Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency and Fire Adapted Communities Together

Left to right: Participants monitor the progress of their fire during a prescribed fire training exchange in Nebraska. FLN partners use fire to improve habitat for a host of plants and animals; for example, Venus flytraps from North Carolina's Green Swamp Preserve thrive after controlled burns. The Ukonom Hotshots shepherd the Butler Fire around Butler Flat, CA using an old miner's ditch. This community—in the Western Klamath Mountains landscape —participates in the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network as well as the Fire Learning Network.   *Photos: Anu Kramer, Skip Pudney, Will Harling*

Our Partnership: 2002-2016

PERFACT is a cooperative program of the Forest Service, Department of the Interior agencies and The Nature Conservancy. It supports the Fire Learning Network (FLN), the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net), innovative training, targeted implementation, outreach and other efforts that together are restoring our nation's forests and grasslands and making communities safer from fire. A small core staff engages hundreds of agency and private partners across the U.S. to increase ecosystem resiliency to benefit nature and people.

National Impact

- Since its start in 2002, the FLN has supported 157 landscapes in 40 states and worked with more than 1,250 partner groups.
- Network projects and partners have raised over $30 million to support their land management activities, collectively treating more than 500,000 acres.
- Since 2008, 48 prescribed fire training exchanges have provided 1,300 training opportunities and treated more than 82,000 acres with ecological fire.
- The FAC Learning Network was launched in 2013, rooted in the lessons of the FLN. It engages 22 community- and state-based efforts, linking them to strengthen their local work and support fire adapted communities efforts nationally.

Under the PERFACT agreement, people work together to increase the capacity and social capital needed to make ecosystems and communities more resilient to wildfire and related challenges. PERFACT supports two robust learning networks—the Fire Learning Network and Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network— as well as training, capacity-building and targeted collaborative implementation work.

The Fire Learning Network (FLN) engages dozens of multi-stakeholder projects in a process that accelerates the restoration of landscapes that depend on fire to sustain both natural and human communities. By restoring this balance, the ecological, economic and social values of the landscapes can be maintained, and the consequences of catastrophic wildfire can be reduced.

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net), modeled on the FLN, has a similar role, but works from the human communities outward. Members of this network collaborate, exchange information, and work together and at multiple scales to help communities live safely with fire. This includes embracing resiliency concepts and taking action before, during and after wildfires.

Experiential training—through prescribed fire training exchanges (TREX), collaborative burning and other offerings—builds local capacity and provides new perspectives to professional fire workers, while completing treatments that help communities and ecosystems.

Targeted implementation—Scaling-up to Promote Ecosystem Resiliency (SPER)—includes a variety of work on the ground to complete treatments that complement existing or planned work on adjacent federal lands and move work to a landscape scale.

In addition to these efforts, network staff also explore new opportunities, from developing tools for collaboration in fire planning to helping guide the development of the new Burned Area Learning Network and Indigenous Peoples Burning Network.
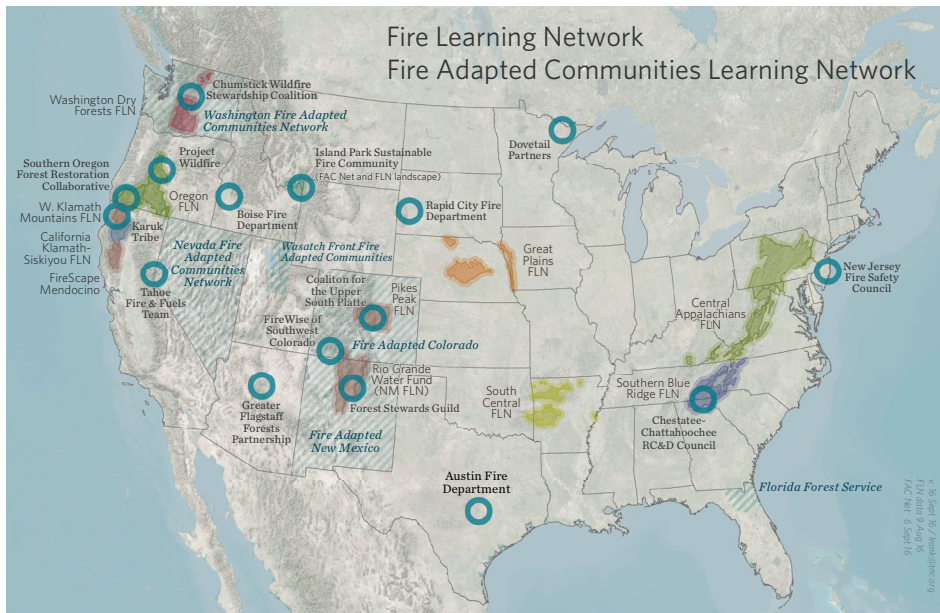
Responding to Today's Challenges

