

# Indigenous Peoples Burning Network

The mission of the Yurok-Hupa-Karuk IPBN is to revitalize the implementation of cultural burns in native communities through the cultivation of an intertribal support system in which traditional ecological knowledge is shared and our rights are protected.

In the fall of 2015 the Fire Learning Network facilitated the launch of a network to support the cultural burning practices of indigenous peoples. The Yurok, Hupa and Yurok Tribes in northern California—the first members of the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network (IPBN) have since been working to develop the foundational principles and first action steps of the network. Key to the success of this is putting the rights of tribes to self-determination first, which means supporting the effort to restore their fire cultures in their own way.

## Planning Underway

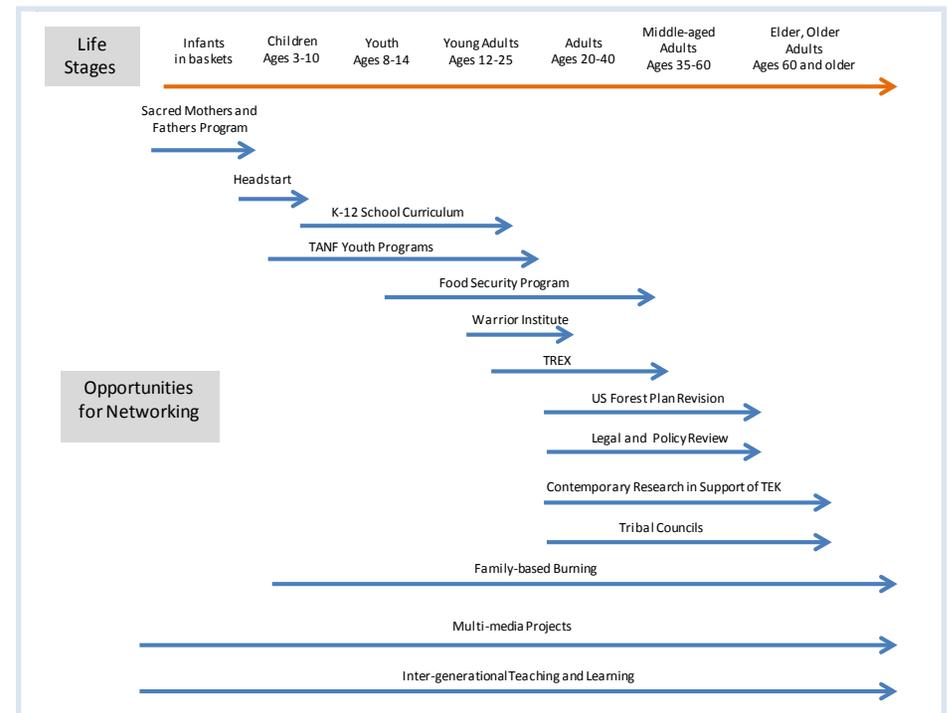
The Yurok-Hupa-Karuk IPBN held two workshops in the winter and spring of 2016. At the first workshop, in January, participants reviewed and updated the network operating principles they had developed at the previous workshop; used aerial and satellite imagery from the 1940s and 2010s to visualize changes in vegetation cover and other features of their ancestral territories at the landscape scale; and networked and learned about the actions of fire management organizations in the area, including the Forest Service and the Yurok Cultural Fire Management Council. They also heard from Frank

Lake, a USFS researcher and a descendant of the Yurok and Karuk Tribes, who had compiled a narrative of the fire management life stages for a traditional practitioner in a contemporary context (see diagram).

