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FOCUS ON ACTION:

REDUCING COMMUNITY AND LANDSCAPE WILDFIRE RISK

PERFACT strategies promote community and landscape wildfire risk reduction and resilience through targeted investments in on-the-ground work, supporting local leaders in developing and sustaining enabling conditions, and creating critical connections among practitioners across the country who are leading the way in living better with fire. Risk reduction includes action at multiple scales. From individual residents implementing projects in their neighborhoods to locally-appropriate strategic plans that coordinate and prioritize action across large regions, the hallmarks of a successful risk reduction approach include:

- Local coordination and strong partnerships that leverage the efforts of multiple individuals, organizations and agencies;
- Identifying and building on community assets and opportunities to take action;
- Developing and sharing resources, tools and innovations that support effective action; and
- A “whole community” perspective that acknowledges the range of priorities and resilience needs of residents.

Some examples from the last year can give a sense of the networks’ impact.

Laying the Groundwork ... Together

Developing strategies—informed by local information, knowledge and values—is a critical foundation to coordinated risk reduction action. From leading CWPP development, to implementing risk assessments, to conducting values-based spatial fire planning, members across the country are demonstrating how important multi-party planning informed by local information is in developing a winning strategy.

UT

Communities along Utah’s Wasatch Front worked on seven CWPPs this spring with FAC Net support. CWPP kickoff meetings with the Lindon and Orem fire departments and with South Davis Metro Fire (which serves five municipalities) engaged key community representatives in the planning processes.



Before and after defensible space and fuels reduction treatments.

© Wildfire Adapted Partnership

What is PERFACT?

Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together is a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. The agreement supports the Fire Learning Network (since 2002), Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (2008), Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (2013), Indigenous Peoples Burning Network (2016) and other efforts that bring people together to collectively identify and meet our wildfire challenges.

- CO** In an effort modeled after the West Region Wildfire Council's work in Colorado, the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partners implemented a targeted pilot program to assess parcel risk in a community near Flagstaff. Working with county, city, state and fire department partners, more than 600 rapid assessments were completed on developed and undeveloped plots, and landowners are being contacted for more in-depth assessments and mitigation recommendations.
- CO** In southwest Colorado, Wildfire Adapted Partnership staff supported the Southern Ute Tribe with training in conducting risk assessments and defensible space work. Tribal Department of Housing staff completed wildfire risk assessments and defensible space work for individuals living on the reservation, and the tribe is continuing to apply this training to additional assessments and projects.
- NM** The Forest Stewards Guild is partnering with the New Mexico FLN and the Rio Grande Water Fund to prepare for post-fire response. As part of this, in 2015, the Guild and New Mexico State Forestry developed general post-fire recommendations for CWPP updates, which were accepted by the New Mexico Association of Counties. Building on these, in 2018 the Guild applied post-fire debris flow analysis to the Rio Arriba County CWPP, and in 2019 were able to integrate post-fire considerations into CWPPs for Mora County and the community of Angel Fire.
- CA** In California, the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership's values-based spatial fire planning process helped the collaborative write specific prescriptions for the Somes Bar Integrated Fire Management Project. Project implementation will involve mechanically treating 809 acres and manually treating 1,500 acres, in preparation for applying prescribed fire to 5,500 acres. At public meetings they created a list of what partners individually cared about, and then we put those values on a map. The result? "Each partner knew that our project plans accounted for what they cared about."



A crew works on creating defensible space near a home in the Tahoe Basin.
© Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team

Implementing Projects for Fuel Reduction and Fire-Resilient Landscapes

PERFACT supports network members and participants as they implement risk reduction and resilience enhancement projects. While only a fraction of the funding for implementation projects conducted by members comes directly from PERFACT, participation in the networks—and the enabling conditions that the networks foster—has been cited by members as a key element in securing leveraged funding, and in making implementation funds go further through cooperative work. PERFACT supports implementation projects that demonstrate a unique or particularly strategic practice, and frequently supports prescribed fire implementation through Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TRES) and other cooperative burning models.

- CA** In the central Sierra Nevada, partners have completed an impressive 60,000 acres of wildland-urban interface fuel reduction projects over the last 10 years. To meet their aggressive target of 22,000 additional acres and 99 percent compliance with defensible space requirements by 2023, they are working to double the pace of their work.

CO With FAC Net support, Fire Adapted Colorado offers members Opportunity Fund Awards of up to \$2,500 to support a specific project or help an organization strategically increase its capacity. Recent projects included coordinating local partners to complete a pile burning project on 23 acres, and enabling a fire department to complete its first community fuel break project adjacent to a very high risk neighborhood.

SD In the Black Hills of South Dakota, the Rapid City Veteran Wildfire Mitigation Crew, has begun a new 50 acre fuel thinning project in steep terrain adjacent to several existing subdivisions on the site of a proposed subdivision in North Rapid City. Participation in the Southern Rockies TREX is helping them move to the next step, increasing their use of prescribed burning.

