

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TRES)

More Good Fire: Re-defining What's Possible by Working Together (2008-2015)

TREX are based on the premise that in order to get more good fire accomplished, more people have to be using fire. Agencies and land-based conservation organizations working alone—or even together—do not have the capacity to meet the scale of the need. By engaging a wider array of practitioners, TREX increase both the number of people able to contribute to the effort and social acceptance of fire.

The first TREX were offered on FLN landscapes in the Great Plains in 2008; by 2011 or so, the main components that needed to be delivered to yield consistently successful events and effective strategy results were in place. We then began to introduce TREX to new landscapes, bringing in more partners and leaders. In 2012, TREX made the move to its first forest landscape. TREX objectives expanded to include burning in and around communities to enhance community safety as well. TREX now fully embody the Cohesive Strategy, delivering events that address all three of its goals in an integrated package to a diverse set of stakeholders.

PRESCRIBED FIRE TRAINING EXCHANGES DEMONSTRATE A COHESIVE STRATEGY FOR GETTING MORE GOOD FIRE DONE

By Building Local Capacity for Safer Fire

Training exchanges that focus on providing basic firefighter training—and integrating local fire and forestry contractors, local government agencies and non-profit conservation organizations—are providing basic job skills training, creating relationships and building trust among groups. The training and certification of individuals enlarges and improves the skill level of a new workforce, the relationships and trust built help fire management service providers find qualified crews, and TREX participants find federal and private jobs in the field. Training exchanges also demonstrate how groups can cooperate and collaborate, and by working together, increase an area's available fire management capacity.

By Helping Communities Become More Fire Adapted

There is probably no better way for a community to prepare for the inevitable approach of unwanted wildfire than to burn in and around the community themselves. There is no doubt that controlled burns can reduce the damaging effects of wildfires and make communities safer. In addition to completing burns near communities and helping local practitioners gain the experience to conduct further burns, TREX events spread this message by integrating visits from local media into their agendas.

By Bringing Together Diverse Crews to Foster Learning

Diversity matters. Having a wide variety of participants, mixed together and integrated into burn teams, allows great cross-learning among various fire professionals—from federal, state and tribal agencies, as well as contract fire crews and municipal firefighters. Bringing students, scientists, researchers, private landowners and regulators into the mix further enriches the learning. It has important and potent effects. Participants are able to spend time with a wide variety of people with different backgrounds and experiences, and everyone gains knowledge, insights and learning. Participants new to wildland and prescribed fire will say, "Wow, I had no idea how organized a prescribed fire is," after participating in their first briefing, burn and after action review. And wildland firefighters learn that lots of people—from municipal firefighters and air quality regulators to private citizens and students—bring strong ecological and practical experience, while other participants bring knowledge and experience in policy and management issues.



photo via Mid-Klamath Watershed Center (MKWC) Facebook



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By Giving Students Hands-on Experience with Ecologically- and Culturally-Appropriate Fire

We hear it all the time, and numerous studies verify it: hands-on learning is the best kind of learning. Getting out and practicing pre-burn briefings, working with a fire ecologist to establish monitoring plots, walking the range with ranchers to understand grazing patterns and rotation schedules, or working as a trainee firing boss—these are the experiences that shape firefighters and other practitioners. Every year these collaboratively planned and implemented prescribed burns further the educations of university students who will be the next generation of forest workers and managers. Through these training exchanges, scores of students have a newfound respect for prescribed burning, and an understanding that accomplishing prescribed burns is a reasonable expectation—and a worthwhile goal. We are nurturing a generation that will feel confident that they can scale up the use of fire and restore cultural and natural fire regimes at the landscape level.

By Supporting Interagency Cooperation

By forming ad hoc Type 3 Incident Management Teams to organize and host the trainings, individuals, organizations and agencies are learning that we can manage the potential liabilities of working together and on each other's lands. We do this by using tested avenues like MOUs, cooperative agreements, shared standards and collaborative planning. Federal, state and private fire teams are thus learning that they can depend on one another to support prescribed fire projects, just as they depend on each other during wildfires.

By Integrating Traditional Burning

Tribes that are still practicing fire use for traditional purposes—such as for food security, regalia and basket making materials—are providing additional training opportunities for participants. Learning from people who have a longer and often more complex view of the role of fire in an ecosystem is a great addition to the hands-on experience the training exchanges offer. Participants may see that fire and people are inseparable, and that a full exclusion approach to fire may not only be impossible, it may be inappropriate.

By Working through Barriers to Burning

By having a diverse body of participants, and by including ecological, cultural, regulatory and tactical components into TREX burning, training, field trips and classroom presentations, participants are learning that the barriers to implementing prescribed burns can be managed and overcome. Participants are learning that by collaborating with partners they can build a team of experts that have the capacity to successfully navigate the process of achieving good fire at scale.

