



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the Spanish-Language TRES

Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

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Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TRES) are designed to empower communities and practitioners to work together to safely conduct prescribed burns that benefit both human and natural communities. Building this capacity requires a holistic approach, so TRES provide wide range of learning opportunities, from basic fire-line skills to exploration of the ecological, cultural and social facets of the field.

The Conservancy's Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team was invited to do an "Unconscious Bias and Active Bystander" training session at the 2018 Spanish-Language TRES. "In these workshops we examine our differences—of gender, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and ability, for example—to create awareness about how those differences are always in dynamic interaction and impact our relationships at work. We also offer opportunities to practice listening and dialoguing skills by using scenarios from situations where colleagues have experienced challenging interactions with others such as harassment or discrimination. The purpose of this work is to give people the tools to work respectfully and effectively across our differences and to intervene competently if experiencing or witnessing any of these situations." This training is particularly suitable for TRES, where participants work long hours, live in close quarters for extended periods of time, and engage in intense training and work—both during the TRES, and in their daily work.

On arriving at the Albuquerque airport, I followed the plan arranged for me and met up with Tania from Mexico; together, we spent a few hours waiting for Andrea's flight from Ecuador to

arrive. Then we were all picked up by Randy from the Pecos-Las Vegas Ranger District, who knew we were hungry and took us to his favorite restaurant in Santa Fe for a warm meal.



Maria Estrada, building her fireline skills.
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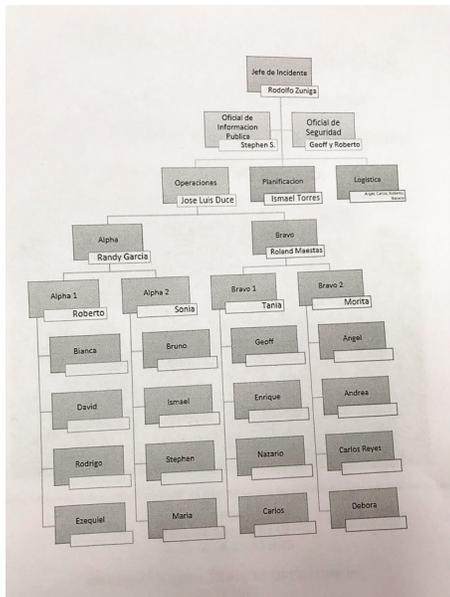
I was struck by how I was immediately at home with this Spanish-speaking group. Later we met up with other wildland firefighters, forest and fire experts from other countries in Latin America, Spain and the U.S. We bonded through long days of learning and exercises, and through shared meals and our willingness to jump with both feet into the complexity and rigor this work requires. Organized into four brigades, we were all given opportunities to practice leadership skills while cutting fire lines together. And we traveled to various sites to learn about local fire ecology and fire management from agencies like the U.S. Forest Service.

Twenty-three people from ten countries (including four U.S. agencies) made up this year's Spanish-Language TRES crew.
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From the very first, we all understood and accepted the expectations set up by the leaders: Show up fully. Engage in thoughtful, thorough planning and clear communications as critical elements of our safety. Be present and alert. Give and expect respect for, and be fully accountable to, one another. Stay humble yet strong. And, most of all, honor and follow the chain of command.



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Honor the chain of command.

I was surprised at how much I loved my experience. Particularly the sense of being held in community by people who hardly knew each other, yet offered kindness and supported each other without hesitation, knowing that we needed each other to succeed.

By the time my time came to deliver the “Unconscious Bias and Active Bystander” workshop, we had had plenty of opportunities for meaningful and deep interpersonal engagement and the group was ready to enter into

uncomfortable conversations with me. Some shared deeply and early about their passion for their work and about their aspirations. A few shared stories of how they had been at the receiving end of harassment or disrespect. I was very moved by the response from both women and men who told me how they live with the consequences of sexism, harassment, or worse that they or loved ones have experienced.

All of the women participants—we shared a cabin—one by one expressed their genuine gratitude at having had the space to open up to their male colleagues, and shared stories about not always receiving the respect they deserved from some of their peers. Others spoke of being shunned by their teammates for having voiced a grievance or for having called out a colleague on their sexism. They especially appreciated the question I posed to all of them in my closing: “What are you going to do with this learning, and are you ready to be an ally when you see a team member being mocked, humiliated or harassed?”

I am still reflecting—Why was this short experience so profound? Perhaps it was about being called to show up as your best self ... and finding out that in doing so, you are able to see and bring the best in others.



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For more on the TREX strategy, visit:

<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>

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To download a reminder sheet of active bystander skills and inclusive practices on the fireline, visit:

<https://bit.ly/2SzygQ1>

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 PERFAC, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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