

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges

Partners work by accelerating the development of prototype **fire adapted communities** in a landscape context ... accelerating **integrated efforts** for restoring and maintaining resilient landscapes through multi-scalar collaboration, effective planning processes and **transformative** learning and networks ... building **social and operational capacity** for response to wildland fire in a changing world ... accelerating the adjustment of landscape-level strategies for a changing climate ... integrating science, **cultural knowledge** and adaptive learning to resolve key barriers to transformative resilience.

Experiential training events with multiple objectives—training, outreach and treatments—are not part of the normal, comfortable status quo. But TRES provide precisely this, and all who are involved in the events work hard to maintain this balance.

Professional fire practitioners gain experience, learn about conservation, and receive position task book evaluations. Less traditional training partners—private contractors, ranchers, and others—engage in events that meet NWCG safety standards, gaining skills to work more safely and effectively. And TRES include some partici-

pants who have never burned before: biologists and air quality agency staff, for example, come to better understand how fire affects their work. TRES events strengthen partnerships and coalitions in the fire community and diversify the workforce by exposing participants to practitioners from other places and diverse backgrounds.

TRES events include training in crafting and delivering key messages about the benefits of prescribed fire and its use as a management tool, and designated days during each event for members of the media to experience the work at close range and talk with

practitioners. This has proved to be an excellent strategy for giving reporters a good understanding of basic concepts in a way that they can effectively share with readers, viewers and listeners.

Each TRES starts with introductions to local ecosystems and land management practices, and to fellow crew members and equipment. Crews then implement a series of prescribed fires, burning on average for 5-10 days, and accomplishing from a few hundred to several thousand acres of treatments on priority landscapes and around communities at risk from wildfire—simultaneously building skills and

fostering healthy natural and human communities.

TRES participants are immersed in demonstrations, discussions, required readings and experiential training to learn—and teach—about myriad aspects of prescribed fire. The training delivers a foundation of key safety, operational and tactical skills, including:

- NWCG basic firefighter safety training for those who need it;
- scouting, lighting, holding, mop-up and patrolling controlled burns;
- communicating effectively by radio;
- delivering & receiving briefings,

Spring Break TRES March 10-22 Niobrara Valley, NE

With 102 participants, this was the largest TRES offered to date. This allowed participants to break into several burn teams and conduct simultaneous burns, and the added level of complexity provided new opportunities for learning.

Loup Rivers TRES March 24-April 2 north-central NE

On a day when high winds precluded prescribed burning, this group saw wildfire smoke when engaged in other training. They made themselves available to local dispatch and provided welcome assistance on a rapidly-spreading blaze. Several FFT1 trainees were evaluated on wildfire tasks.



Virginia TRES March 31-April 11 coastal & Appalachian VA

The Central Appalachians FLN and its partners hosted the first TRES held east of the Mississippi. In addition to providing an excellent venue for regional training, several TRES veterans welcomed the chance to burn in these different fuel types, thus broadening their experience.

Yurok TRES May 24-June 4 Weitchpec, CA

Offered in partnership with the Yurok Tribe, this TRES helped get cultural burning re-started after a long hiatus in this landscape. Food security and reliable sources of materials for cultural traditions are the long-term goals of partners here.

conducting after action reviews, and documenting daily actions and activities; and

- using a variety of tactics and tools from different regions of the country (and world).

These are placed in a larger fire management context:

- the Incident Command System, use of daily planning cycles and planning documents;
- planning, organizing and implementing controlled burns; and
- monitoring fire effects, writing reports and reporting to senior managers.

And, perhaps most important, TREX integrate prescribed fire strategies and tactics into a holistic ecological and social context, that includes:

- regional fire ecology and local socio-economic impacts of fire management;
- work with groups like prescribed fire councils and landowner associations; and
- fire adapted communities concepts.

Participants also learn to craft key messages about wildfire and fire management, safely integrate media onto the fireline, and effectively deliver the messages in interviews.

In the spring of 2014, four prescribed fire training exchanges—two in Nebraska and one each in Virginia and northern California—resulted in over 8,000 acres of treatments in key landscapes and provided learning opportunities for 179 practitioners, building their skills, widening their experience, and contributing to local, regional and national capacity to get more “good fire” on the ground.



TREX are conducted in a wide range of landscapes, with a variety of ecological and social goals. In Nebraska this spring, burns restored and maintained prairie and reduced woody encroachment on rangeland. On the coastal plain of Virginia, underburns were conducted to maintain longleaf pine habitat. In northern California mountains, burning reduced hazardous fuel loads and rejuvenated cultural resources.



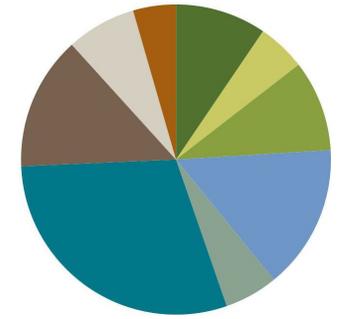
All TREX incorporate a range of skill levels and professional backgrounds in the people taking part. However the events often have a focus on a particular group of practitioners being engaged. The Niobrara Valley TREX was timed to coincide with universities' spring breaks so that numerous students could attend, while the Virginia event included many state agency staff and the Yurok TREX had a strong tribal component.



In addition to focusing on local ecological and fire management issues, TREX explicitly embrace local fire culture. In northern California this spring, that included classroom presentations on traditional burning practices and the products they provide and, for example, the identification of basket-making materials in the field. In Nebraska, this might take the form of razor-straight blacklines on private units, in line with local practice.



One of the things that makes TREX successful is the “can do” attitude people bring: large groups gather, ready to work. They burn together when conditions are right—and take on other learning experiences when the weather doesn't cooperate. This brings on-the-ground progress—whether it's 37 acres in drought-struck California or a 1,000-acre day in Nebraska—as well as a better-skilled, and better connected, workforce.



Forest Service state & local private
 Dept. of the Interior NGO int'l
 TNC university other

In their early days, TREX were attended mainly by staff from the partners in the cooperative agreement: the Forest Service, Department of the Interior agencies and The Nature Conservancy. This spring, only about a quarter of the participants were from those three sources, as TREX are meeting their goal of engaging a diverse set of participants. This brings together a wide range of experiences and viewpoints for a richer shared learning environment.

Even before the spring TREX were done, planning was well underway for the next season, with fall TREX planned for Arizona, California and New Mexico. Spring 2015 events are also starting to take shape in Nebraska, North Carolina and Oregon.

Much of the effort at the national level is now focused on mentoring local leaders to deliver these events. This strategy of moving away from on-the-ground FLN staff leadership during the events is already expanding the scale of TREX, as multiple events can run back-to-back, or even overlap.

TREX are supported by *Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency through Collaboration: Landscapes, Learning & Restoration*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more about prescribed fire training exchanges, contact Jeremy Bailey (jeremy_bailey@tnc.org).