



Bureau: Bureau of Land Management

## **BLM, Veterans, and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps Partner on Fire**

Since their training in June with the Northwest Colorado Bureau of Land Management fire crew, the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps Veterans Fire Crew (RMYC) has been mitigating the threats of hazardous fuels in northwestern Colorado. Recently, they had the opportunity to help manage wildland fires.



The Rocky Mountain Youth Corps Veterans Fire Crew gathers for a group photo. Photo by BLM.

Their training for the fuel-mitigation work included chainsaw and wildland fire training, which provided the skills and qualifications necessary for the RMYC fire to be available for wildland fire response if needed. The crew was divided into two squads, Fire 1 and Fire 2. The Fire 2 squad worked on the Upper Colorado River Fire Management Unit on BLM fuel reduction projects. The Fire 1 squad worked with the Northwest Colorado Fire Management Unit on BLM and private land mitigating hazardous fuels.

The squads are composed of Mountain Youth Corps members (non-veterans) and returning vets. This offers the returning vets the opportunity to share their skills and experiences with the non-vet squad members while readjusting to civilian life. The Fire 2 squad is comprised of Marine Corps veterans, while the Fire 1 squad veterans are a mix of Army and Navy armed services.

Fire Crew 2's first wildland fire assignment was the Milk Creek Fire in July, near Meeker. In August, both squads were combined into one crew to assist with the management of the 54-acre Kodiak fire northwest of Maybell. The Kodiak Fire is being managed for multiple objectives on BLM land, and the RMYC fire crew is assisting with mop-up and black lining operations. BLM

Fuels Specialist and former hot shot crew member Kevin Thompson is serving as the RMYC fire crew representative.



RMYC Veterans Fire Crew Member Tara Earl. Photo by BLM.

When asked how they liked working a wildland fire, the crew members' responses were unanimously positive. "We're glad to get a fire assignment before any other crew members had to leave for fall classes," said Tara Earl, the only female veteran on the crew. "We understand the importance of the mitigation projects we've been working on and feel good about that, but we were really looking forward to experiencing a wildfire and helping out there too."

"We're pleased to be able to support the Veterans Green Corps program by training and employing returning vets in a system that's similar to their military structure," said Colt Mortenson, BLM fire management officer. "It's a win-win for everyone involved."

RMYC's Veterans Corps program was introduced in 2012 in Colorado. Similar Conservation Corps programs in Colorado, California and Montana initiated partnerships with the BLM to establish Veterans Conservation Corps programs starting in 2010.

The Veterans Fire Corps is part of a broader national initiative between the Department of the Interior, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Conservation Corps programs referred to as Veterans Green Corps programs. The Northwest District Fuels Reduction project is a cooperative effort between the BLM and the RMYC. The project supports mitigation work in the protection of communities.

By: BLM-Colorado  
August 14, 2013