



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

The first outcomes of the Yurok TREX that you see are the burns, completed in strategic locations that can be used in a few months as anchor points for burning under hotter, drier conditions of the fall. Or maybe it would be the local participants and local leadership that formed the core of the crew, and the strong participation from the state's fire management agency. Or maybe the good media coverage, telling of the historical relationship between the land, the people and fire.

But the most important outcome might be the thing that allowed and helped enable all the others—and that is *process*. While at first glance this perhaps not a very flashy outcome, it is at the center of this TREX, and central to the objective of building capacity in the Yurok community. Process is essential because of the deep need for developing productive relationships with local fire organizations and agencies. Process also touches on the role of burning in general—the treatment itself is the sum of many small knowledge- and skill-based actions orchestrated in a dynamic environment.

In this TREX, the process joined the skill-sets of local, state and federal personnel with those of tribal members and land managers, non-profit staff and university students. Through their cooperative work and attention to developing the skills and knowledge that underpin the burning process, participants gained meaningful experience with prescribed fire—and, working together, the team continued the arduous work of bringing fire back to the Yurok land.



Left: Tribal members, students and local residents work with agency personnel to begin ignitions and create a blackline for holding the unit.
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Right: The crew conducts control and mop-up activities on a large pile burn.
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Yurok TREX

Weitchpec, CA
Spring 2017



Firefighter Dominic Obie from the Cultural Fire Management Council watches a landing pile scorch a tree, prepared for the potential of fire to climb toward the treetops.
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Participant Organizations

Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve
CAL FIRE
Cultural Fire Management Council
Firestorm Wildland Fire Suppression
Humboldt State University
Stanford University Extension
Terra Fuego Resource Foundation
USDA Forest Service—Six Rivers National Forest, Orleans District
Yurok Wildland Fire

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Fire is essential for maintaining the supply of numerous culturally important resources. For example, basketmaking traditions cannot be sustained without the grasses and the straight, pliant hazel sticks that sprout after fire. Discussions of these cultural aspects of fire, and the effects of fire on key species, formed an important part of this TREX.

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TECHNICAL HIGHLIGHTS

This TREX took place on the Yurok land west of Weitchpec, CA, primarily from May 16-23, with an additional clean-up burn on June 7. Unlike other TREX, because the great majority of the participants are local, this event could have “floating date”—a wide window, with mobilization on 48-hour notice based on conditions. The 24 participants came from as far as five hours away and as close as a quarter mile. Thirty-five CAL FIRE personnel also took part on one or more days of the TREX.

Fire effects from the burning varied throughout the units, but significant results were achieved by burning piles along unit perimeters, red-slash along perimeters and interior of units, and on exposed ridges within the Transfer Unit. Areas burned were strategically chosen to support fall burns under more active burning conditions.

Treatment and training highlights included:

- 31 acres of burning over 8 days (11 acres of piles and slash, 20 acres of broadcast burning)
- working with CAL FIRE, constructed and improved 3,200' feet of hand-line
- with CAL FIRE engines, implemented 3,000' of progressive hose lay
- cleared significant blowdown across roads, gaining experience with sawyer techniques and safety procedures for limbing, bucking and felling technically complex fuel arrangements and species
- discussion with Humboldt State University undergraduate Tenaya Wood on the scientific basis for fire-dependent species and systems
- presentation from graduate student Tony Marks-Block on the effects of fire on hazel growth and regeneration
- learning from Margo Robbins about the role of fire in producing basket-weaving materials, and their role in the Yurok culture

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Elizabeth Azzuz	logistics, local liaison
Naomi Tora	finance and planning
Jim Wills	operations
Dan Kelleher	primary burn boss
Steve Graydon	incident commander



Cultural Fire Management Council Executive Director Bob McConnell takes a break to watch the action.

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Local resident and sustainability enthusiast Devin Finnegan lights a pile; all told, 11 acres of piles were treated during the TREX. ©Naomi Tora



All hands turned out to move a hose lay as the crew made adjustments for an operational transition.

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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 PERFECT, contact Lynn Decker: ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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