$150,000 to 17 rural fire departments and continues to build strong relationships with various fire organizations in the communities.

The Region’s hazardous fuels reduction program on refuge lands was also increased with the inception of the NFP. Our well

planned and executed prescribed fire program safely restores thousands of acres of wildlife habitat on refuges, reduces the risk of wildfires to communities, and promotes partnerships with fire departments in the six western states. This year, with yet another severe fire season consuming our firefighters’ time, we still were able to complete prescribed fire and mechanical treatments on about 40,000 acres of refuge lands.

Fire management planning continues to be a bright spot. The region has completed fire management plans for refuges and national fish hatcheries that use prescribed fire. The planning continues on less fire prone lands and is slated for completion by the end of the fiscal year.

From establishing new partnerships to meeting with refuge neighbors, outreach is an important part of implementing the National Fire Plan. These efforts and our many successful contributions to the plan make me justifiably proud of the region’s fire program managers and staff. I am confident that our ongoing outreach and professionalism will result in a continued safe and productive fire program. **O**

*Pam Ensley is the fire management director for Region 1.*

## Upcoming Events

### Washington Water Weeks

**When:** August 31 - October 20

**Where:** Statewide

**Contact:** 360/943-3642

### Ridgefield NWR Bird Fest

**When:** October 11-13

**Where:** Ridgefield, WA

**Contact:** 360-887-9495

<http://www.ridgefield>

[friends.org/](http://www.ridgefield)

### National Wildlife Refuge Week

**When:** Oct. 13-19

**Where:** Nationwide

**Contact:** Susan Saul

503/872-2728

### Return of the Salmon Festival

**When:** October 19

**Where:** Anderson, CA

**Contact:** Coleman NFI

530/365-8622

### Sandhill Crane Festival

**When:** November 8-10

**Where:** Lodi, CA

**Contact:** 800/304-LODI

[www.lodichamber.com](http://www.lodichamber.com)

or Bruce Forman

916/358-2353

## Fire in the “WUI”

Continued from Page 6

complicate fire management planning. Over the past 10 years, the area in and around the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge has averaged 15 wildfires per year — all of them caused by people.

Early refuge planning efforts recognized the need to address the effects of fire management on the refuge and surrounding private properties.

In 1996, the Service hired a fire management officer to plan, organize, and implement a comprehensive strategy for wildland fire prevention, with refuge and private property protection as the main goal.

Education, suppression, and hazard fuel reduction are the major components of this strategy and outreach is an important delivery method. Our messages communicate the value of refuge lands to the community and the need for wildlife and wildlife habitat protection.

We have initiated public meetings, held training sessions, made contacts at public events, and dispersed literature through libraries and other public venues.

The development of a suppression organization was a more difficult undertaking, requiring equipment purchases, hiring personnel, meeting national qualification standards, and establishing an infrastructure. Interagency cooperation and coordination have been crucial. Six municipal, one tribal, one state, and two federal fire departments require daily coordination and cooperative fire protection agreements that detail how the Service will integrate with each department’s fire response, command structure, communications network, and other issues.

Hazardous fuel reduction is the critical link between prevention and suppression. The goal is to reduce the amount of burnable fuel along the WUI. A dual purpose is served: to lower the flame lengths and intensities at the interface by providing a “defensible space” in which firefighters can operate to protect homes and to protect the refuge from wildfires occurring on private property.

We coordinate with local fire marshals regarding hazard reduction compliance in order to identify areas of concern in the WUI. The refuge fire management staff and the WUI project coordinator can develop projects

that protect both the refuge and private homes in nearby communities.

Property owners are an important part of reducing burnable fuels on private lands that could significantly impact the refuge. Much of our effort is spent educating neighboring homeowners. We accomplish this by personally contacting people, participating on the San Diego Fire Safe Council (a grassroots homeowner organization that meets to discuss wildfire safety and ways of protecting their community), and distributing brochures about wildfire safety and landscaping. **O**

*Bill Molumby is a fire management officer at San Diego NWR.*



*The refuge is separated by a firebreak from a major subdivision in the Wildland Urban Interface.*



*A helicopter fights the Jamal Fire at the edge of the Wildland Urban Interface.*

*“Our messages communicate the value of refuge lands to the community...”*

# Grants Buy Equipment and Training

*Rural Fire Assistance program helps small fire districts*

By Gary Darrington and Greg Hultman

*“The program allows the DOI to conduct training, purchase equipment, and pursue prevention activities on a cost-share basis...”*

The call comes in to the local rural fire department: There’s a fire on a nearby national wildlife refuge. Often before the Fish and Wildlife Service can reach the scene, local volunteer firefighters begin arriving. These men and women must take the first steps to suppress the fire.

