



# Indigenous Peoples Burning Network Learning Exchange: Eco-Cultural Revitalization in California and New Mexico

## Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

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Northern New Mexico

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Leaders from the Yurok-Hupa-Karuk Indigenous Peoples Burning Network (IPBN) visited people from two pueblos, the Mescalero Apache Nation and New Mexico's other fire networks. IPBN co-lead Deborah McConnell (Hupa tribal member), IPBN advisor Robert "Bob" McConnell, Sr. (Yurok tribal member) and I immersed ourselves in indigenous cultures of New Mexico for four days. Here are three early lessons for growing our network.

### CULTURAL ORIENTATION

The collections manager at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center showed us the museum collection of basketry, pottery, jewelry and other Pueblo cultural items that are not currently on public display. It was a good way to quietly get oriented to Pueblo culture. Deborah is a traditional basket weaver and Bob is recently retired from 20 years of cultural resource protection, so there was much they could sense from what we saw—like living culture and sacredness—while I worked hard to grasp a basic understanding at the level of objects. Lesson one: Native American people visiting one another will be key to the IPBN reaching its potential.



Deborah (left), a Hupa basket weaver, examined Puebloan baskets in the collection of the Pueblo Indian Cultural Center. © TNC/Mary Huffman

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SPRINGS

We met with four staff members from the U.S. Forest Service, two from the Cibola NF and two from the regional office for New Mexico and Arizona. As we learned about each other's efforts, we found an eco-cultural place of connection. In the Yurok-Hupa-Karuk IPBN in Northern California, fire exclusion results in prairies

and meadows becoming overshadowed by trees. In New Mexico, freshwater springs dry up. Too many trees act like too many straws drawing water from the ground. Lesson two: Advancing spring restoration through controlled burning and tree thinning may be where indigenous people and the U.S. Forest Service connect with the IPBN in New Mexico.

### INSPIRATION FROM A YOUNG MAN

We received a warm welcome in the home of a Jemez cultural leader. Deborah, Bob and our host found that maintaining indigenous culture by carefully passing traditional knowledge and practices from generation to generation was a challenge their tribes have in common. Some traditions take a lifetime to learn. Young people must balance the rewards of contemporary society with taking on traditional responsibilities. During the



The commitment of a young Jemez basket weaver inspired the idea of a young practitioners' exchange between tribes in California and New Mexico. Comparing cultural arts and other aspects of fire-adapted cultures will help strengthen the next generation's commitment to healthy homelands.

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Members of the IPBN leadership team from Northern California traveled to New Mexico for the first IPBN learning exchange. © TNC/Mary Huffman

visit, a young Jemez man came by with an armful of handmade baskets, some from his grandparents' home and some that he had made. Among the Jemez people, his family carried the tradition of basket weaving. When the Deborah asked him how he learned to weave, he replied that no one was available to teach him. He was teaching himself by trial and error, studying old baskets as his guide. His solitary journey stood in contrast to Northern California, where Deborah has taught three generations of weavers. With support from the IPBN, Bob and Deborah are extending those teachings to include culturally-based controlled burning. Lesson three: A young-practitioners' exchange between New Mexico and California would allow next generation practitioners to travel to one another's landscapes, share learning, and bolster their commitment to caring for fire-adapted homelands.

For more on the IPBN, contact:

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The IPBN 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 about PERFECT, contact Marek Smith: marek\_smith@tnc.org.



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