

Illegal dumps on BLM land an issue

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IVN contributing writer

Bureau of Land Management employees found 150 illegal dumping sites on BLM lands in Jackson and Josephine counties between June 2019 and August 2022.

Hazardous materials coordinator Anna Tankersley estimates that of those sites, 70% has been cleaned up. But that's not the whole story.

In Josephine County there are at least another 30 sites reported by the public. In the Illinois Valley, focus areas include Rough and Ready off Airport Drive and Kerby Mainline Road; and a major dump site in the Tartar Gulch area, where a lot of vehicles were recently cleaned up.

"Trash dumping is one of the biggest issues we face on BLM lands in Jackson and Josephine counties," said public affairs specialist Kyle Sullivan. And the problem is getting worse, according to Tankersley.

"It has definitely increased since 2020."

The reasons, she suggested, include the cost of living, the cost of trash disposal and the cost of fuel. And marijuana grows are a problem. A lot of excess herbicide containers and trimmings are getting dumped on public land.

Given the number

of sites, Tankersley must prioritize.

"Where there's anything in a creek, or possibly damaging public land or in the place of a road or a hazard I try to focus on those versus those that aren't posing an environmental or human threat or property damage."

So, what is the process when a member of the public reports an illegal dump site? Once a site is reported, the first thing Tankersley does is verify that it is on BLM land. A lot of times it ends up being on someone's private easement or a county road that cuts through BLM. The ownership of roads and lands is very complex and not as simple as the public likes to think it is, she explained.

Once a site is determined to be on BLM land, Tankersley must verify it is a hazardous materials site and, if need be, separate that material from other trash. Aerosols are one example of hazardous material. Used motor oil is recyclable as long as it has not been mixed with listed hazardous wastes, such as chlorinated solvents.

But the determination of hazardous materials is not straightforward. A lot of time there are containers that don't have labels. All unlabeled containers with liquid must be treated as an unknown substance and must have analytical tests performed to determine if hazardous

wastes are present in order to dispose of the wastes properly according to state and federal laws.

"For example in Josephine County I found a drop this year and there was a container and they did a test on it and it turned out to contain mercury."

Once the hazardous material is separated from the household trash, Tankersley must find a facility that will take it. For instance some facilities will not take refrigerators and air conditioners because of the Freon they contain.

To pick up the trash, Tankersley uses a contractor for vehicles and sites that don't contain hazardous waste. This contractor has the equipment to pick up big piles of trash. But if there is hazardous waste, she must hire a specialized contractor.

How can illegal dumping be prevented or minimized? Sullivan said they may place boulders in places with a lot of dumping.

"BLM manages land for the public and we don't want

to necessarily limit access. But there are locations where modifying where people can park or dump is something we may pursue."

Finally, Tankersley noted that Southern Oregon

Sanitation has two days a year, one in the spring and one in the fall, when it will accept hazardous waste for free.

The next free day is Friday, Sept. 23 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.



A pile of trash dumped near Rough & Ready Botanical viewed Friday, Sept. 16.

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