Some have come dressed in full turnouts (the heavy pants and coats worn to protect them from the intense heat of structural fires). Others may stop what they’re doing and arrive wearing cut-offs and sandals. Neither mode of dress works in fighting a wildland fire, but without training and the required special equipment, how would these volunteers know what is required?

These dedicated firefighters volunteer numerous hours with little monetary compensation. Their motivation comes from teamwork and pride in what they have accomplished.

To better prepare them to give the help that is needed, they need to learn the proper tactics for attacking a wildland fire, wear the appropriate dress/protective gear, and understand the command structure so they can fit safely and efficiently into the suppression effort.

The Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) program was established by Congress under the FY2001 Interior Appropriations Act to “enhance firefighter safety and wildland fire protection capabilities of rural fire districts.” Congress appropriated \$10 million dollars to be used by the Department of the Interior (DOI) for RFA nationwide during FY2001.

The maximum allowable DOI contribution for each Rural Fire Department (RFD) is \$20,000 per year. This can amount to a significant portion of the annual budget for small fire departments that may rely on local bake sales and cleaning parking lots to supplement their budgets.

The program allows the DOI to conduct training, purchase equipment, and pursue prevention activities on a cost-share basis with rural fire districts. In return, the rural fire districts provide vital support (mutual aid) for resources on federal lands.

Frequently, an RFD, the Service, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection have overlapping jurisdictions and responsibilities. So how does the RFA program really work?

In San Diego County, there is a special relationship between the Service and the Rural Fire Protection District (RFPD). These firefighters share Station 66 in Jamul, California. The two agencies pool equipment and respond to the same fire calls. In the last year they responded to 15 fires, ranging in size from a half-acre to 1,200 acres.

Refuge lands in San Diego County account for 10,000 acres. San Diego has one of the most challenging wildland fire environments in the world. Drought conditions, flashy continuous fuels, steep mountainous terrain, and large portions of private land intermixed with state and federal lands call for immediate interagency responses.

Last year, the Service was able to provide \$10,000 in RFA funding to the fire district. This money was immediately put to good use to purchase personal protective equipment, lightweight Wajax fire hose, and tools for fire line construction.

The agencies supplement the purchases with specialized training. At Station 66, the RFPD took the lead on classes involving structural hose lays, medical responses, and extrication techniques.

The Service provided expertise on wildland fire hose lays, packing fire hose, use of specialized tools and their maintenance, and topographical map reading.

They cross trained on radio use, equipment nomenclature, engine pumping, compartment items, and area orientation.

The results of the grant program and training are yielding measurable results in terms of lives saved, homes spared, and wildland acreage protected. This is outreach at a very high level! 

*Gary Darrington now works for the Bureau of Land Management and Greg Hultman is the wildland urban interface coordinator at the California/Nevada Office.*

# Lighting a Fire in the Community

*New regional prescribed fire crew makes effort to fit in*

By Justin Hughes and Gary Luce

The Turnbull NWR Prescribed Fire Crew was formed in August 1998 as a pilot project to reduce hazardous fuels and improve habitat in a fire-dependent ecosystem. Between 1998 and 2001, the crew treated over 5,000 acres in Region 1 through mechanical thinning and broadcast burns.

These successes paved the way for permanent status in 2001, when the crew was converted to a Regional Prescribed Fire Crew as part of National Fire Plan legislation. The highly trained crew is available to assist all Pacific Region refuges with complex prescribed fire operations and provide needed support during periods of high fire danger. Often, the group is the first to respond as an "initial attack resource."

Over the past 18 months the Regional Prescribed Fire Crew has traveled to six refuges in Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California. The group also traveled to Mississippi to complete prescribed burns on more than 1,500 acres at several refuges.

