



Working Together to Keep the DeBorgia Community Safe from Wildfire

In mid-May, the WildWest Institute and the West End Volunteer Fire Department in DeBorgia, MT joined forces for the DeBorgia Community Wildfire Protection Work Weekend. By all accounts, the work weekend was a tremendous success!

The goal of the work weekend was to bring people together to create defensible space on private land around the DeBorgia community through education, action and fellowship. Special emphasis was placed on improving defensible space around the homes of elderly members of the community, along key roads in the community and establishing a safe zone near the firehouse and community center.



The fellowship component of the community work weekend included a community potluck barbecue at the DeBorgia Schoolhouse – which, poetically, was one of the few buildings in the entire area to survive the 1910 wildfires – and live music at Billy BigRiggers courtesy of JT and Travelers.

In addition to lots of volunteer help, the community work weekend was supported by a grant the WildWest Institute secured through the National Forest Foundation and the Liz Claiborne and Art Ortenberg Foundation. The grant money was used to hire a local fuel reduction crew through Wildland Conservation Services, which helped put some money into the pockets of local workers.

The WildWest Institute, West End Volunteer Fire Department and others local residents, businesses and conservation groups are currently engaged in a collaborative process through the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) with the Lolo National Forest to develop a common sense plan for fuel reduction work on Forest Service land directly around the greater DeBorgia area. These collaborative meetings and field trips have brought together a total of 115 people, demonstrating a great deal of public interest.

While the WildWest Institute is supportive of fuel reduction work around the DeBorgia area to help protect the community from wildfire, we do have serious concerns with the Forest Service's proposal as it now stands. We have let the Forest Service and community know that our concerns center around issues related to old-growth forests, soils, water quality, roads and endangered species such as lynx and bull trout.

The Forest Service has informed the collaborative group that fuel reduction work on the Forest Service lands around the DeBorgia area will not be implemented until at least 2009 due to the HFRA process and Forest Service budget issues, making the WildWest Institute's DeBorgia Community Wildfire Protection Work Weekend all the more important for keeping the community safe from wildfire. For more information contact Jake Kreilick, WildWest Institute's Restoration Coordinator at 406.542.7343 or jkreilick@wildrockies.org.