National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

Gunnison, CO 81230

970-641-2337 phone
970-641-3127 fax
www.nps.gov/blca

June 2009

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park Fire Management

First Prescribed Fire in Park's History Implemented

After months of planning and preparation the park's patience and hard work paid off with the successful implementation of their first ever prescribed fire (Rx). The 80-acre Green Grizzly Rx, located on the north rim of the Black Canyon, was completed in early May of this year. Since the park does not have a dedicated fire staff, the Rx's success was due in large part to the cooperative efforts of the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit partners, which includes the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. This fire management unit covers approximately 4.4 million acres in west-central Colorado. Personnel from all of these agencies assisted with the Rx.

The objectives of the Green Grizzly Rx were to reduce the amount of hazardous fuels in the area, improve the habitat for the threatened Gunnison Sage Grouse and to reintroduce fire to its natural role in the grass, sagebrush and mountain shrub ecosystem. Fire managers attempted to achieve a "mosaic" burn pattern in the unit, that would mimic a naturally ignited lightning fire. Openings in the burn unit produced by hand-ignited fire were kept to a maximum of 10 acres. This type of burn pattern will benefit the Gunnison Sage Grouse and other animal and plant species that call this landscape their home.

The Green Grizzly Rx will benefit not only park resources by the reintroduction of fire to the ecosystem but also park visitors and local residents/landowners by reducing the risk from wildfires. The policy of using fire as a management tool will help perpetuate many of the values for which the park was established.