In addition to serving the region in a firefighting and training capacity, the Spokane, Washington based-group has made community outreach an important mission. Three crew members are volunteer firefighters with Spokane County, sharing their expertise along the way.

Crew members have taught several technical classes involving wildland firefighting tactics to one of the county fire districts.

They've also spread the word to the public about protecting their homes from fire in the urban interface by helping to staff a booth at the Spokane Interstate Fair sponsored by five refuges and a field office. (See "Hot Fire Exhibit" under Announcements on page 11.)

*Justin Hughes is a lead forestry technician and Gary Luce is a forestry technician at Turnbull NWR.*

*"Crew members have taught classes involving wildland firefighting tactics."*



Photo by: Columbia NWR

*Regional crew sets a test fire to determine burning conditions.*

Displays, Exhibits,  
and Publications

RESOURCES

### Digital Image Library Now On-Line

The Service's new Digital Image Library offers a collection of more than 2,000 photographs documenting wildlife species, their habitats, and wildlife management activities. All of these images are copyright-free and available for downloading from the web at <http://images.fws.gov>. The Digital Image Library is searchable by subject, location and photographer. More images will be added regularly. This new capability helps tell the Service's story through photos and their captions.

### ABA Outreach Aids

The American Birding Association (ABA) website has two features to use for outreach to birders. The *Opportunities for Birders Directory* at <http://www.americanbirding.org/opps/voldiindex.htm> leads people to bird-oriented volunteer projects in parks, refuges, wildlife management areas, etc. The *Birding and Nature Festivals Directory* searchable index at <http://americanbirding.org/resources/evntfestgen.htm>

lists a variety of birding and nature festivals, by locale, topic, or month. If you would like to list your festival in the ABA database, you can use the on-line Festivals Listing Form. For more information, email Paul Baicich at [baicich@aba.org](mailto:baicich@aba.org).

### NWRS Centennial Commemorative Blanket

Don't miss this chance to purchase a traditional "Trade Blanket," 64" x 80" with special ultrasuede commemorative Centennial label and interpretive hang tag. The beautiful multi-colored bands on the blanket symbolize the ecosystems where refuges are found. Made in USA by Pendleton Woolen Mills. Retail price is \$165. Add \$6 for shipping for each blanket. Washington residents add \$13.20 in sales tax per blanket. VISA and MC accepted. Contact Friends of Mid-Columbia River Refuges, P.O. Box 2527, Pasco, WA 99302-2527. Phone: 509/543-8322 or 509/545-8588. Fax: 509/545-8670.

# Beating Cheatgrass in the Shrub-Steppe

*Networking and workshops are keys to project success*

By Dr. Steven O. Link, Randal W. Hill, and Eric M. Hagen

*“A big part of our job is to communicate our findings to DOI firefighters and managers and reach out to the public.”*

Wildfire is now a very common phenomenon in the West. These fires are gradually reducing the native plant diversity of Fish and Wildlife Service properties and reducing habitat value for wildlife.

This is not the legacy we want to leave to future generations. Recognizing this problem, the Department of the Interior (DOI) has implemented the Joint Fire Science Program to find solutions.

Recently we received a grant to determine how to reduce fuel loads in the shrub-steppe. A big part of our job is to communicate our findings to DOI firefighters and managers and reach out to the public.

In large part, the reason for frequent fires in the shrub-steppe is cheatgrass. This non-native annual grass is particularly competitive in disturbed soil and has taken over much of the West where grazing was or is severe. In disturbed soils, cheatgrass can form monocultures that easily carry fire.

This leads to a further reduction in the diversity and cover of native species, making it easier for cheatgrass to increase even in relatively undisturbed soils. The resulting ecological feedback loop is responsible for more frequent fires and larger fires, and the loss of millions of acres of sagebrush, a shrub necessary for the survival of several bird species.

It is possible to beat cheatgrass; there are species that can compete. Effective

revegetation techniques are available, but little progress has been made largely due to fiscal restraints on land management agencies. We proposed to find the least costly method of beating cheatgrass and developing management protocols that will interrupt the cheatgrass-fire feedback loop.

