

Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together (PERFACT)

A cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior

“The network provides the push I need to keep innovating, stay connected, and to consider the relevance of our local and regional efforts to the challenges faced nationally.”

Rio Trampas TREX © FSG (Sam Berry)



DELIVERING ON A VISION FOR A BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH FIRE

The PERFACT partnership works to restore our relationship with fire by moving us toward “right fire”—where good fire can do its work on the landscape, and both human and natural communities are better able to live with fire. We invest in the people who share our goals in implementing the integrated tenets of the Cohesive Strategy, helping them develop the resources and relationships they need to succeed. We work in key places, with the people and organizations leading the charge locally, and also at regional and national scales.

PERFACT works through interwoven strategic efforts. The Fire Learning Network (FLN) fosters collaboration for restoration and integrated fire management in landscapes across the country. The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net) supports and connects people and communities who are striving to live more safely with wildfire. The Indigenous Peoples Burning Network (IPBN) supports traditional burning knowledge and practices to perpetuate traditions and a healthy environment. Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX) and cooperative burns provide experiential training that integrates a range of people, places and aspects of fire, expanding our collective capacity to manage fire well. And,

finally, the third phase of Scaling-up to Promote Ecosystem Resiliency (SPER), which wrapped up in 2017, supported targeted restoration action and capacity-building in pilot landscapes where the other efforts had laid strong foundations; SPER projects boosted social and operational capacity for right fire—at a meaningful scale—to the next level.



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As a mature network, the FLN is focusing on cultivating new leaders and strengthening connections across networks. Some

FLNs are nurturing growth in geographic reach—for example, the Southern Blue Ridge FLN added the Southern Cherokee landscape; the South Central FLN works on multi-state initiatives, hosting a learning exchange on shortleaf pine for practitioners from Tennessee this fall. Other FLNs are prioritizing closer integration with complementary PERFACT strategies—in Washington, FLN partners hosted their first TREX this fall; an Oregon FLN landscape held its first cooperative training burn, and a landscape in North Carolina hosted a Community Mitigation Assistance Team to incorporate communities in their wildfire recovery work.

FAC Net members are dismantling the silos that have kept community work, fire management and landscape resilience apart. By integrating their work, they are moving from one-off projects to long-term system-wide change. In the Tahoe Basin, work on NEPA planning and capacity-building are moving in tandem, so projects can be implemented as soon as they’re through review. An integrated approach to smoke in Oregon includes advocating for flexibility in the state smoke management strategy revision, while also pursuing ways to help residents reduce health impacts. Along the Colorado-New Mexico border, connecting FAC Net, TREX and FLN partners brings together diverse skills and builds capacity that is leading to joint projects—and a shared vision for integrated fire management.

In spite of a severe fall wildfire season, PERFACT burning and training events adjusted as needed and went forward. Seven TREX provided training for 251 people and treated 1,587 acres with fire. Training burns were also implemented in New Mexico and Oregon, and the TREX model spread abroad, with members of the TREX Coaches Network helping lead a TREX in Portugal. In northern California, members of the IPBN also continued returning cultural fire to the land, with five family-led burns this fall.

Three years of work under SPER finished with remarkable progress in all five pilot projects. They had proposed 1,300 acres of treatments, along with creating enabling conditions for active fire use on their landscapes. By the end, they had treated over 2,000 acres, and had all opened doors to more use of fire.

In California, two projects made great strides building local capacity for fire management while completing strategic treatments around communities to allow wildfires to be safely managed for resource benefit. They saw success when the Island Fire was allowed to burn, with good community support. SPER demonstrated the feasibility of burning on private lands and across boundaries in New Mexico. This helped the Rio Grande Water Fund draw more partners—and funding for the next steps. New partnerships that cross the Colorado state line will also facilitate cooperative work in the upper reaches of the watershed. In Oregon, burning done during the Ashland TREX, coupled with meaningful community engagement, helped the community come to terms with working together on smoke. The transparency and trust that were built laid a good foundation for the community to continue using fire to protect its watershed and its landscape.

“Projects matter—but also who we’re working with, and how it happens: the story is in the relationships.”

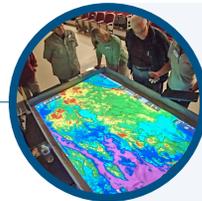
PERFACT *works* because it works at all scales—from individuals, to communities and landscapes, to states and regions, to the country as a whole and our national fire-related institutions. PERFACT works because people, and the relationships among them, are at its core. Over and over again, members of the networks have reiterated the central role of relationships to their successes.

