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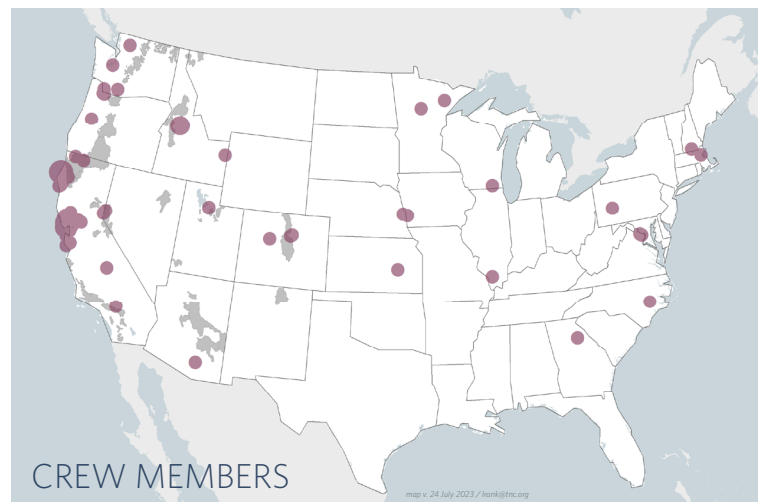
FOCUS ON BUILDING PRESCRIBED FIRE CAPACITY:

A NIMBLE MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE FIRE CAREERS

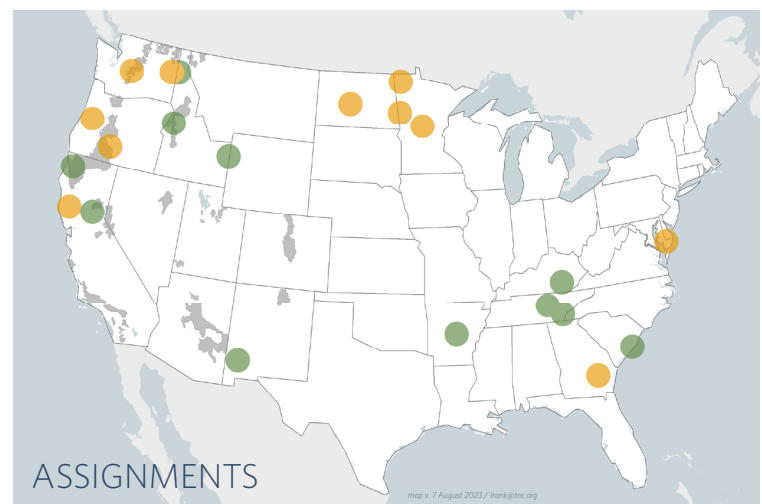
The U.S. wildland fire workforce is stretched thin—at both the institutional and personal levels. At the same time, the need to increase the use of prescribed fire has never been more acute. The challenges in staffing prescribed fire at the scale needed are numerous and varied, ranging from work schedules and conditions that place excessive demands on personnel and their families, to increasingly severe fire seasons that draw all hands from other work to support wildfire response.

A new approach is needed if we are to use prescribed fire at an adequate scale to ensure resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities and safe and effective wildfire response. A dedicated prescribed fire workforce, with appropriate schedules and wages, can meet this need. Wages need to reflect the hazardous environment of the profession and the specialized skill sets required. Schedules need to be able to account for family and other personal responsibilities, as well as providing adequate time for physical and mental recovery. Such changes can make this work accessible to people of different cultures, career backgrounds, family and work responsibilities, enlarging the pool of potential practitioners. And they can create sustainable situations for firefighters and their families, thereby increasing retention of personnel who have built up the qualifications and experience needed to meet our fire future.

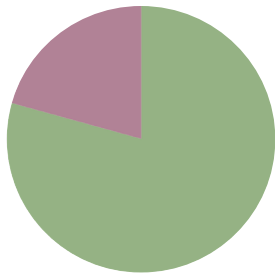
Over the last year, The Nature Conservancy’s North America Fire program hired more than 60 people for various terms, and also managed a roster of contractors and volunteers. They were mobilized with attention to their scheduling and training needs in support of 50 prescribed fire projects and prescribed fire partners across the country.