Our study will investigate application rate and frequency using imazapic (Plateau) and glyphosate (Roundup) herbicides, determine the herbicides' effectiveness in reducing cheatgrass and their effects on non-target species, and seed with Sandberg's bluegrass, a competitive native grass with little continuous fine fuel that can help break the cheatgrass-fire feedback loop.

We plan to use small test burns in stands of cheatgrass densities that will mimic the effects of herbicide treatments that reduce fuel loads and therefore, result in a reduced fire risk. This will allow managers to balance the costs of fuel reduction against the fire risks posed by varying plant communities.

The study relies heavily upon outreach. Hill's previous work with chemical company representatives testing for control of other refuge weeds facilitated their involvement, while Dr. Link has a background in restoration and knew a Bureau of Land Management specialist and a precision herbicide applicator.

We plan on conducting a one-day training workshop and field trip to cover the how-to aspects of the study. A one-day restoration "show me" tour will focus on the problems and the results.

We'll also publicize these gatherings in the daily and weekly papers in our area, with the hope of informing and drawing a variety of representatives from weed boards, restoration groups, and land management agencies, as well as interested neighbors and the general public. **O**

*Steven Link is a botanist with Washington State University. Randal Hill is a wildlife biologist at Columbia NWR. Eric Hagen, an FWS fire management officer for the Columbia Basin, resides at Hanford Reach National Monument.*



Photo by: Randy Hill

*Cheatgrass, left, carries fire while Sandberg's bluegrass, right, won't feed a fire.*

## Fast Results

In the spring issue of *Out & About* you read about the attractive interpretive panels developed with oil spill mitigation funds to help protect seabirds and other marine life along Oregon's coast. These Oregon Education Project panels were installed at several coastal locations on Thursday, July 18.

Within 12 hours of panel installation at Port Orford, folks at Oregon Coastal Refuges received a call from a fisherman reporting that a boat was harassing Steller sea lions off of Orford Reef.

Not long afterward, the refuge heard from the Columbia River Maritime Museum. Their education coordinator read a story in the Astoria newspaper regarding the Oregon Education Project and wanted to partner on a seabird education program covering schools in five counties of northwestern Oregon. We are also discussing a similar boaters' education project with refuges in the Caribbean.

## O&A Wins Again

Maintaining its reputation as a winner, *Out & About* has captured second place in the "Internal Communications" category of the Association for Conservation Information's annual awards program.

This is the sixth time in a row that the Pacific Region outreach newsletter has won either first (three times) or second (three times) place in

alternate years. The award recognizes our efforts to consistently produce a timely, well-designed and informative publication.

Judges' comments included: "great information, well presented in an attractive manner" and "the communications column is great and ensures it is a great resource for field personnel."

Thanks to all of you who have submitted stories about your outreach work, successes, and insights. Without your contributions, we could not produce an award-winning newsletter.

## Caterpillar Calendars

Caterpillar, the heavy equipment and engine manufacturer, will feature images of refuges on its 2003 calendar in tribute to the NWRs centennial. The back of the calendar will have a map showing the locations of refuges and text referring people to the Refuge System website.

With over 2,500 dealers in the U.S. and Canada giving away the calendars as promotions, Caterpillar customers across North America will be exposed to the Refuge System next year.

## Wanted: Your Events

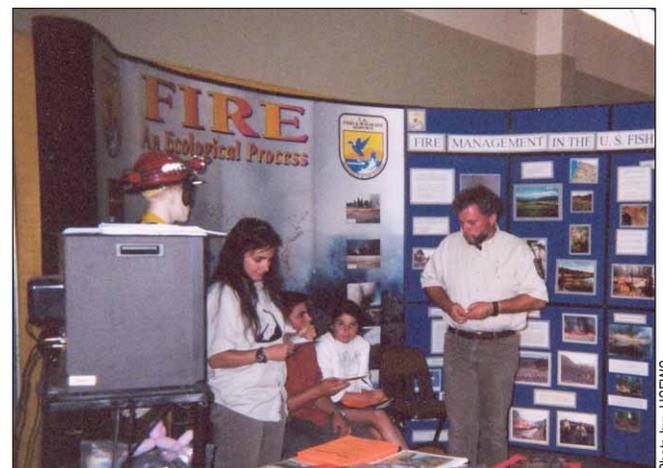
Do you have a wildlife festival or cultural celebration you'd like to promote? *Out & About* includes upcoming events listings in every issue. Each listing includes when and where the event occurs and gives contact information.

