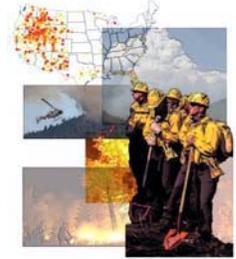


National Fire Plan

Community Assistance in Montana



In the Bitterroot Valley, the 2000 fires destroyed 71 homes and 370,000 acres. As the nation is quickly learning, people tend to come together in tragic times. The story of Bitterroot Interagency Community Recovery Team, or BIRT, is an inspiring illustration of this phenomenon.

BIRT began in August of 2000, as the fires were still burning. This coalition of more than 30 Bitterroot Valley agencies and community groups met the diverse human and resource needs resulting from fire. Once they received a grant of State and Private Forestry Community Assistance, their focus became assisting landowners with rehabilitation, and the prevention of further resource damage. However, they were helping to heal much

more than the fire-affected forests; they were healing the human spirit and sense of community.

In the spring of 2001, a BIRT office was established and the team began work. When the season ended in mid-June, more than 60 landowners had benefited from the work of 1,300 volunteers who contributed over 12,000 hours of labor. Volunteers and landowners planted 17,000 trees, most of which were purchased with grant funds.

“BIRT helped me with (rehabilitation projects) that I don’t think I could have accomplished alone. One was an \$8,000 rehab project (to protect the soil from runoff) ... that had to be done quickly.”—Ed Lesky, North Fork of Rye Creek

At the Sula Peak ranch, they lost a million board feet of timber in the fires of 2000. That fall, they had flash floods that washed debris into their meadows and did about \$10,000 worth of damage. ***“There was way too much for us to do...the BIRT team was right there every time we called,”*** said Ranch Foreman John Thomas.

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