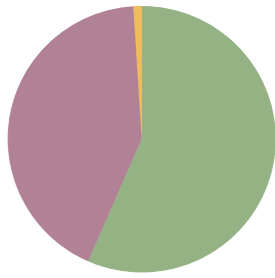
Each purple dot represents a crew member (home zip code) hired during the period of July 2022 through June 2023. (Larger dots represent two or three crew members with the same home zip code.) Forest Service Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscapes in the West are in gray.



Crews supported projects based in 22 landscapes. Green dots indicate those that included work on USFS lands. Orange dots represent assignments on lands managed by The Nature Conservancy and other partners.



WILDLAND FIRE WORKFORCE



OUR CREWS

Gender: ■ Male ■ Female ■ Nonbinary

National workforce data from <https://www.zippia.com/wildland-fire-fighter-jobs/demographics/>

◀◀◀ WHO WE HIRED

A more diverse prescribed fire workforce will bring a wider range of ideas, skills and experience to the field, making it more resilient and sustainable.

Gender diversity (*left*) is one of the most apparent (and easily captured) facets of diversity. But we also work to bring in a wide range of others who have much to contribute but may not fit the typical agency firefighter mold, whether from family responsibilities, ethnicity, career background, or other social factors.

THE WORK ACCOMPLISHED

Our program fulfills personnel requests from programs across the country. Requests this year ranged from a single individual to a 10-person module, with a median crew size of four, and a median assignment duration of three weeks. The primary goal is to get crew members to priority places that need additional capacity to complete prescribed burns. But when weather or other factors preclude burning, crew members are either reassigned elsewhere, or engage in a wide range of actions that support the host unit's work, their own professional development, or both. ▶▶▶

When broadcast burning isn't possible, our crews—
 • construct and burn piles • install and refresh burn breaks
 • scout • snag • conduct ecological thinning for wildfire hazard reduction, invasive species removal or wildlife habitat improvement • assist with wildfire suppression or mop-up • conduct pre- or post-fire monitoring • map, using Collector or Avenza • maintain equipment, including engines, power tools, pumps, drip torches and radios • install and maintain infrastructure like trails, fences and bridges • train or complete NWCG coursework • mentor others.

LASTING IMPACT ▶▶▶

In addition to meeting current capacity needs, building a workforce for the future is an important facet of this work. Assignments are made with an eye to opportunities for progressing qualifications, and promising early-career practitioners are provided with NWCG training that qualifies them for roles burn programs urgently need.

Our employee and volunteer crew members also successfully completed the requirements for numerous positions while on assignments—
 Engine Boss (ENGB) • Firing Boss (FIRB) • Firefighter Type One (FFT1) • Incident Commander Type Five (ICT5) • Fire Effects Monitor (FEMO) • Intermediate Faller (FAL2) • Basic Faller (FAL3)

UNEXPECTED BENEFITS ▶▶▶

The network of contacts built and maintained for placing our surge capacity crew members has yielded additional benefits, including being able to fill partners' wildfire response needs with prescribed fire practitioners in need of wildfire assignments to progress their careers.

Last August on the Idaho Panhandle NF, and this July on the Gila NF, we filled requests for 10-person wildland fire modules. Hired as Forest Service AD employees, our crews provided critical wildfire response capacity—while receiving wildfire training and evaluation opportunities that are difficult for non-agency fire personnel to access.



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◀◀◀ Faller qualifications and chainsaw skills are extremely valuable to a practitioner—and are often desired or needed by the host units requesting surge capacity. Our program provided S-212 Wildland Fire Chainsaws as part of assignments in Idaho and New Mexico, as well as to four tribal forestry crews. In addition, the Fire Networks partially supported a women's chainsaw course hosted by the Southern Blue Ridge PBA ([read more](#)) and a women's Trailblazers Academy hosted by TNC in Iowa ([read more](#)).

This program is supported in part by Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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