Every Region 1 employee should receive a copy of the newsletter and it is posted on the Pacific Region website. This is a great way to receive some free publicity for your special gathering. We're especially looking for listings from Hawaii, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, and Washington. Please send information to Jeanne\_Clark@fws.gov.

## Hot Fire Exhibit

This popular fire management exhibit at the Spokane Fair had people fired up! It featured the fire management practices of several Columbia Basin refuges. Visitors had a chance to see a video showing ways to make homes safe from wildland fires, talk with firefighting professionals, and go home with a handful of brochures and flyers about fire safety.

Refuges at Turnbull, Little Pend Oreille, Kootenai, Columbia, Mid-Columbia Complex, and the Upper Columbia Basin Field Office partnered on the exhibit.



Fire management exhibit at Spokane Fair was popular with visitors.

Photo by: USFWS

# Dealing with Trespassers and Arson

*Education part of the solution in Southern California*

By Greg Hultman

*“Getting the community to report suspicious activity has reduced the presence of trespassers on the refuge.”*

Arson is the leading cause of wildland fires in San Diego County, and the Refuge System is not immune. In the last 10 years, 857 wildland fires have been attributed to arson on state and federal lands in San Diego County; of these, 27 were on refuges.

Whereas most arson fires in the county are set for the thrill of action and destruction, our follow-up shows that refuge fires are mainly from trespassers, set for warming and cooking, or in retaliation because they have been evicted from refuge lands.

Research shows that San Diego’s temperate year-round climate and undeveloped areas make it a leading destination for the homeless. On our refuges, they make elaborately camouflaged shelters in dense stands of coyote bush and mulefat in areas where visitation is minimal.

In early March 2002, the fire alarm went off just as it was getting dark. The Fish and

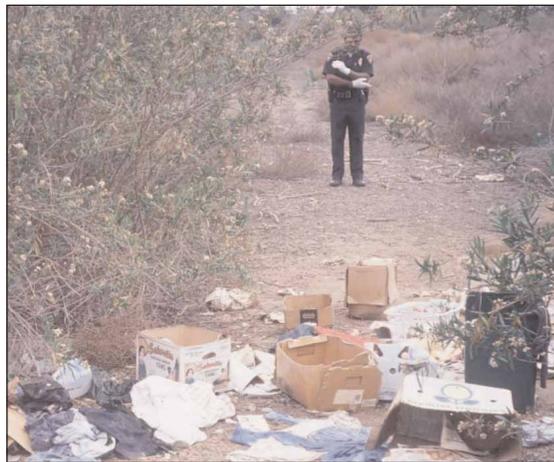
Wildlife Service, along with cooperating fire departments, responded to a half-acre fire intentionally set in a stand of cattail at the South San Diego Bay NWR. While the firefighters were working they heard a loud thud and discovered a man lying near a tree. He admitted he fell out of the tree while straining to get a better view of the fire. He later confessed to local law enforcement that he had set the fire in anger because he had been evicted from the refuge for trespassing earlier that day.

Whatever the reasons for trespassing, we cannot condone these activities because fires spread so rapidly and threaten people living near the refuge boundary and refuge fish and wildlife resources, including many threatened and endangered species, such as the least Bell’s vireo, California gnatcatcher, Belding’s savannah sparrow, and light-footed clapper rail.

What can be done to reduce the threat of fire? These problems have prompted solutions across the county. For example, once a year the residents of Imperial Beach, adjacent to the Tijuana Slough NWR, get a plastic bag with pamphlets about activities that impact the refuge and its wildlife, including a neighborhood watch brochure. Getting the community to report suspicious activity has dramatically reduced the presence of trespassers on the refuge. We’re also pursuing other ways of eliminating arson, including:

- Integrate fire prevention information into existing visitor services;
- Post signs stating “No Campfires/No Overnight Camping” in critical areas of the refuge;
- Increase patrol of remote areas of the refuge where illegal camps are most frequently noticed; and
- Create an appendix to the Fire Plan regarding fire prevention and a community-based fire-prevention program with other cooperators.

