



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

FireScope Mendocino Workshop 10: Fire Ready Communities

Upper Lake, California
March 14-15, 2017

Members of the FireScope Mendocino collaborative met to talk about fire ready communities in the historic town of Upper Lake in northern California. The 58 people who took part in the two-day event represented about 20 organizations: Fire Safe Councils, environmental advocacy organizations, tribal natural resource and historic preservation departments, federal and state agencies, water quality control boards, recreation and timber interests, private foresters, and landowners. Marek Smith, the new Director of the Fire Learning Network, also flew in from Virginia for his first experience with the collaborative. Field work, presentations and conversation provided opportunities to learn new perspectives, integrate contributions from new participants and partner organizations, network, and recognize the good work being done in the area.

On their field day, participants enjoyed an early spring day in the vibrantly green California hills—some remarked that the hills will soon turn dangerously brown while others playfully insisted that they will be beautifully “gold.” The first stop was just off a steep dirt road leading into the pines of the Mendocino National Forest. A spectacular view to the west overlooked Clear Lake and the small town of Lucerne spreading along its near shore. The District Ranger showed how a fuel break at this ridge could both protect Lucerne from forest fire and protect the forest from fires starting in the checkerboard lands and highway corridor below. He passed out maps showing potential fire spread in two different conditions. “Whoa, look at that!” was a typical response, and people then shared information about the area’s fire



The town of Lucerne nestles on the north shore of Clear Lake, by the Mendocino NF. © TNC (Mary Huffman)

history, wind dynamics and land use patterns. The next stop was the Lakeview Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, a collaborative effort of the Forest Service, Lake County Fire Safe Council, CAL FIRE and the North Shore Fire Protection District. Here, the fuel break butts up against a densely vegetated private inholding, highlighting the importance of engaging private landowners in establishing an uninterrupted fuel break. Standing amid hand piles and shaded by the forest, the group discussed the fuel reduction treatments as a means of forest restoration as well as improved access for firefighters.

Indoor work took place at the Bachelor Valley Grange Hall, its walls plastered with maps and posters representing FireScope Mendocino’s previous work and new projects. Speakers wove together the workshop themes of supporting the local economy, environmental health and community well-being through engagement in programs and projects involving wild-fire readiness and use of “good” fire:

- Participants learned how the Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group formed in an economically devastated area and works persistently to meet the “triple bottom line” of healthy environment, community and economy in their forest and watershed restoration work. In planning projects, which include controlled burning, they advocate for local employment, respect historic and Native American cultural sites and stay current with science-based tools and strategies.
- The Mendocino County Blacktail Deer Association, a longtime financial contributor to habitat improvement on public lands, advocates for controlled fire to help stem the decline in deer population, in turn supporting recreational hunting as an important economic sector in the area. The association is working with the Mendocino National Forest on a prescribed burn project.
- A report on the recent Northern California Prescribed Fire Council

meeting included discussion of private burning collaborations, biochar initiatives and public perspectives on smoke.

- The Lake County Fire Safe Council is meeting success in implementing reflective signage to help with emergency response and wayfinding during fires in the Lake Pillsbury area of the national forest. Communities adjoining an initial project area clamored to participate when they found out about the program. “The goal is to have reflective signage for everyone in the forest boundaries,” said a Forest Service forester.

A fun sandtable exercise on fuels treatment and defensible space engaged participants in fuels treatment scenarios. Three sand landscapes—with match and birthday candle trees, blue paper waterways, bird-house homes and sticky note critical habitat areas—were carted outside from their hiding place behind the grange’s stage area. Participants broke into three teams to study their landscapes and implement a fuels treatment strategy—selectively removing “trees”—before a fire was lit and blown by wind from an electric fan. Everyone cheered as structures survived in the post-treatment landscapes.

Strategies and tools for supporting and extending work with communities and beyond was another workshop theme. Community engagement consultant Jana Carp described the important assets every community has that can be mobilized locally for learning to live well with fire. She described a systematic approach

for mapping (literally or figuratively) and connecting assets in ways that are uniquely appropriate to a particular community’s residents and organizations.

Finally, a group of FLN peers from the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership visited from northern California to share some of their experience with FireScope Mendocino. In addition to talking with participants, they brought examples of the kinds of documents they have developed in organizing and recording the growth of their network, such as interagency agreements, partnership documents and telling their stories for a national audience.



Participants discuss the placement of “fuel treatments” during the sandtable exercise.
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For more on FireScope Mendocino:

Mary Huffman
mhuffman@tnc.org

Participant Organizations

Blue Ribbon Coalition
Bureau of Land Management
CAL FIRE
California Environmental Protection Agency—Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, North Coast Water Quality Control Board
Environmental Protection Information Center
Lake County Fire Safe Council
Lake County Resource Conservation District
Little Stony Inholders Alliance
Mendocino County Blacktail Deer Association
Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California
Northshore Fire Protection District
Office of Congressional Representative Doug LaMalfa
Private landowners
Robinson Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California
Sierra Club
Sierra Pacific Industries
Tuleyome
USDA Forest Service—Mendocino National Forest; Region 5
Western Klamath Restoration Partnership

The Fire Learning Network is part of *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information about PERFACT, contact Lynn Decker: ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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