

# Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges and Cooperative Burning

Experiential training events in support of landscape restoration and resiliency, fire adapted communities and workforce capacity-building



The winter/spring 2018 burn season saw partners deliver a series of cooperative burning and training events, including seven Trex supported by the Fire Learning Network—the Yurok Trex and Butte Trex in California, Niobrara Trex in Nebraska, Taos Trex and Chama Trex in New Mexico and the Central Oregon Trex and Ashland Trex in Oregon. Several events based on previous Trex were also delivered without direct FLN support, including a cooperative burn week in Iowa offered by the Loess Hills Fire Partners, a fire tour of the Great Plains (Pheasants Forever) and training exchanges in South Dakota (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service). Members of the Trex Coaches Network led, organized, mentored or otherwise took part in all of these events.

These successful efforts prove that a solution to the wicked problem of

inadequate capacity for prescribed fire treatments on public and private lands is to use various models of cooperative burning to facilitate an all-lands, all-hands approach. The burns range from formal agency assists to less formal neighbor-helping-neighbor expectations—but in all cases, sharing resources and having teams in place to prioritize the prescribed fire work



At the Ashland Trex, 50 percent of the incident management team and 37 percent of participants were women. Overall, 24 percent of Trex participants this spring were women.

## Sustainable & Resilient

About 20 Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges held across the country each year are proving that we can work together as a community, we can work together as different agencies with different standards, and we can accomplish more planned burns together than separately. Trex hosts, coordinating staff and participants are all learning that to build sustainable and resilient burn capacity you have to spend time and energy administering agreements, planning a year ahead, developing a variety of burn units with various weather parameters, coordinating multiple funding sources, and assembling a diverse burn team that can burn on various jurisdictions.

## Spring 2018 Trex



Photo: BLM (Lisa McNee)

		people	acres
Yurok Trex	CA	32	30
Niobrara Trex	NE	53	1,347
Taos Trex	NM	15	1
Chama Trex	NM/CO	19	0
Central Oregon Trex	OR	39	1,669
Ashland Trex	OR	50	328
Butte Trex	CA	19	55
<b>TOTAL:</b>		<b>227</b>	<b>3,430</b>

**Interpreting the numbers:** Each event is planned with the intent to accomplish the right fire at the right time under the right conditions. But planners and coordinators all discuss and develop alternative training activities for when the weather or other factors don't cooperate. The wide range in number of acres burned at this season's events resulted from both excellent and extremely poor burn windows, but also because some important burns are small while others are large. In New Mexico, the warm, dry winter prevented burning, but the teams conducted a full suite of alternative training and outreach. In Oregon, conditions were conducive to burning at both Trex; the fewer acres burned in Ashland were just as critical as the larger acre totals in Central Oregon. The Ashland team is focused on the watershed above the city, so they burn numerous small units to build a matrix or mosaic of different burn footprints. This helps manage smoke, and also creates important diversity in the vegetation that breaks up fuel continuity. Nebraska was a mixed bag—they were limited by weather, but also had some excellent days and prepared teams, so when the burn windows opened they took full advantage. The Yurok and Butte acre totals, though small, covered important acres in priority locations to accomplish the teams' goals, which for the Yurok was generating basket making material and for the Butte was community protection and demonstration burns.

will help ensure the burns are in fact completed and the benefits from the use of fire are realized. A typical Trex is a two-week prescribed fire assignment, conducted under the Incident Management System, with a strong emphasis on integrated fire management and skills beyond the fireline. But the Trex model

has the ability to flex or morph to fit the opportunities at hand, and is especially suited to cross-boundary burning using inter-organization burn teams. The flexible nature of Trex model is demonstrated in the various project goals that defined the individual events this spring—the Yurok Trex focused on a tribal and

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community opportunity to provide plant materials for important cultural practices; the Niobrara TREX provided planned fire for the pyric-herbivory focused management for bison herds on a Conservancy preserve; the Taos TREX, hosted by the BLM through the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program in New Mexico, helped build a workforce to be used across the state; and the Ashland TREX supported collaborative city, federal and non-profit organization efforts that focus treatment on a municipal watershed to protect the city's water supply.

Once a landscape hosts a TREX, and successfully co-plans and co-implements priority burns with their partners, they want to repeat the effort, usually immediately. At the moment, this is particularly striking along the New Mexico-Colorado border, where there is a cadre of seven TREX coaches who are working together to help one another lead TREX events—three to five a year—in the Rio Grande watershed and other priority places. Over time, each TREX

develops its own core team of locals, aided by experienced staff from other areas who return every year. The consistency in leadership at each TREX is helping make each burn safer, each training and evaluation more effective, and accomplishment of burn treatments across ownerships more efficient.

An important effort this spring season was the continued focus on diversity, equity and inclusion. Highlighting the place-based nature of fire, cadre are focused on ensuring that Incident Management Teams and modules that make up a TREX organization represent the landscapes and people where the events are hosted. TREX is ahead of the field in attracting and recruiting women as participants and leaders. Beginning last fall, a two-hour harassment awareness training has been incorporated into TREX events, and we're now building a more robust approach and expanding to include formal training from subject matter experts in diversity, equity and inclusion.

## Training, Treatments & Outreach

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges & cooperative training burns provide:

- hands-on training and NWCG position task book opportunities
- prescribed fire treatments that meet local objectives
- outreach to community leaders, media outlets and land managers

TREX events are organized as prescribed fire assignments, managed using the Incident Command System (ICS) and hosted by a combination of federal, state and non-governmental organizations. A typical two-week agenda begins with classroom presentations and field trips where participants learn about local ecology, conservation challenges and opportunities, and tour sites of wildland fires in the area to explore and discuss their impacts. Participants are then divided into modules, and begin training with their assigned equipment and scouting burn units. Over the course of the TREX, the modules work as part of a burn team completing a series of prescribed burns on a variety of ownerships. Through this process, participants learn how to effectively work on interdisciplinary teams, and experience how legal and administrative frameworks for cooperative burning can enable regions to increase the pace and scale of prescribed fire. They also gain experience working for—and leading—firefighters, managers and practitioners from other states, regions and countries, and with a variety of skills, life experiences and backgrounds.



The Central Oregon TREX team facilitated media engagement, and also captured professional quality photos and video footage of prescribed fire planning and implementation for use in public service announcements and social media outreach. *Photo: BLM (Lisa McNee)*



Kept from burning by hot, dry, windy conditions, the Chama TREX crew turned to other work, including a day helping local managers work with community members and complete home safety assessments.

*© Chama Peak Land Alliance (Caitlin Barbour)*

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges are supported by *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together* (PERFACT), a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior.

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### MORE ONLINE

Upcoming TREX—planning generally begins 6-12 months before a TREX: <http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/HabitatProtectionandRestoration/Training/TrainingExchanges/Pages/Upcoming-Training-Exchanges.aspx>

*FLN Notes from the Field*—Index: <http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/USFLNPublications/Pages/Index-FLN-Notes-from-the-Field.aspx>