*Greg Hultman is the wildland urban interface coordinator at the California/Nevada Office.*



Photos by: Greg Hultman

*Litter (above) and cooking fires at illegal camps increase fire danger.*

# Interagency Ties Vital to Success

*Prescribed fire at Sheldon-Hart Mountain NWRC*

By Kevin Conn

Teamwork is a necessity throughout most Fish and Wildlife Service programs and nowhere is it more essential than in the world of firefighting. Whether it's battling a wildfire or conducting a prescribed burn, the small Fish and Wildlife Service fire force cannot accomplish this work alone.

Historically Service fire management programs have been comparatively small compared to those at other land management agencies. At the same time many large prescribed fire projects are complex, have potentially hazardous control problems, and must be ignited under nontraditional conditions. Our challenge is that most large prescribed fire projects planned for landscape scale habitat restoration and hazardous fuel reduction require equally large numbers of people and specialized resources in order to be safely completed.

We are not alone. Many federal and state agencies face the same challenges in regards to prescribed fire programs, even those with larger firefighting forces. These challenges are easily solved by good interagency working relationships. Solid connections are developed through inreach and outreach during mutual training exercises, through agency coordination meetings, and when we are called to assist each other on fires.

One such teamwork project occurred during the fall of 2001 on the Escarpment

Prescribed Burn on Sheldon NWR, a several thousand acre prescribed fire to reduce invading western juniper in California bighorn sheep habitat.

Natural fire had been suppressed in the area for the past 100 years. Fuel levels had reached hazardous levels and junipers had encroached on historic grass/shrub habitat, resulting in drastically reduced bighorn sheep utilization.

To accomplish our goal, we included many cooperators we have cultivated through our outreach efforts. We "borrowed" an ignition specialist from the National Park Service, a division supervisor from the Boise Smokejumpers, a terra torch operator from Mid-Columbia NWR, a holding crew of 10 Boise Smokejumpers, a helicopter manager from Lower Klamath NWR, a 10-person fuels crew from Susanville BLM, a 6-person burn crew from Lower Klamath NWR, and engines from Fremont NF, Lakeview BLM, and Susanville BLM.

Also assisting were a Service regional fire behavior analyst, four researchers from USDA Pacific Northwest Research Center, the Reno National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration office, and a contract Timberland Bell 206 helicopter.

This experienced team completed the burn with no glitches. The process also provided personal improvement opportunities for many of the participants. They were able to take advantage of trainee assignments. They were better able to understand our land management policies. Some were able to work in unfamiliar jobs or with unfamiliar types of fuels.

The favors — and the training — are often reciprocated, allowing Fish and Wildlife Service employees to help others accomplish fire management duties, while broadening their experience base in the process. 

*Kevin Conn is a fire management officer trainee at Sheldon-Hart Mountain NWRC.*

## Snow Goose Festival

**When:** January 19-20  
**Where:** Butte County, CA  
**Contact:** 800/852-8570  
[www.chicochamber.com](http://www.chicochamber.com)

## San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival

**When:** January 18-20  
**Where:** Vallejo, CA  
**Contact:** 707/557-9816  
<http://www.sfbayflywayfestival.com/>

## Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival

**When:** January 18-21  
**Where:** The Inn at Morro Bay, CA  
**Contact:** Chamber of Commerce  
 800/231-0592  
[www.morrobay.net/birds](http://www.morrobay.net/birds)

## Klamath Basin Bald Eagle Conference/Festival

**When:** February 14-16  
**Where:** Klamath Falls, OR  
**Contact:** Klamath County Dept. of Tourism  
 1 800/445-6728  
[www.eaglecon.org](http://www.eaglecon.org)



Photo by: Kevin Conn

*Prescribed fire reduces western juniper invading bighorn sheep habitat.*

## Fires That Give Life

*Cooperative prescribed burns sustain prairie systems and native plants*

By Brian Gales

*“News releases and outreach efforts enable us to get ‘buy in’...”*

Imagine a western Oregon valley, centuries ago, dotted with wetland prairies and oak savannahs. Picture the native Kalapuyan people setting seasonal fires to the land, ridding the area of underbrush and coaxing dormant seeds to germinate.