Relationships power the flow of information and innovation. Written resources are essential, but it’s people who help each other efficiently find the right ones, and refine or modify them as needed. Some of the most effective tools and resources can’t be easily reduced to words, and are better transmitted person-to-person through hands-on experience. And, finally, we’re more likely to try new things when we learn them from a person we trust, and have their support through the trial.

Relationships between individuals build the partnerships and collaboratives that plan together, and get work done together in a particular community and landscape. Relationships between people help join these local efforts into larger-scale work.



A FAC Net learning exchange of members from several municipal fire services opened doors on how to enhance home and property assessment processes, since they had the opportunity to see three distinct approaches—from communities in New Mexico, Oregon and Washington—to using these tools in their areas. But maybe the most impactful aspect of the exchange was when participants shared their priorities and job descriptions, and how they are making their personal marks on what leading fire adaptation efforts in their respective communities means.



A “Living with Fire” workshop in Minnesota drew heavily on successful public engagement activities developed by other FAC Net members. The Citizens Fire Academy in Oregon, Island Park’s Incident Command Team reenactment and Santa Fe’s use of the Simtable provided the main ideas for the workshop. The workshop was well attended by permanent residents and seasonal landowners alike and participants felt empowered by the knowledge they gained.



The Cascadia TREX was the first TREX held in Washington, and was planned and implemented in a relatively short timeframe. Its success was made possible by strong local partnerships that provided a foundation of trust, good communications and a wide range of skills. Together, these partners were able to tackle the complexities of a TREX because of key support from several members of the TREX Coaches Network, who guided them through the planning process and were on site through the event as mentors.



From the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk landscape of the IPBN in the West to the Potomac Highlands FLN in the East, network members plan together, so they can then work together with a shared vision and strategy. While at least one person at the IPBN Healthy Country Plan workshop was rather young, it was fitting, given the emphasis on inter-generational learning in the newly developed plan.



An important partner organization in New Mexico hired a former lead of the Great Plains FLN as its director this year. Her experience with TREX and prescribed burns—and established ties to the NM FLN, through the national network—were among factors enabling on-the-ground work in the Chama landscape of the Rio Grande Water Fund to accelerate. Likewise, relationships between the NM FLN and FAC Net members in southwest Colorado played a key role in launching a new collaborative effort spanning two states, three national forests and two forest regions.

“Participation in the network has reinforced the importance of reaching out to others, forming partnerships, and looking for ways to leverage others’ efforts and not just undertaking this work on your own.”

“We feel that we are not alone—we are all in this together and what we are working towards is collectively addressing a significant social, economic and ecological issue that requires long-term solutions.”

Relationships between individuals help move the lessons and culture of these specific places and regions into our institutions. Individual voices, speaking from personal experience, can power the national conversation.



The FLN has been key to the growth of a new generation of prescribed fire councils that bring together prescribed fire practitioners and a full range of stakeholders, from researchers to private landowners to air quality and other regulatory agencies. Together they identify goals and barriers, strategize, and act. Lenya Quinn-Davidson helped form the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council in 2009, was instrumental in forming the Washington council, and advises the Southern Sierra council. She is now on the board of the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils, bringing this approach—and learning from her work with FAC Net—to the national level.

This is why PERFECT supports actions that connect people, and that build the skills and capacity of people in the places they work.



Northern California needs a more robust local fire management workforce and more private-land burning. The FLN is building capacity for both. Training burns—such as those near Hayfork and Weaverville this fall—build skills and give the wide range of local burners experience working together, bridging any institutional barriers. Work is also under way to launch a prescribed burn association to help private landowners burn cooperatively. The FLN held two training burns in Humboldt County and is working with a partner NGO to build an equipment cache for private burners.

Strong networks also build resiliency and sustainability. Groups that work together can continue moving forward when one or a few people leave. Having relationships in place allows a group and a community to weather a crisis—or seize an opportunity. And a proven ability to work together and get things accomplished also leads to greater success in obtaining funding to keep moving work forward; PERFECT support routinely launches efforts that leverage funding by this means.



The Heart of the Appalachians landscape has recently seen significant turnover in partners from numerous agencies. This FLN is weathering the turnover because of its long history of partner work together—and is even being revitalized by the changes. In October a small group met to discuss plans for the coming burn season, and ended up developing a plan to revise the landscape’s strategic plan; a workshop is set for the late winter. Many of these newly identified leaders will take part in leading the workshop—and carrying forward the current network.



Wildfires in California turned lethal shortly after the Women in Fire TREX near Yosemite National park got started, and all burning in the state was shut down. Strong working relationships and a commitment to resiliency meant that WTREX went forward. The organizing team rapidly developed an alternative plan. Drawing from within their ranks, they put together trainings based on the expertise of people on the roster and opportunities at hand, including fire effects monitoring on a managed wildfire, providing valuable learning experiences for all.



