

## **ROCKY MOUNTAIN TRENCH PRESCRIBED FIRE COUNCIL**

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For Immediate Release

### **Spring Burns Benefit Ecosystems and Protect Communities**

The Rocky Mountain Trench Prescribed Fire Council reports that the 2009 spring burning season is underway in the East Kootenay with two of four prescribed fires successfully completed.

On April 8 Parks Canada ignited a 100-hectare burn at Redstreak Meadow on the eastern bench above Radium's main street. On the same day, the Rocky Mountain Forest District ignited a 240-hectare burn at Clear Lake Pasture, 10 km south of Jaffray.

Weather conditions permitting, the forest district will ignite the remaining burns next week: 550 hectares on Stinky Pasture, located eight km west of Canal Flats on Fir Mountain, and 400 hectares on Big Hill Pasture, located north of Lakit Lake about seven km from Fort Steele.

During the Redstreak prescribed fire, six heat-protected video cameras recorded fire behaviour while thermocouples sunk into the ground measured soil temperatures on the surface and at varying depths. Information collected will aid fire specialists in planning and implementing future burns.

Prescribed fire, used in conjunction with timber harvesting and thinning, restores grassland and open forest ecosystems and protects East Kootenay communities from wildfire. The treatments have become standard land management tools on Crown land, in national and provincial parks, on private conservation properties, and within municipalities.

The controlled, low-intensity ground fire of prescribed burns mimics the effects of natural fire regimes and First Nations' land management practices. Fire rejuvenates grasses and shrubs that provide habitat and forage for wildlife and domestic livestock, and maintains grassland and open forest landscapes by removing thickets of conifer seedlings.

"Fire is a natural ecological process that recycles nutrients, helps plants reproduce, and creates diverse habitats for wildlife," says Sue Crowley of Invermere, a Ministry of

Environment ecosystem biologist who chairs the Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program's operations committee. "A prescribed burn often results in a mosaic of fire effects. This contributes to increased biodiversity and associated habitats for a wide range of wildlife species."

Prescribed fires are carried out by trained crews who follow detailed ignition and safety plans prepared for each site. Fires are ignited only under favorable conditions and managed so they burn within defined boundaries.

In spring, the burning window opens for a few weeks when the ground is beginning to dry out but before vegetation is too green. Atmospheric conditions on the day of ignition must be such that smoke is vented up or dispersed by wind.

On average over the past 10 years, these conditions have come together in the East Kootenay on only three days each spring. Last year, for instance, 1350 hectares were scheduled to be burned but only 468 hectares were ignited before the spring burning window closed.

Prescribed burning is used in many parts of North America as a land management tool, and multi-agency prescribed fire councils have been established in 34 US states and Mexico to coordinate burn activity within regions. Agencies that conduct prescribed fires in the East Kootenay established the first international council in 2007 with formation of the Rocky Mountain Trench Prescribed Fire Council.

Members include the Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program, Rocky Mountain Forest District, Southeast Fire Centre, Ministry of Environment, BC Parks, Parks Canada, The Nature Trust, The Nature Conservancy of Canada, Regional District of East Kootenay, Cities of Kimberley and Cranbrook, and the US Forest Service's Rexford Ranger District based in Eureka, Montana.

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PHOTOS FOLLOW ...



Hand-held drip torches were used to light the Clear Lake prescribed burn south of Jaffray.



At centre is one of six video cameras mounted on tripods to record fire behaviour during the Redstreak Meadow prescribed burn.