This is a natural process that once occurred in the Willamette Valley over the millennia. Now, after more than 150 years of fire suppression, agricultural conversion, weed invasion, and forest encroachment, the Willamette Valley prairies are one of the most endangered ecosystems in the United States. These prairies support several federally-listed threatened and endangered species and include the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex — some of the most extensive remnant native upland and wetland prairie habitat in the valley.

Over the years, the refuge has partnered with Oregon State University to research the use of prescribed fire as a management tool in prairie habitats. Prescribed fire reduces the encroachment of woody vegetation and improves native plant communities, including listed species. It also reduces fuels that could contribute to wildfires.

Executing and maintaining a prescribed fire program is a huge undertaking, requiring a lot of planning, outreach, and cooperation from several local communities, interagency fire support, Oregon State University, and Service staff.

In an area where “smoke in the air” is always a cause for concern, outreach is

critical regarding the value and benefits of prescribed fire. This issue is an especially sensitive in the valley because through the mid 1980s, agricultural burning was a key component in producing grass seed; since then, public opposition has led to significant reductions in burning practices.

But the need to use fire to benefit native plant communities has remained. Any time we want to use prescribed fire, we generate informative news releases describing refuge activities. We take time to individually notify refuge neighbor, by letter or face-to-face. These news releases and outreach efforts enable us to get “buy in” by using the opportunity to explain the objectives of the project and its timing, location, size, and other issues that may be of concern.

The refuge also relies on outreach to generate partnerships to implement prescribed fire projects. A lot of elements have to come together all at once. Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association provide weather and smoke forecasts used to plan and execute each project. The U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Oregon Department of Forestry assist in preparing and executing the prescribed burns.

Our cooperators help provide a cost effective means to carry out project goals. Beginning this year, we’ll also rely on rural and city fire departments to help with prescribed burns.

This mutual assistance is a win-win situation on many levels. It provides the refuge with qualified people to assist with prescribed burns. It offers these participants valuable field experience in the wildland fire environment. It develops and enhances an effective working relationship between the local communities and the Service. And on the ground, it helps manage our wetland prairies, oak savannahs, and a host of imperilled native plant species and communities that rely on fire for survival. **O**

*Brian Gales is a prescribed fire specialist at Willamette Valley NWRC.*



Photo by: USFWS

*Neighbors are contacted before experimental prairie burn.*

# Plan Ahead to Promote Special Events

*Motivate people so they want to attend your event*

By Susan Saul

Refuge managers probably question why they are being asked in June to provide details about their Refuge Week special events in October. There's still plenty of time, they may be thinking. "It's on my work plan for August," they say. "I'll figure out what we are going to do then."

Although that may be a workable plan, procrastination means they will miss out on excellent opportunities to promote their events and attract larger attendance. For example, the California Division of Tourism publishes an annual *Visitors Guide* and a quarterly called *What's New in California* that go to an extensive mailing list of travel writers, visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce, travel agencies, tourism publications, and the public. Each *What's New* edition is compiled three months in advance of the publication date. Other state tourism offices produce similar publications.

Barbara Steinberg, California Tourism publications manager, emphasizes the need for advance planning. "If you want to get the public involved, people need to start thinking about attending long before the event happens," she says. Even people who have attended before need to be motivated.

"If the event is still in the planning phase, basic information about the event, contact information and date it will occur still can be included," Steinberg says.

She also urges every refuge to place its event information in the national special events database on the Service's website. As event plans become final, the database can be updated.

## SPECIAL EVENTS DATABASE

To input your data, you use the Service Internal Intranet at <http://sii.fws.gov>.

Scroll down the table of contents to Refuges and click on Service-wide Special Events Calendar. You then have several choices: edit, delete, or review an existing record, or add an event. If you choose to add an event, you have two choices: long or short form. The long form gives you step-by-step instructions. The short form allows you to bypass the instructions.

The public is able to access event information through the National Wildlife Refuge System website at <http://refuges.fws.gov/> or directly at [refugeevents.fws.gov](http://refugeevents.fws.gov). 

*Susan Saul is an outreach specialist in External Affairs.*

## TRAININGS & WORKSHOPS

### Wild Things 2002

Remind teachers and others involved with education that this year's Wild Things broadcast will commemorate the Refuge System's Centennial in 2003. Learn about habitat restoration efforts at Pelican Island, the first National Wildlife Refuge.

