



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Southern Blue Ridge FLN Annual Workshop

May 2013

Using our knowledge of past fire regimes, current landscape conditions, and lessons learned to manage for more resilient landscapes with public support

At the 8th annual SBR FLN workshop, 75 attendees from more than 15 organizations participated in two days of presentations and discussions and a field trip to Tallulah Gorge State Park and the Chattooga River Ranger District of the Chattahoochee National Forest. This was an opportunity for FLN members to return to sites visited during Workshop 4 to observe and discuss the fire effects on sites that had been treated with between one and three prescribed fires.

The workshop began with an overview of the Chattooga River Ranger District and the Upper Warwoman Landscape Management Project, followed by updates from researchers at the University of Tennessee on their work using dendrochronology and macroscopic soil charcoal to evaluate fire and forest history in the Southern Blue Ridge. The afternoon included presentations on smoke management and an outstanding series of presentations led by Megan Sutton, Katherine Medlock and Josh Kelly on landscape-level planning using VDDT models as a reference / benchmark for restoration. Discussion focused on assessing forest

structure and integrating those assessments into forest planning processes. The day concluded with a panel of representatives from each of the SBR FLN landscapes discussing successes and challenges within their landscapes.

Day two was a highlight of the workshop for many participants. A big “hats off” is in order to Nathan Klaus (Georgia DNR), and Dave Martin and Mike Brod (Chattooga River Ranger District) for a successful field trip that brought participants to a variety of thought-provoking areas and facilitated great discussions. Participants were impressed by restoration

work being done to create early successional habitat on Chestnut Mountain, where golden-winged warbler habitat is a management goal. They also enjoyed seeing some shortleaf pine restoration work in the Tugalo Village Burn Unit. The fire team showed flexibility in burning parts of a large

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Participants discussed fire effects at the Tugalo Village Burn Unit, the first stop on the workshop's field tour. © Evan Raskin/TNC



Participants engaged with a timber rattlesnake during the field trip, and discussed how prescribed fire is improving habitat for these and other reptiles in the Southern Blue Ridge.

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unit on days when resources like the helicopter and larger crews were not available. This was more efficient and increased safety when conditions were right to burn the bulk of the unit. Lunch overlooking the Tallulah Gorge provided a great vantage point for discussing the need to better communicate with the public about prescribed fire, as well as a beautiful view. A surprise visitor from the Orianne Society—a timber rattlesnake that participants had the chance to touch and observe up close!—and some

outstanding bus driving (thanks, Dave Martin) provided humor to an overall excellent day in the field.

The final day of the workshop packed in a number of great topics and discussions. Staff from North Carolina State Parks presented an excellent after action review of the Pilot Mountain Fire, a prescribed fire escape, demonstrating how lessons learned can significantly improve safety standards for a program. This led nicely into a discussion, led by Judy Toppins (USFS) and Debbie Crane (The Nature Conservancy), of communications and public opinion surrounding fire. Participants then had a chance to engage in discussion with a panel regarding lessons learned and landscape needs related to public relations and communications. Other highlights from the day included updates from state prescribed fire councils, a presentation from Eric Mosley of the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, and discussion of the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest plan revision process.

Overall this record-attendance workshop was very successful. Presentations from the workshop and other materials are posted at <http://2013sbrfln.weebly.com/>.

Participating Agencies & Organizations

Georgia Department of Natural Resources--Game Management, Nongame Conservation Section, and State Parks
 Georgia Forest Watch
 Georgia Forestry Commission
 Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance
 Greenville Water
 Land Trust for the Little Tennessee
 North Carolina State Parks
 North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
 Orianne Society
 Ruffed Grouse Society
 Shortleaf Pine Initiative
 South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
 The Nature Conservancy—Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee chapters
 Towns County, Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council
 University of Tennessee
 Upstate Forever
 US Forest Service--Chattahoochee-Oconee NF, Francis Marion & Sumter NFs, National Forests in North Carolina, Pisgah NF, Oconee NF, Region 8, and Southern Research Station
 Western Carolina University
 Western North Carolina Alliance



Nathan Klaus and Mike Brod gave a brief presentation on the Chestnut Mountain Project, while standing in an area of great habitat for the golden-winged warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) on the last stop of the day. © Evan Raskin/TNC

The Fire Learning Network is supported by *Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency through Collaboration: Landscapes, Learning and Restoration*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information about the FLN, contact Lynn Decker at ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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