



Fire Learning Network
Notes from the Field

National Fire Cache Provides PPE for TRES, Communities Bring Good Fire to Their Neighborhoods



Newly trained citizen fire practitioners from local tribes and rural communities were provided PPE so they could fully participate in two weeks of burning in the Klamath Mountains. These citizen burners completed nearly 500 acres of burning with a little help from their professional firefighter colleagues. *Photos: Margo Robbins*

Forest Service fire leadership at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise coordinated the sharing of personal protective equipment (PPE) with the Fire Learning Network's innovative training program. The Redding Interagency Fire Cache provided PPE for prescribed fire crews made up of wildland firefighters and community members for community-based training and burning events. The newly trained firefighters—who made up half the burn team—gained experience over the two-week assignment and grew into capable and effective citizen fire practitioners. Working directly for professional wildland fire-fighters, these first-time fire practitioners took part in burns that protect their communities and help restore forests, and are now part of a more robust local fire management workforce.

Numerous towns and rural communities are accepting responsibility for fire, and are working to return controlled burning to their landscapes. The Fire Learning Network (FLN) is proving that by training and outfitting interested and available members of a community and partnering them with professional wildland firefighters, we can increase both implementation capacity and social support for prescribed burns.

Though the need to use prescribed fire is widely recognized, managers, landowners and organizations remain largely unsuccessful at achieving their burning goals. The FLN is working to change that. Community-focused fire training events led by the FLN are overcoming the common barriers that prevent agencies, organizations and individuals from fulfilling their prescribed fire goals. These prescribed fire training exchanges—TRES, for short—are proving successful even under the most challenging circumstances. Even when faced with unpredictable weather, burn bans across wide areas, national shortages of firefighting resources, and reluctant or resistant adjacent neighbors, land managers and politicians, people using the TRES model to organize their burning efforts are having unprecedented success. Rather than cancelling or postponing burns, communities are banding together, consolidating their resources and cooperating to get their burning done. These efforts are demonstrating that a unified community is much more effective at achieving burning goals than any one agency, organization or individual alone could be.

Developing a community's capacity to safely and effectively engage in fire management involves building ties—and removing barriers—between local people and knowledge on one hand and fire professionals on the

In the past, the FLN has rented PPE from private contractors or state agencies, borrowed from generous partners, and pieced together sets of PPE from hand-me-downs. This can be costly in terms of time and logistics as well as money, and is a complicating factor in an already complex event. Access to the Redding Fire Cache this fall—and future support from the Forest Service—is a game changer. It will help the FLN ensure that there is always enough PPE for the volunteer and non-traditional citizen fire practitioners that are quickly becoming an important part of the fire community and a critical investment for ensuring resilient communities and landscapes in the long term.

other. This often requires that training organizers provide basic firefighter training courses like S-130 and S-190, pack tests and other NWCG/FEMA trainings. It also requires that we provide personal protective equipment, from hardhats to fire shelters. With some common standards and language in place, we're learning how to create squads and crews of citizen fire practitioners. Paired with professional wildland firefighters and managers an effective local or regional crew can be built. For the past eight years the FLN has been building these burn teams with a mix of volunteer and professional firefighters. The volunteers are landowners and homeowners, students and scientists, biologists, hunters and gatherers, and other people who are dependent on the products that come from healthy and vibrant ecosystems.

In the fall of 2015, the U.S. Forest Service, through the Redding Interagency Fire Cache, provided PPE to one such group of newly trained citizens paired with professional firefighters to form a burn team. With basic qualifications met, this team then gained experience while conducting controlled burns in and around their towns and communities in the Klamath Mountains of northern California. Together, these fire practitioners completed 400 acres of burning that may prove critical when the next fire threatens these places.

Twenty full sets of PPE were provided. Had the cache not been available, it would have cost nearly \$20,000 to outfit these burners for the duration of the training. For perspective, a two-week TREX in this kind of landscape—timber and wildland-urban interface—costs on average about \$40,000 (plus volunteer time and resources). Clearly, the PPE provided by the Forest Service was crucial to the cost effectiveness and success of these training events.

One of these two-week TREX typically results in about 400 acres of completed burns—with an average cash cost of \$100 an acre, TREX burning is very cost effective compared with other prescribed burning in similar settings and fuel types. And the investment also provides training and evaluation for about 30 firefighters, and generates impressive media interest and positive coverage. The uniquely integrated approach of the TREX program—incorporating training, treatments and outreach—attracts support and involvement from a wide variety of groups and individuals.

Collaboration with local contractors, volunteers and landowners—and their donations of time and resources—increases both the cost effectiveness and beneficial impact of the program. The participants are well-invested in TREX—and its benefits—so that each additional resource is leveraged by the contributions of many others, and encourages and enables further growth.



The initial burn team briefing in Orleans, California, just before participants were outfitted and assigned to the three burn crews. At the briefing they heard a presentation on local ecology and community conservation programs and learned about local tactics and safety. They then broke out into their three teams to meet their burn bosses and fellow crew members, and get their PPE, further instructions and more on expectations. The three burn crews went on to implement controlled burns in the communities of Happy Camp, Orleans and Somes Bar, including an important ceremonial burn for the Karuk Tribe. *Photo: Jeremy Bailey/TNC*

For more information about Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges, visit:

<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>

or contact:

Jeremy Bailey
jeremy_bailey@tnc.org

The Fire Learning Network (FLN) and Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX) 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, contact Lynn Decker ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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