Wildfire season is fast approaching

Are you prepared?

Workshop coming April 22 to assist residents

There's no time like now to begin preparing your property and family, including pets and livestock, from the potential devastating effects of wildfire. Cold winter weather will soon be giving way to hot, dry weather and by planning now, we can better protect what's important to us.

The Oregon Department of Forestry, Applegate Fire District #9, Jackson and Josephine counties, and the Applegate Partnership & Watershed Council have teamed up to provide a workshop to help residents prepare for wildfire. Topics included are:

- Creating defensible space
- Fuel reduction assistance grants, fire resistant plants and landscaping
- Getting rid of toxic/invasive plants
- Recycling/composting tree and brush cutting
- Disaster Registry, family emergency planning
- What you need to know to protect pets and livestock
- Developing emergency kits for pets and livestock

One thing that's different from past fire prevention workshops is the section on preparing pets and livestock. We've learned from past disasters such as Katrina, the importance of planning for the potential evacuation and sheltering of animals. Not preparing for them prior to disaster has seriously impeded response efforts and has risked the lives of animals and humans like.

The Applegate Animal Disaster Preparedness Workgroup is creating resources and plans for the evacuation and sheltering of pets and livestock in certain areas of the Applegate Valley. They will be sharing information about this project and how it can be expanded to other areas.

The workshop will be Thursday, April 22 at the Upper Applegate Grange, located at 3901 Upper Applegate Road outside Ruch. The workshop will begin at 7 pm and refreshments will be served. We hope to see you there!

For more information contact Lin Bernhardt at 541-840-9903 or linb@clearwire.net.

Updating the Applegate Fire Plan

BY SANDY SHAFFER

Our Applegate Fire Plan (the *first* community fire plan in the nation) was written eight years ago. Since that time a lot of work has been completed from the recommendations found in Chapter 3, regarding priority fuel reduction projects. With a new two-county risk assessment recently completed, it was time to update our list of projects and see whether any other priority areas might need hazardous fuels work.

An 18-member team was assembled, consisting of federal, state and local fire and fuels folks and local landowners who are all knowledgeable of what's happening on the ground in the Applegate watershed. The first task was to update the original list of 62 projects for status. We found that 15 had been completed, 23 were partially implemented, 5 are currently being implemented, 2 are in the NEPA process, and 3 are on the agency's long-term plan. One project is still in litigation, and 13 projects have had nothing done on them. We were very pleased with these results.

As I write this article, we have determined our objectives, process, and products, and also listed out the various map layers that we want to utilize (22 of them!) to do a complete assessment of the watershed's lands. Aside from the new risk assessment, we also have the results of the values and data that were mapped by another group of Applegaters and agency folks last year as part of the Applegate Fire Learning Network. Twelve values were identified to consider when doing work in the Applegate: fire-suppressed forests, oak woodlands, public lands adjacent to private, late successional old-growth, areas prone to intense fire, next-generation old-growth, pine dominated systems, at-risk/ESA habitat, timber infrastructure, fire regime 1, communities at risk and the wildland-urban interface. We will also utilize the findings of the Southern Oregon Small Diameter Collaborative's maps of pole stands near existing roads. These tools will be considered when projects are defined, because more funding sources could be available by adding in some restoration type activities or small diameter utilization.

We'll be going through the watershed in our next few meetings to analyze fire hazard and risk for each of the nineteen Strategic Planning Areas across the Applegate. As potential projects are detected, we'll define locations, jurisdiction, values-at-risk, objectives, and, if applicable, treatment methods. A final list will be put together, and then we'll be ready to present the new list of priority projects to the rest of our community. I'm hoping to be able to announce public meetings to view the proposed projects in late May or early June. Once the meetings have been held, we'll get the update officially blessed by the County and the State. (The Applegate Fire Plan is an official CWPP or Community Wildfire Protection Plan, and priority projects listed in CWPPs have a lot of pull when federal and state funding comes along.)

So, if you are interested in this process, please send me an email so that I can send you on the announcement of when and where we'll be holding meetings. Hope to see you there! (And, if you're new to the Applegate and are wondering what this Fire Plan is all about, drop by the Fire District's Headquarters at 1095 Upper Applegate Road in Ruch and pick up a free copy.)

