

Range Management. . . Fire becomes manager on range



Walt Sixkiller, Fire Management officer, points out the area burned during the Tohet fire in relation to the planned controlled burn held in September.

By Pat Leno

Some people may find it a little hard to believe that the suppression of wildfires on range lands has been detrimental to good range management on the reservation. Years ago, wildfires cleansed the ranges of plant life that was of little value to livestock and wildlife. With the civilization and settlement of the West these wildfires are now not allowed to burn uncontrolled.

Having fewer fires means that the juniper trees have been allowed to invade the range. A main concern in having a large growth of juniper take over the range is that their water systems do not hold the soil and the trees use all the available water, not sharing with other plants. The juniper is able to choke out other vegetation

because they are able to grow in rocky areas. They then, spread to the grassy areas of the range. The use of fire is the best method range managers have found to destroy juniper.

In September a controlled burn of 1,500 acres on Miller Flats through the combined planning and efforts of Land Operations, Forestry and Fire Control was a part of a range management plan for the reservation. The area burned has been of little use as a grazing area because until recently only a limited amount of water was available. A well drilled and a pipeline laid for six watering troughs was the answer to the watering problem. The problem was then to upgrade the range, bring back vegetation that livestock could use to graze on.

Burning at the right time can

rejuvenate grasses and rid the area of juniper. This fall following good rainfall which gave the soil increased moisture content and provided conditions for the growth of fuel for the use of fire a controlled burn was planned.

Dean Elliott, soil conservationist, said that in previous years attempts were made in the area for small burns and it was of benefit to the range but this year's controlled burn should be of great value to the entire Miller Flats area.

While burning rids the range of juniper it does little to destroy the rabbitbrush which is not termed as good foliage for livestock. Burning does enhance the bitterbrush which is abundant on the range but which has been allowed to grow undisturbed. This has resulted in the bitterbrush to grow large



A member of the Fire Management team watches as a clump of juniper crown with fire, these juniper will not withstand the fire.

and woody in texture. Cattle and horses feed well on tender young shoots of the bitterbrush; burning brings the brush back tender. Bunchgrasses which are native to the range will also survive the burn and return in the spring with the new growth that will be tender and will attract the stock.

The burn area extends the area that was burned earlier this summer. The lightning caused Tohet Fire burned a total of 9,254 acres. It burned mostly juniper, sage and grass

land but it was a threat to the living areas of Warm Springs and Dry Creek so it was suppressed.

The value of the controlled burn in this range area will not be seen by livestock owners for another year and grazing in that area should be avoided to allow the range to recover. Fire which can be destructive can also be an aid in ridding the range of vegetation that is of little value to wildlife and livestock.



With the abundant amount of fuel needed to make the controlled burn a success, the burn should produce the needed effect for good range conditions.