**Where:** Distance Learning Broadcast from NCTC

**When:** October 10

**Contact:** Deborah McCrensky at 703/358-2386.

### 2002 Watchable Wildlife Conference

The conference theme, "A Vision for Wildlife Viewing," explores how to develop a successful wildlife viewing program, one that focuses on how wildlife tourism assists local communities and provides new dimensions to traditional tourism activities and marketing efforts, bed and breakfast owners and managers, trip outfitters and tour operators.

**Where:** St. Paul, MN

**When:** October 15-19

**Contact:** 1/800/657-3637 or [www.watchablewildlife.org](http://www.watchablewildlife.org)

### Basics of Working with the News Media

This course will help you determine "key" media messages and choose tools for conveying them. Learn how to address controversial issues and coordinate a media response with your regional and national counterparts. Watch how to interact with reporters, then practice what you learn.

**Where:** NCTC

**When:** October 28-29

**Contact:** Randy Robinson 304/876-7450

### National Interpreters Workshop

This workshop event includes three days of sessions with more than 100 professional presenters. A full day of field sessions are offered at more than 15 parks, zoos, nature centers, and museums. In 2001, nearly 1,100 people attended the meeting in Des Moines, Iowa. A great opportunity to network!

**Where:** Virginia Beach, VA

**When:** November 12-16

**Contact:** Mary Ellen Dore 301/888-1410

<http://www.interpnet.com/interpnet/workshops.htm>

## Saving...

Continued from Page 1

counted as many as 350 eagles at a time flying between the roost and feeding areas.

Both the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manage lands bordering the refuge. Also nearby are private timberlands, the growing community of Keno (with about 80 houses close to the refuge), and a Federal Aviation Administration radar facility less than a mile away.

Dry summer conditions and thunderstorms make fire a common occurrence in southern Oregon. Between 1970 and 2001, 199 fires started near Bear Valley. The current heavy fuel load on and near the refuge makes firefighting more difficult and dangerous and increases the chance that a fire could destroy homes, eagle roosts, and other wildlife habitat.

Through the National Fire Plan, money is available to reduce fuels in places where wildfires could threaten homes. Using these funds, the Fish and Wildlife Service has been able to pay for some of the costs of protecting the eagle roosting area, nearby subdivisions, and the neighboring community of Keno.

This program aims to reduce fuels that have built up during 90 years of fire suppression and restore timber stands to more fire-resistant conditions by thinning small diameter white fir that could carry fire from the ground into the crowns of large trees — a real worry in the eagle roosting area.

Phone calls and meetings yielded several experienced BLM silviculturists who recommended optimum tree densities, developed a prescription for thinning, laid out unit boundaries, and marked trees for thinning contractors.

In 1998 and 1999, contractors thinned 246 acres within the core refuge roosting area. In February 2002, the refuge cooperated with ODF to thin 300 acres of state-managed land adjacent to Bear Valley. Contractors reduced the number of trees from 500 to 120 per acre. Plans are being developed to reduce fuels on approximately 2,000 acres in the next few years. After the thinning, the refuge fire management staff conducts prescribed burns to mimic the low-intensity ground fires that historically maintained forests in a fire resistant condition.

Before work could begin on the major roost areas, an environmental assessment (EA) was required, where neighbors could express concerns and ask questions about the plan.

This spring, the Fish and Wildlife Service provided a grant through ODF to the Keno volunteer fire department for community wildfire education. Outreach efforts are ongoing as another EA is now being developed to continue thinning activities on the rest of the refuge.

From the scientific aspects of fire suppression to the recreational aspects of eagle viewing, people in the community like to be involved. Oregon State University researchers have been studying the eagle roosts since 1979, making invaluable management recommendations.

The community of Klamath Falls holds a Bald Eagle Conference each year, providing both an educational forum and opportunities for tours.

And our fire management staff routinely contacts its neighbors to increase community awareness of and support for fire suppression efforts.

*J. Susie Donahue is a prescribed fire technician at Klamath Basin NWRC.*



Printed on recycled paper



Photo by: W. Colburn

*Thinning reduced fire risk to eagle roosting areas and nearby communities.*