MN In Minnesota, contractors have removed hazardous woody debris from 100 acres on 120 properties. Fifty residents completed another 50 acres of treatments with support from 50-50 match grants from Firewise USA®.

SC The Southern Blue Ridge FLN and the TREX it hosted supported risk reduction with a first-entry burn conducted on Greenville Waters' North Saluda Watershed, the first controlled burn on that property since the 1950s. The SBR TREX also provided an incentive—and a deadline—for partners to identify and prepare burn units, and to make arrangements for allowing crews outside their agencies to burn their lands. After years of building trust, this was the big step, going from talking about working in an All Hands All Lands framework, to doing it.

NJ Efforts to expand prescribed burning on private lands in New Jersey were advanced through a new partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Three regional workshops connected state fire wardens and NRCS field staff, and these partnerships helped boost prescribed burning in the state to more than 30,000 acres—a record year, that exceeded the annual goal by more than 50 percent—in spite of a difficult, wet burn season.

And Preparing for More Implementation

Through Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges, cooperative burning events and the network of practitioners who implement them, PERFACT embraces combining experiential training with implementation, to grow the local workforces that are needed to continue treatments.

CA In response to feedback from participants in previous Klamath River TREX, the fall 2018 event set training opportunities as its first priority. More than 84 people from more than 25 organizations and agencies took part, with 61 NWCG training assignments offered under a Type III management team framework, and one RXB2 burn boss trainee completing her position task book. Even with the focus on training, the crews treated more than 300 acres, mainly in the wildland urban interface around local towns and homes.

US In all, the 17 TREX held across the country over the course of the year provided 661 training opportunities and completed 18,481 acres of prescribed burning.



Pile burns reduce fuel loads in the wildland-urban interface near Rapid City.
© Tim Weaver/Rapid City FD



FAC ambassadors get a firsthand look at prescribed burning in New Jersey.
© Bill Brash/
New Jersey Wildfire Safety Council



A crew gets briefed before a burn during the Klamath River TREX.
© Will Harling/MKWC



A Forest Stewards Guild Youth Corps crew prepares line for a prescribed burn. © FSG

“It is the leadership, training, motivation, collaboration, attitude and passion of Wildfire Adapted Partnership and their Neighborhood Ambassador program that has taught us how to create the knowledge base and attitudes needed for our residents to keep working year after year to cultivate a healthy forest.

NM

The Forest Stewards Guild has substantially expanded its reach and capacity for risk reduction throughout the Southwest with its Gravitas Peak Wildland Fire Module, staffed with young people from traditionally underrepresented and under-served populations. The module takes on a variety of tasks as needed—from assisting the Niobrara TREX with several thousand acres of burning in Nebraska, to conducting a 500-acre fuels reduction burn in a WUI in New Mexico that the local CWPP had identified as high priority.

As PERFECT members and partners work to put more prescribed fire on the ground, obstacles arise—and are addressed. Deep connections to a place, along with a network of practitioner peers and support to explore options have allowed network members to break through barriers that had long checked the use of prescribed fire.

CO

Until recently, ordinances in Archuleta County, Colorado, kept private landowners from being able to conduct pile burns at the scale needed to manage fuels. This year, the Chama Peak Land Alliance worked with the county to create a mechanism to allow this burning, and several landowners took advantage of this to burn over the winter. A revised process for broadcast prescribed burns is now nearly complete, as well. “Not only does this allow landowners to accomplish important forest health work, but in the process we have brought county emergency management staff around from a perspective that was against all private land fire to one where they support landowner efforts and are open to cooperating on future efforts.”

US

Prescribed fire liability insurance has been an insurmountable barrier for many small organizations and contractors. With support from the Fire Learning Network, the Forest Stewards Guild worked with a private insurance company—answering the questions of several underwriters, and “translating” between the conservation and insurance worlds—to create a product to insure their fire work. Other network members have since been able to secure this insurance, and work is underway to share this opportunity throughout the networks and larger fire community.

Tested by Fire

For years, Wildfire Adapted Partnership has worked with the Firewise USA® Falls Creek Ranch neighborhood near Durango, Colorado, helping them draft their wildfire protection plan, and mentoring the volunteer neighborhood ambassador who led the annual mitigation and other preparation work under the plan. Because of the community’s work, when the 416 Fire broke out in the summer of 2018, the Durango Fire and Rescue chief decided “Falls Creek is where we can stop this fire.” And they did, with no structures lost.

Wildfire Adapted Partnership
 Neighborhood Ambassador program
<https://fireadaptednetwork.org/enhancing-fire-adaptation-through-active-volunteers-the-neighborhood-ambassador-approach/>



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For more about the Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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