



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Klamath Fire Ecology Symposium Orleans, California

April 15-17, 2014

The **Klamath Fire Ecology Symposium** takes place every three years in the small mountain town of Orleans, the heart of one of the most complex fire environments in the country, if not the world. It brings together scientists, managers, area residents, tribes and the conservation community to address restoring historic fire regimes in the Klamath Mountains in a manner that protects life and property, improves forest health and enhances resources. These symposia facilitate constructive dialogue on emerging themes in fire ecology and management in the Klamath Mountains and beyond. This year's symposium provided two and a half days of presentations and group discussions and a half-day tour of the 2013 Orleans Fire that burned through the town of Orleans, just behind the conference venue, as well as prescribed burns

The 81 symposium participants met at the Orleans Elementary School, behind which the Orleans Fire burned in the summer of 2013.

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conducted in 2013 during the fall Northern California Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TREX) and by the Forest Service.

The **2014 symposium** was another successful gathering of land managers, scientists, tribes, conservationists and community members for important sharing of current research and discussions regarding fire history and ecology in the Klamath Mountains. Nowhere else in the country are the social, cultural, and ecological realities of fire discussed with such candor and connection to place. Over the course of the three days, more than 80 participants gained a deeper sense of the past, present and future of fire in the Klamath Mountains.

Important discussion highlights of this symposium included:

- Fire exclusion has occurred simultaneously with a changing climate—the past 100 years have been the wettest in many centuries—which has produced fuel and vegetation conditions never seen before.
- The last time we have seen so little fire on the landscape in this region was when glaciers were retreating at the end of the last Ice Age.
- Fires are getting larger and more difficult to manage.



Top: The restoration coordinator for the Salmon River Restoration Council gave a presentation on the recently-tested Community Liaison Program that provides avenues of communication between the area residents and fire suppression teams.

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Bottom: The cultural biologist for the Karuk Tribe presented information on the cultural impacts of continued fire suppression policies

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- “Fire severity” has been defined various ways in research, leading to confusion on the topic. “Fire severity” measures relative change, whereas “fire intensity” is an exact measure of the amount of energy released during a fire event. Every fire has some degree of mixed severity depending on the scale.



Among the breakout sessions was one on the topic “Research: What are our burning questions?”
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- The paradigm is shifting in wild-land fire management, especially concerning community collaboration. Community liaisons can be a critical asset during a wildfire. Local knowledge is being listened to. Giant steps are being made with regard to collaborative landscape planning.
- Traditional fire knowledge has much to offer regarding fire management for multiple resources. Fire managers are listening more carefully to tribal practitioners and resource specialists, but there is still room for improvement. Fire suppression has had significant impacts to the Karuk Tribe’s culture and ceremonies, including their ability to gather the food, fiber and medicine resources that require specific fire cycles at different places on the landscape.
- Post-fire salvage logging decisions involve a complex balance between habitat and hazard. Issues brought up by participants included road building, erosion, invasive species and economics. A landowner whose property

burned during the Orleans Fire last July asked the group to come on their field trip and offer specific advice regarding salvage logging in the burned area. As a result, his decisions will be better informed. Agreements on the scope and scale of salvage logging between diverse stakeholders are needed.

- Recent fire footprints—those that are less than 10 years old—can and should be used



The executive director of the Watershed Research and Training Center spoke at an ancient clonal madrone tree burned in the 2013 Orleans Fire during one of the stops on the symposium field tour.

Participating Organizations

- California Fire Science Consortium
- Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)
- Happy Camp Fire Safe Council
- Hoopa Office of Emergency Services
- Humboldt County
- Humboldt State University
- Karuk Tribe
- Klamath Forest Alliance
- Mendocino Fire Safe Council
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- National Park Service—Redwood National Park
- Northern California Prescribed Fire Council
- Orleans Volunteer Fire Department
- Salmon River Restoration Council
- Southern Humboldt Fire Safe Council
- USDA Forest Service—Klamath National Forest
- USDA Forest Service—Pacific Southwest Research Station
- USDA Forest Service—Six Rivers National Forest, Orleans Ranger District
- USDA Forest Service—Six Rivers National Forest, Supervisors Office
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Watershed Research and Training Center

to manage future fires. They can be allowed to burn as part of maintenance and towards the long term goal of restoring historic fire regimes—or, given climate change, more resilient fire regimes.

- Science must inform policy. Policy must be flexible enough to incorporate adaptive management.

Fire managers and scientists will integrate the knowledge they gained at the symposium into their land management decisions and research choices. Local restoration organizations, conservationists and community members all gained perspective and offered insights regarding wildfire management, post-fire management strategies and fire resilient communities. As important, all participants made important connections and will be networking into the future as they continue these important conversations.

For more information on the Klamath Fire Ecology Symposium or Western Klamath Mountains FLN:

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The Fire Learning Network (FLN), Scaling-up to Promote Ecosystem Resiliency (SPER) and prescribed fire training exchanges (TREX) are part of the *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, contact Lynn Decker at ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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PRESENTATIONS

Bowman, Crystal (Karuk Tribe)—2013 Wildfires and Water Quality on the Salmon River, CA

Cocking, Matt (Natural Resources Conservation Service)—Fire Effects in Conifer-Encroached California Black Oak Ecosystems: Implications for Restoration and Management

Engber, Eamon (Redwood National Park)—NW California Deciduous Oak Woodlands: Learning from 25 Years of Management and Restoration on NPS Lands

Goulette, Nick (Watershed Research and Training Center)—Klamath People, Communities, and Landscapes: Fitting In and Standing Out in the National Context

Greenberg, Karuna (Salmon River Restoration Council)—Community Liaison Program: Trial By Fire

Guzman, Ed (USFS Klamath National Forest)—A Collaborative Approach to Hazard Mitigation on the Klamath River

Harling, Will (MKWC)—Prioritizing Fuels Treatments in the Western Klamath Mountains Using Geospatial Data, Collaborative Planning, and Local and Tribal Knowledge

Kane, Jeff (Humboldt State University)—Klamath Mountains as a Learning Landscape to Engage Students in Fire Science Research and Management

Knapp, Eric (USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station)—Management in the Post High-Severity Fire Landscape: Balancing Wildlife Habitat and Future Fuels

Lake, Frank (USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station)—Evaluating the Effects of Fuels Reduction and Wildland Fire Management on Tribally Valued Resources and Habitats

Minton, Mike (USFS Six Rivers National Forest)—Landscape Level Fire Planning Efforts on the Six Rivers National Forest

Quinn-Davidson, Lenya (Northern California Prescribed Fire Council)—Fire Science and Management: Bridging the Gap in Northern California

Reed, Ron (Karuk Tribe) and **Kari Norgaard** (University of Oregon)—Social Impacts of Fire Exclusion

Sherriff, Rosemary (Humboldt State University)—Historical and Observed Wildfire Severity Examples in Montane Forests of Colorado and Other Western states

Skinner, Carl (USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station)—Trends in Wildfire Size and Severity in the Klamath Mountains and Implications for Management

Tripp, Bill (Karuk Tribe)—Bridging Science and Management with People and Place

Wageknecht, Louise (Author, *Light on the Devils*)—Hoedads, Herbicides & Hardwoods: Running the Red Queen's Race on the Klamath

Symposium organizers are working with presenters to post these presentations at: <http://mkwc.org/programs/fire-fuels/klamath-fire-ecology-symposium/>