

Arkansas TRES: The Fire Must Go On

Omaha, NE to Little Rock, AR
March 18-28, 2019

In the last weeks before the scheduled start of the Loup River TRES in central Nebraska, it became clear that a late, and exceedingly wet, spring would preclude any prescribed burning in the area. The decision was made to cancel that TRES, and re-focus local resources on taking advantage of any burn windows that might appear. However, a strong component of the planned TRES was an international exchange, with participants from Colombia, Mexico and Spain bringing their knowledge and perspectives to the Great Plains—and those 14 participants had already committed to their international travel. Within days, members of the TRES Coaches Network and partners in Arkansas had stepped up—to host burns and house crews, to shuttle people from Omaha to Little Rock, and to fill the many roles that make a successful TRES.

José Luis Duce, TRES Coach
Sr. Scientist, Spatial Informatics Group

The Arkansas TRES was 14 days of incredible time together and shared knowledge. We came together from four countries—Colombia, Mexico, Spain and the United States—and nine agencies. And we shared more than 150 hours full of ecology, presentations, high-quality classroom and field classes, walks, line digging, patrol and mop-up. Innumerable moments of shared emotions, sweat, smiles, anecdotes and lessons about fire and life. Throughout the time, I saw friendship, positive attitudes, a willingness to learn, and enthusiasm and love for fire, for this profession and for those around us.

And fire—1,667 acres of good fire. Fire to restore grasslands, and open spaces among the shortleaf (*Pinus*

echinata) and loblolly pines (*P. taeda*). Fire among oaks (*Quercus* spp.). Fire to protect watersheds and sequester carbon. Fire for fuel management and hazard reduction and plantation management. And fire to improve wildlife habitat in different ecosystems in Arkansas, from the West Gulf Coastal Plain in the south, to the Ozarks in the north. Head fire, backing fire, flanking fire. Fire on the plains, fire on those “terrible but incredible” slopes. Even fire and water up to our knees in the swamps.

The group of 14 fire practitioners converged in Omaha, Nebraska on March 16, just as the state was experiencing record-high river levels and flooding. We were met by Gabriel Cahalan and Lydia Zowada from The

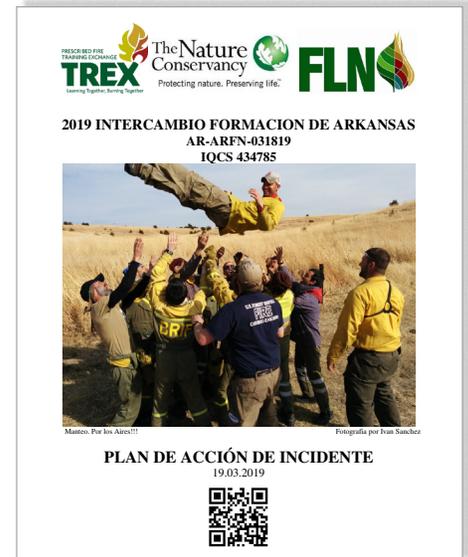


There were lots of briefings, starting with an introduction to “life at a TRES,” before traveling down to Arkansas. © Emilio del Pino



Safety first! Participants prepare to practice deploying fire shelters.

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Incident Action Plan for the Arkansas TRES, which was conducted primarily in Spanish

Nature Conservancy (Maryland and Colorado chapters, respectively), and we then drove to Little Rock, Arkansas, where Kyle Lapham and his Conservancy fire crew were waiting, to welcome us and start the Arkansas TRES 2019.

The first day consisted of an orientation with Conservancy staff—Kyle Lapham (fire manager), Gabe De Jong (ecologist), Douglas Zollner (science director)—and NOAA meteorologist Dennis Cavanaugh, who introduced us to the fire program,



At briefings, burn boss Kyle Lapham delivers great knowledge, setting objectives and highlighting safety. © Emilio del Pino

ecology and weather in Arkansas. Those new to TRES also met Phil Dye, who would lead the Planning Section.

By the end of the two weeks, we had racked up hundreds of miles through four states. Hours of strenuous effort and good team work, and all with positive energy among the TRES fire family. We saw—and took part in—the incredible fire and land management efforts by the Arkansas fire team, a good example of partnership among different institutions.

It took great effort to make this TRES possible, and to do so in record time. It was only possible with the care, human touch, and commitment and support from the whole TRES network. And now, a piece of us and our heart is still in the Arkansas landscape—we give thanks for that.



The crew conducts a test fire at one of the Central Arkansas Water units. A test fire, ignited in a representative location in a unit, helps to check whether the fire behavior is appropriate to meet burn plan objectives. On another day, we learned a lot from a 'no go' test fire result at the Cottonmouth Creek Unit.
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Gabriel De Jong leads first-order fire effects monitoring on the East Lake Unit. This exercise gave everyone a good sense of the protocols used and the desired effects of "good fire" in this landscape.

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A crew protects some trees used by red-cockaded woodpeckers. © Inmaculada Ibar



The crew pauses at the end of ignitions at Lundsford Corner. © Angel Larriba



Unit / Complex	Acres
Warren Big North	857
East Lake 4	164
Lundsford Corner	171
Cottonmouth Creek	no-go
Devil's Eyebrow	475
TOTAL	1,667



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<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges 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 PERFECT, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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