National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Bryce Canyon National Park

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Bryce Canyon National Park Fire Management

Bryce Canyon Uses AM Radio System For Fire Education

While it true that a picture is worth a thousand words, it certainly doesn't hurt to have words with the picture so that people really understand what they are looking at. A good example of that was recently put to the test at Bryce Canyon National Park by their fire management staff when they decided to use a Highway Advisory Radio Systems (HARS) to broadcast their message about the largest prescribed fire (Rx) in the park's history.

The Puma Rx was an interagency prescribed fire ignited in September 2008 in conjunction with adjoining Dixie National Forest. The burn totaled just over 4,000 acres with 2,000 acres of this being on park lands. Its goal was to increase visitor safety by reducing the amount of hazardous fuels along the park roadway, while also gaining the benefits of the reintroduction of fire to the mixed conifer ecosystem. Since much of the fire was along a five mile section of the main park highway, it was very visible to visitors, many of whom wanted to know more about it. The park tried putting up information boards at various pullouts but found that few people were stopping to read them. To try and remedy this situation, Bryce Canyon officials decided to use a unique and innovative solution using a portable and localized AM radio transmitter that would provide information about the Puma Rx as visitors drove through the area. A request was made to the Intermountain Regional Office Fire Management Division to fund the project for a three month period, from August through October. The regional office was very supportive of the idea and agreed to fund it through its fuels account.

InfoGuys, a company out of Arizona who specializes in HARS, provided the system for the park. The company was very supportive of the project as well as some of the precautions that the National Park Service (NPS) wanted to have in place. They cleaned their equipment before bringing it into the park to prevent the spread of exotic seeds and placed pads on the ground where the equipment was placed so as not to disturb the soil. The equipment was also solar powered since there was no electricity in that area of the park. All these things added up to a very low impact project that ended with good results.

A message for the two minute recording was developed by Bryce Canyon's interpretive and fire management staffs with assistance from their cluster Fire Information and Education Specialist. The radio system was able to broadcast the repetitive message for the entire five miles of park roadway through the prescribed fire area. Information signs were set up at the beginning of the burn area to let people know about and how to access the localized AM broadcast. The message advised visitors to stop by the park's visitor center and pick up a brochure about fire management in our national parks. This turned out to be so successful that the park ran out of brochures and had to get more to meet the demand. This stop at the visitor center also allowed visitors to ask park staff more questions about the prescribed fire.

Since there was no way of judging how many people actually listened to the broadcast, the park put a traffic counter on that section of the highway to at least get a feel as to how many visitors passed by. The counter was put in place from August 26 to October 27. During that time, 41,818 vehicles were counted. This works out to be seven cents per person, a very cost effective way of contacting and educating visitors about the Puma Rx and fire management within the NPS.

As most everyone knows, the transfer and sharing of information has changed dramatically over the last number of years. People are getting their information in a variety of new formats based around the internet and the use of portable communication devices. While the use of bulletin boards and other forms of written information is still important, it may not be as effective in these changing times. By coming up with a unique way of communicating its message about the Puma Rx, Bryce Canyon National Park has shown that "thinking outside the box" can have good results and can also provide an example to other land management agencies of an innovative way to share information with the public.

Aerial view of the Puma Rx showing park highway

Example of publics view of Puma Rx along highway