Millions of acres of public and private lands are at risk from damaging wild-fires and related threats. Thousands of communities in these landscapes are also at risk. There is a widespread and urgent need for restoration and mitigation actions—proactive tactics from managing wildfires for resource benefit, prescribed burning, thinning and controlling invasive species to developing effective community plans and creating defensible space.

PERFACT is addressing this problem head-on with a flexible methodology that is constantly evolving in response to emerging issues and partner priorities such as the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

The Cohesive Strategy has three goals:
- Resilient landscapes;
- Fire adapted communities; and
- Safe & effective wildfire response.

From coast to coast, landscapes and communities are advancing planning, implementation and adaptive management related to these goals with support from PERFACT.

The Fire Learning Network is currently supporting 12 landscape-scale collaborative partnerships (colored patches). The geographic reach of Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network groups varies widely; core members include 16 locally-based efforts (blue circles) and several state-based efforts and state-wide networks (blue cross-hatching).

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How it Works

PERFACT helps diverse stakeholders—agencies, organizations and residents—build trust and understanding, and work together to improve their community's capacity to safely co-exist with fire. Access to training helps fire professionals work with local communities, ultimately allowing managers to meet their goals in service of the public interest.

The FLN provides demonstration landscapes and regional networks with modest funding to support workshops and other actions that further their ability to collaborate. They integrate science with cultural and local knowledge to create plans, measure results and adapt their approaches. Key FAC Net communities also receive support to nudge them past barriers, and to allow them to test and refine strategies that can then be shared widely. Both networks also provide facilitation and coordination assistance, and means to access new tools and innovations. In 2015, the networks also began developing formal communities of practice to address some of the most challenging issues related to wildfire; these communities are intended to reach far beyond PERFACT.

Partnership staff conduct prescribed fire training at selected landscapes, and increasingly mentor others now moving into leadership roles. These events increase local capacity for cross-boundary restoration and fuel reduction while strengthening partnerships. Training exchanges have grown to attract several hundred fire practitioners a year from across the country, and from abroad. Participants gain experience in ecological burning and communicating with the media, develop fireline qualifications, and hear about local ecology and conservation issues in an environment that emphasizes safety, learning and cooperation.

Cooperative implementation projects under SPER I and II completed nearly 24,000 acres of treatments in strategic areas. The third phase of SPER, now underway, is focused on increasing the use of "right fire"—prescribed fire and natural ignitions managed to benefit natural systems and human communities. This includes intensive work over three years in landscapes in California, New Mexico and Oregon, as well as targeted capacity-building and cooperative burning. Outreach activities are incorporated in SPER work as well, extending the benefits of the work into the future. SPER projects—which are informed by and rooted in other PERFACT work—are on-the-ground embodiments of the Cohesive Strategy emphasis on a broad-based and integrated approach to fire management.

Who We Are

The FLN, training and implementation parts of PERFACT are led by staff from The Nature Conservancy, who partner with the Watershed Research and Training Center to facilitate the FAC Learning Network.

These organizations are active members of the Fire Adapted Communities Coalition, and the FLN partners with numerous other programs, including many projects in the Forest Service's Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) and The Nature Conservancy's Restoring America's Forests priority.

Partners in individual landscape and community efforts span a full range of affiliations, including federal, state, local and tribal agencies; businesses; non-profit organizations; universities; private landowners; and engaged citizens. Interests are equally diverse, and this diversity helps build strong, resilient networks.

Learn More

FLN resources are posted at:
www.conservationgateway.org/fln

FAC Network blogs and more are at:
http://facnetwork.org/

TREX information is at:
http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges

For more, or to sign up for the newsletter, write to fire@tnc.org