



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Butte TRES

Chico, CA
May 29-June 2, 2018

Short but sweet, the Butte TRES included a field tour of an ecological reserve, two days of broadcast burning, a post-burn evaluation on a nearby unit, and a demonstration of Simtable technology. TRES participants were a useful addition to the crew conducting a burn on the Plumas National Forest, and the burn served TRES participants, helping them meet specific training objectives while gaining knowledge about ecological and socio-political factors specific to the area.

GETTING ORIENTED AT BIG CHICO CREEK

The TRES was based at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve (BCCER), which is managed by the California State University Chico Research Foundation as a natural area for environmental research and education. The descent to the property starts high on the ridge, and the road winds visitors down to a wide field with an old barn, a small office, and nearly 4,000 acres of land surrounding Big Chico Creek. Participants were welcomed to the event inside the barn, which has stood there for over a century.

The land was historically grazed, and while for some time that method served to keep an overstory of black and canyon oaks, overgrazing and unchecked vegetation growth left the property in need of improvement and upkeep. And so the staff of the BCCER have been using fire, in conjunction with mechanical techniques, to manage invasive species; the improved areas now serve as both objectives and test plots for future actions. With these lessons in mind, participants toured the ground with reserve field coordinator Kohner



A burn boss trainee—who also took part in a TRES in Oregon earlier in the spring—gives the briefing on the first day of the burn.

© BCCER (Jon Aull)

Vugrenes, who shared more about the background of the land, and current treatments and their various degrees of success. Subtle differences—like the difference between blistering an interior live oak, and scorching one—can have significantly different effects; the former will eliminate the stump-sprouting brush, while the latter will stimulate it.

The staff doesn't have a big workforce, but it is fortunate to have volunteers, including some with long experience—one volunteer often logs more hours than most of the part-time staff, and due to his 25 years of work on the reserve, often informs decision-making and project strategies and tactics.

The BCCER is also a Vegetation Management Program (VMP) site. The VMP is a CAL FIRE cost-sharing program that focuses on the use of prescribed fire, and some mechanical means, for addressing wildland fire fuel hazards and other resource management issues on



A member of the BLM Redding Fuels Module had a wealth of experience working in the Great Basin, but was new to burning in timber models. "He was a great asset, and we were glad to pick him up for the event so he could get some time burning in his new home in Northern California." © BCCER (Jon Aull)

Tipping the torch for the first time under the supervision of a squad leader from the Feather River Hotshots, one Butte TRES participant didn't even know what wildland fire was seven months ago. © BCCER (Jon Aull)



State Responsibility Area lands. Local foresters and fire chiefs attended the first day of the Butte TRES, and took the time to speak about the VMP on the reserve to the group, and to discuss the planned role of fire and burning to achieve multiple objectives across 450 acres of the reserve.

BURNING ON THE PLUMAS NATIONAL FOREST

The next day, participants were up and rolling to the Plumas National Forest for a burn in the Brush Creek area. The steep slope of the northwestern aspect terminated in a creek, the thick vegetation (tanoak mixed with ponderosa pines) hadn't seen fire for over a decade, and the defensible fuel profile zone (fuelbreak) for the unit was in need of reduced fuel loading and improved structure. The burn, with the Feather River Hotshots, lasted two days; the first day saw accomplishment of 80 percent of the 55-acre burn, with the remaining 20 percent and clean-up on the second day.



A BLM burn boss discusses burning and mixed effects. Some areas on the Butte Forest Thin project had some higher flame-lengths than desired, and "the center of the south-facing slope with 15-foot manzanita and timber litter did get hot. But imagine what we would have seen from this entire area in July; we are definitely within the historic range when you look at this entire ridge as opposed to this small section alone." © Terra Fuego (Steve Graydon)

AFTER THE BURN

On the fourth day of the event, participants traveled to the site of burns conducted as part of a watershed and forest restoration project funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and Prop 1. The burns had been completed by the Bureau of Land Management, Terra Fuego and Firestorm Wildland Fire Suppression in February and April. At this site, participants had an opportunity to observe, analyze and discuss the burn effects with Don Hankins (CSU Chico), who is responsible for monitoring on the project.

Rounding out the TRES, participants were able to engage with the Simtable for a localized fire scenario. Like the field tours, this activity included public and local resource agency representatives. Participants were thrilled to see the technology and embraced its potential to facilitate informed planning and communication with communities and local resource advisors in an area.



A graduate student stands satisfied with his ignition of a corner area of the burn. While he had experience doing some burns on the BCCER, working with Plumas NF resources—including the Feather River Hotshots—was a great experience and he was very engaged. © Terra Fuego (Steve Graydon)

Participant Organizations

Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve
Bureau of Land Management
San Jose Fire Department
Terra Fuego
Trinity County RCD

Formal Training Opportunities

- 6 new fire workers trained and certified to support prescribed fire operations at the FFT2 level
- 4 previously non-certified fire practitioners integrated into NWCG standards and training
- 1 burn boss trainee on burn
- 1 firing boss trainee on burn
- 1 strike team leader task book finalized through coordination of firing tasks relative to holding resources

For more about the Butte TRES, contact:

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For more about the TRES strategy, visit
<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>

The Fire Learning Network and Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TRES) are 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 Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.



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