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The Deer Willy Fuel Hazard Reduction Project

BLM's green answer to a burning problem

BY TIM GONZALES

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is moving toward greener options for fire hazard reduction that will allow for continued success managing the land, utilizing small diameter wood products, and reducing particulates and emissions. The Deer Willy Fuel Hazard Reduction Project is an example of utilizing stewardship contracting options that provide environmental, fiscal, and social benefits.

The Medford BLM's Grants Pass Resource Area (GPRA) fire and fuels program is tasked to reduce the fire hazard on approximately 2,500 acres per year. Traditional treatments such as; cutting brush and small trees, constructing handpiles, burning the piles, and then underburning the area have been routinely implemented. Traditional treatments can be problematic in that they can require arduous labor which can be quite expensive (for example, treatments of dense vegetation can cost more than $1,000 per acre). Usable wood products could be wasted by burning, and finding appropriate weather windows to burn while staying within Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) air quality compliance has become more difficult. As vegetation continues to grow and wildfires are quickly suppressed, fire hazard in our wildlands continues to escalate.

The BLM Grants Pass Resource Area fire and fuels program has been moving toward stewardship contracting as a tool to implement a variety of treatments to help alleviate some of the concerns of traditional fuel treatments. Prior to stewardship contracts, utilizing small diameter forest products had been cost prohibitive due to the expense of labor and machinery needed. This has been exacerbated by the increase in transportation costs. Stewardship contracts are designed to allow BLM to implement forestry work while offsetting a portion of the cost by selling extracted material to the contractor, who may then sell it on the open market. This allows planners to design and implement projects that are more economically feasible.

The Deer Willy project is located in the mountains separating Williams from the Illinois Valley. It is in an area where BLM fire and fuels planners have been concerned about fire hazard for years. Some key ridges were identified as high priority fuels hazard reduction treatment areas in the Applegate Fire Plan (2002). In addition, the area is a very valuable wildlife resource. A large wildfire in this area could alter spotted owl habitat, as well as threaten residents in either Williams or Selma, depending on wind direction.

The Deer Willy Project was designed to treat dense vegetation along existing road systems and strategic ridgelines to create a network of defensible fuel breaks to help prevent large fires. The project was coordinated with the public, and input was incorporated into the design. The project decision, issued in October, 2008, included treating 200' above and 200' below selected roads and key ridges. Treatments in these areas were deemed adequate to meet strategic fire suppression needs and be economically feasible. The Deer Willy project limits the felling of trees larger than 20" diameter at breast height (DBH). The project also calls for the removal of some smaller green and woody plant material or "biomass." Removing this material assists in making the area more fire resilient.

Work has already begun with favorable results. Biomass can also have a value as product. The contracting companies working on the Deer Willy project are Lomakatsi Ecological Services of Ashland and Oregon and South Bay Organics from Williams. They have successfully reduced fire hazard on 802 acres to date while producing forest products and local jobs. So far, with only 18% of the project completed,

Deer Willy field trip led by Lomakatsi and BLM.

commodities produced include 315,000 board feet of timber; 5,200 tons of biomass material turned into chips used to produce electricity and other products; 50 cords of firewood; and several log truck loads of poles. These products are sold to the contractor, reducing the price of fuels hazard treatment by approximately 7%. In addition to using biomass extraction to reduce the costs to the public, there is less burning needed. While traditional methods are within DEQ standards, Deer Willy has produced fewer tons of emissions due to the biomass extracted.

Eighty-five percent of the completed acres were funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 also known as "stimulus" money. The renewable energy component in the project made the Deer Willy project more competitive for stimulus funds. Since May 2009, 16 local jobs have been created specifically by this project and $56,000 has been saved thus far. As markets improve and develop, savings are expected to increase.

The Deer Willy project also had a positive effect on forest stands. The thinning of overcrowded vegetation allows remaining trees to absorb limited nutrients and water with less competition, increasing their vigor. Additional growing space will be created around retained trees and treated areas are more likely to develop or retain characteristics of older forests.

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