PERFACT invests in work that demonstrates what is possible when people collaborate and focus on solutions rather than what “can’t” be done. The earliest TREX ran on a little money and borrowed equipment; more support grew TREX into an increasingly effective and replicable model that drew a broader base of support, both financial and technical. Now, half of all TREX are entirely or primarily supported with other funds, linked and guided by the TREX Coaches Network. Similarly, the relatively small SPER pilot projects demonstrated the feasibility of burning in key areas, and led to funding for continuing work in those landscapes.

“FAC Net introduced me to the principles of collaborative leadership. Working in the command-and-control focused world of emergency fire suppression, this presented a shift in thinking in how solutions can be invented through the power of collaboration.”



Klamath River TREX © Erica Terence

CASE STUDY: WORKING PERFECT-LY IN WASHINGTON

On a PERFECT team call this fall, we asked partners in Washington to reflect on their history together, and how they got to their recent great leaps forward.

The story, they said, began in earnest around 2008, with turning points for two local efforts that would become key drivers, the Tapash FLN landscape and the Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition. A several-year incubation period followed, with a lot happening in site-specific, and not always connected, ways for these and other players.

Things sped up in 2013—the FLN geographic scale expanded and Chumstick joined the newly launched FAC Net. In 2014 several factors—including a wicked wildfire season—converged to accelerate things even more. This phase was “rough”—but the long-term relationships and complex web of connections among efforts saw them through to remarkable success.

Washington now has a statewide FAC network and active prescribed fire council. These were instrumental in getting legislation passed (HB 2928) that is changing the state’s approach to prescribed fire. They are leading the drive to use that new framework to get fire on the ground for forest resiliency and community protection. And, because of their experiences and recognition that severe fires will still happen, they are leading post-fire recovery work. Their approach integrates landscape, human and economic recovery factors.

This network of networks continues to collaborate, complement each other, and live by the best practices they’ve discovered along the way:

- Seize opportunities.
- Make room for each other.
- Say “no” strategically.
- Use the Cohesive Strategy.
- Be willing to suspend your disbelief.
- Have faith the pie will get bigger, for everyone.



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PUBLICATIONS & MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Peer-reviewed publications that look at aspects of PERFECT:

Goldstein, Bruce Evan et al. “Transforming with a Soft Touch: Comparing Four Learning Networks,” *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.2479/full>).

Lake, Frank et al. “Returning Fire to the Land: Celebrating Traditional Knowledge and Fire,” *Journal of Forestry* (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/treearch/pubs/54392>).

Highlights from the 50+ media pieces on PERFECT projects and partners this reporting period:

“Wildfires Are Essential: The Forest Service Embraces a Tribal Tradition,” *Yes! Magazine* (<http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/science/wildfires-are-essential-the-forest-service-embraces-a-tribal-tradition-20170403>).

“In the West, Communities Pioneer Cooperative Approach to Fighting Wildfires,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (<https://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/2017/0921/In-the-West-communities-pioneer-cooperative-approach-to-fighting-wildfires>).

“Friendly Fires: Training Exchange Teaches Controlled Burn Strategies in Roslyn,” *Yakima Herald* (http://www.yakimaherald.com/sports/outdoors/friendly-fires-training-exchange-teaches-controlled-burn-strategies-in-roslyn/article_45fe369e-aefe-11e7-97fa-07d11710d2d6.html).

“It’s Impossible to Prevent Wildfires. So How Do We Prepare?” *Fortune Magazine* (<http://fortune.com/2017/10/19/california-wildfires-preparation/>).

“Fire as Friend, Fire as Foe: Klamath TREX and the 2017 Wildfire Season Show Us the Two Faces of Fire,” *Forest and River News* (http://www.treesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/FRN_Winter2017_final.pdf).

“Yes, Something Can Be Done About Wildfires,” *New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/19/opinion/california-wildfires-helping.html>).

Recent Awards

- Will Harling (FLN, TREX, SPER), Lenya Quinn-Davidson (FLN, FAC Net, TREX) and Margo Robbins (IPBN, TREX, FLN) received the three “2017 Partnership Awards” from CAL FIRE
- Grandfather Restoration Collaborative (Central Escarpment FLN landscape) received 2017 USFS Southern Region “Restored and Resilient Landscapes Award”
- USFS FMO Brian Schaffler (Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment FLN landscape) received a South Carolina Forestry Commission “Wildfire Mitigation Award”
- Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project received the 2017 USFS “Chief’s Honor Award” for their work on the West Bend Project

More Online

- <http://www.conservationgateway.org/fln>
- <http://FireAdaptedNetwork.org>
- <http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>



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PERFACT is an equal opportunity provider.