The second workshop this spring was the first of what will be two sessions in developing a Healthy Country Plan. This planning is patterned after similar efforts by aboriginal people in Australia and was brought to the attention of this group by Fire Learning Network (FLN) staff and The Nature Conservancy's Global Fire Director, who facilitated this workshop. One of the goals identified at this workshop was to increase the number of families involved in family-led burning to 40 families, distributed



Then and now: participants in the January 2016 IPBN workshop compare aerial photos from the 1940s and contemporary satellite imagery. © TNC (Mary Huffman)



## Framework for Developing Traditional Fire Practitioners in a Contemporary Context

Local programs and activities provide networking opportunities at each life stage in the development of traditional Yurok, Hupa and Karuk fire practitioners in a contemporary context. Maintaining traditional fire culture is an inter-generational endeavor that requires lifelong investment by the practitioners and the community. Restoration of local fire culture will require the Yurok-Hupa-Karuk IPBN to develop a support network for each stage of life.

across four communities. Workshop participants articulated characteristics of family-led burns (in contrast to agency- or NGO-led burns) and they

identified next steps. The session ended with a field visit to the area that may serve as the site of the first family-led burn, which is slated for this fall.

## On the Ground in the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk Landscape

Among the goals in this landscape is the development of a pathway for long-term restoration of traditional fire culture. The life stages diagram moves the group in that direction, describing in detail the lifelong training process required to develop a traditional fire practitioner, including what types of learning and practice need to happen in different life stages. Workshop participants have identified various programs in their communities—for example, the Warrior Institute in Hoopa—that they could use to accomplish training and practice at each level, and they are fitting them into this framework.



The Director of the Warrior Institute demonstrates the use of a fire drill during Spring Camp.  
© Cultural Fire Management Council (Margo Robbins)

Intergenerational learning is a high priority for the IPBN. To promote that, this spring IPBN leadership focused funding on supporting a local youth organization, the Warrior Institute, to put on a youth camp with sessions on traditional fire and its relationship to local culture. With help from leadership within the IPBN, the Warrior Institute organized and delivered its first three-day Spring Camp. For a long weekend, 21 young people hiked, camped, cooked salmon the traditional way and learned traditional stories—and learned about fire’s relationship to basketweaving, regalia species, native foods, watershed and forest condition, and more.

## Part of the PERFECT Family of Networks

The IPBN also made strides in integrating with the work of other PERFECT strategies and network members this spring. Members of the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk IPBN have been closely engaged with FLN, Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net) and Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TRES) efforts in northern California from the start. This spring members from the Yurok, Hoopa and Karuk Tribes joined the FLN and FAC Net at the annual national Learning Networks

## How We Use TRES

Margo Robbins  
TRES Coaches Network planning workshop

*Excerpts from her introductory statement, available in full at <http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/HabitatProtectionandRestoration/Training/TrainingExchanges/Pages/how-we-use-TRES-Yurok.aspx>*

... Five years ago we had no hazel sticks to weave with; this was the way it had been for many years before that as well. Impenetrable brush has grown up on the land, our traditional food sources, such as acorns and deer have been severely impacted, and the threat of wildfire is of great concern.

Restoration of the land, and preservation of our culture, is a number one priority for people living on the Yurok Reservation. We MUST put fire on the ground if we are to continue the tradition of basket weaving....

This is the task that TRES enables us to embark on. So far we have burned close to 300 acres. This year, for the first time in my life time, we had enough hazel sticks for everyone to gather as much as they needed! There is a basket class taking place in Hoopa and Weitchpec. The next generation of weavers is learning how to gather and weave! ....

As we build capacity in the local community to put fire on the ground in a safe way, we ensure the continuance of our culture.

workshop. This raised the profile of the IPBN and resulted in many discussions among FLN and FAC Net participants about how to incorporate work with indigenous peoples into existing networks. In turn, the IPBN leaders were able to see what the FLN and FAC Net are all about, and to connect with people in other landscapes.

In June, one of the key players in the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk IPBN was one of 20 people invited to take part in the design workshop for the TRES Coaches Network. As part of this group, she contributed a valuable cultural perspective on fire, real-time experience with the

development of a new network, and reflections on the role that TRES plays in cultural revitalization—including in her moving introductory statement (see box).



The Indigenous Peoples Burning Network is supported by *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. For more information, contact Lynn Decker ([ldecker@tnc.org](mailto:ldecker@tnc.org)).

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