OREGON

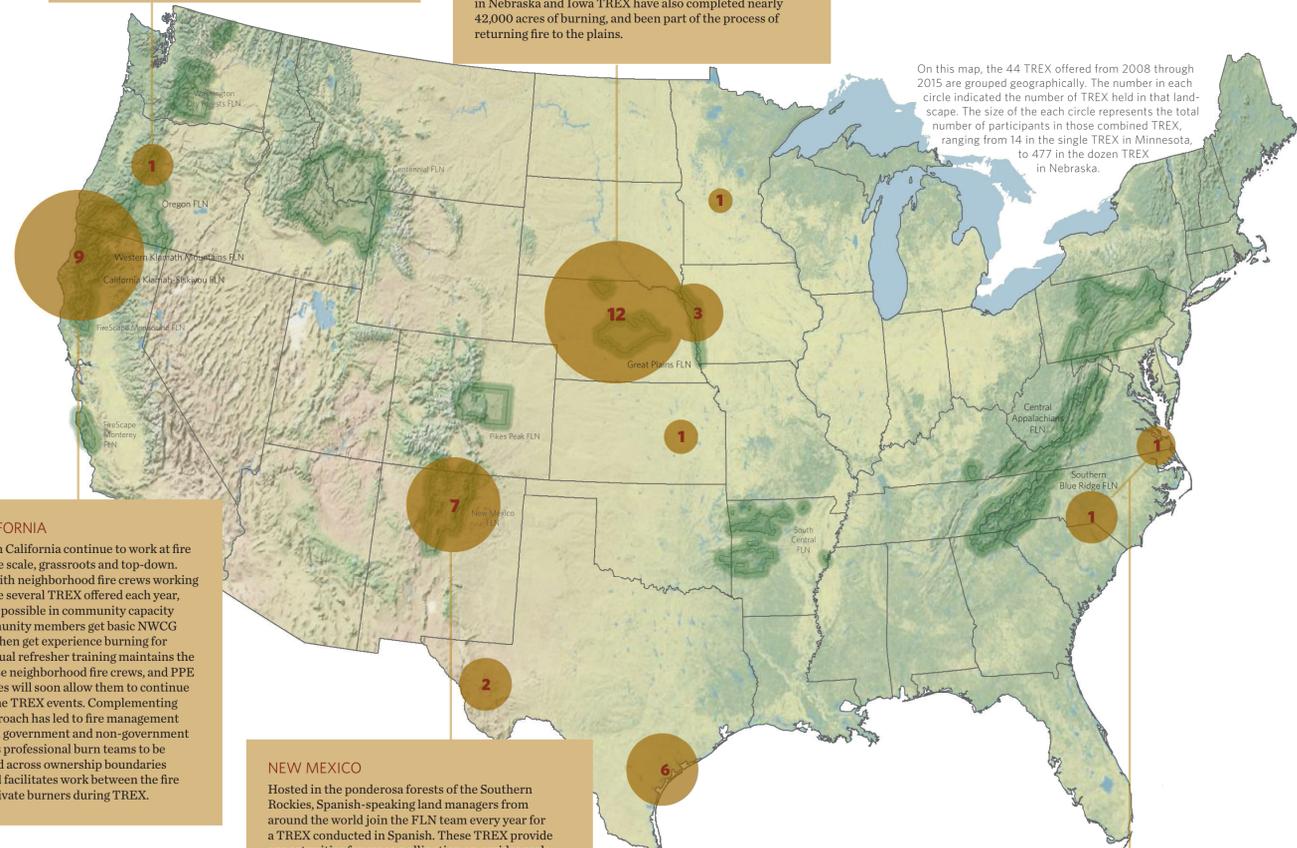
In Oregon, existing collaborative teams from the Fire Learning Network, Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network and Scaling-up to Promote Ecosystem Resiliency projects are using TREX events to augment their work. TREX are getting fire on the ground while providing fire ecology training, helping focus attention on media and outreach, and increasing community acceptance of fire use. The first TREX in the state took place in the Deschutes National Forest in 2015. The 2016 Ashland and Bend TREX are located in densely populated areas—including the Ashland municipal watershed—where their impact will reach thousands of local residents.

GREAT PLAINS

Since 2008 the Great Plains FLN has developed and refined the TREX model under numerous scenarios. Individual TREX have ranged from small two-day events with local volunteer fire departments to two-week events with 100 participants from across the country. Leaders in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, South Dakota and Texas have used TREX events to demonstrate a variety of strategies—bringing together neighbors, providing VFDs with hands on live fire training, matchmaking between contractors and private land owners, staffing idled federal equipment with volunteer practitioners, and helping mold a generation of future managers by engaging university students in holistic controlled burning early in their careers. Participants in Nebraska and Iowa TREX have also completed nearly 42,000 acres of burning, and been part of the process of returning fire to the plains.



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On this map, the 44 TREX offered from 2008 through 2015 are grouped geographically. The number in each circle indicated the number of TREX held in that landscape. The size of each circle represents the total number of participants in those combined TREX, ranging from 14 in the single TREX in Minnesota, to 477 in the dozen TREX in Nebraska.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Partners in Northern California continue to work at fire from both ends of the scale, grassroots and top-down. Grassroots efforts, with neighborhood fire crews working together in one of the several TREX offered each year, demonstrate what is possible in community capacity development. Community members get basic NWCG firefighter training, then get experience burning for weeks at a time. Annual refresher training maintains the qualifications of these neighborhood fire crews, and PPE and equipment caches will soon allow them to continue burning outside of the TREX events. Complementing this, a top-down approach has led to fire management agreements between government and non-government agencies. This allows professional burn teams to be mobilized and moved across ownership boundaries in the landscape, and facilitates work between the fire professionals and private burners during TREX.

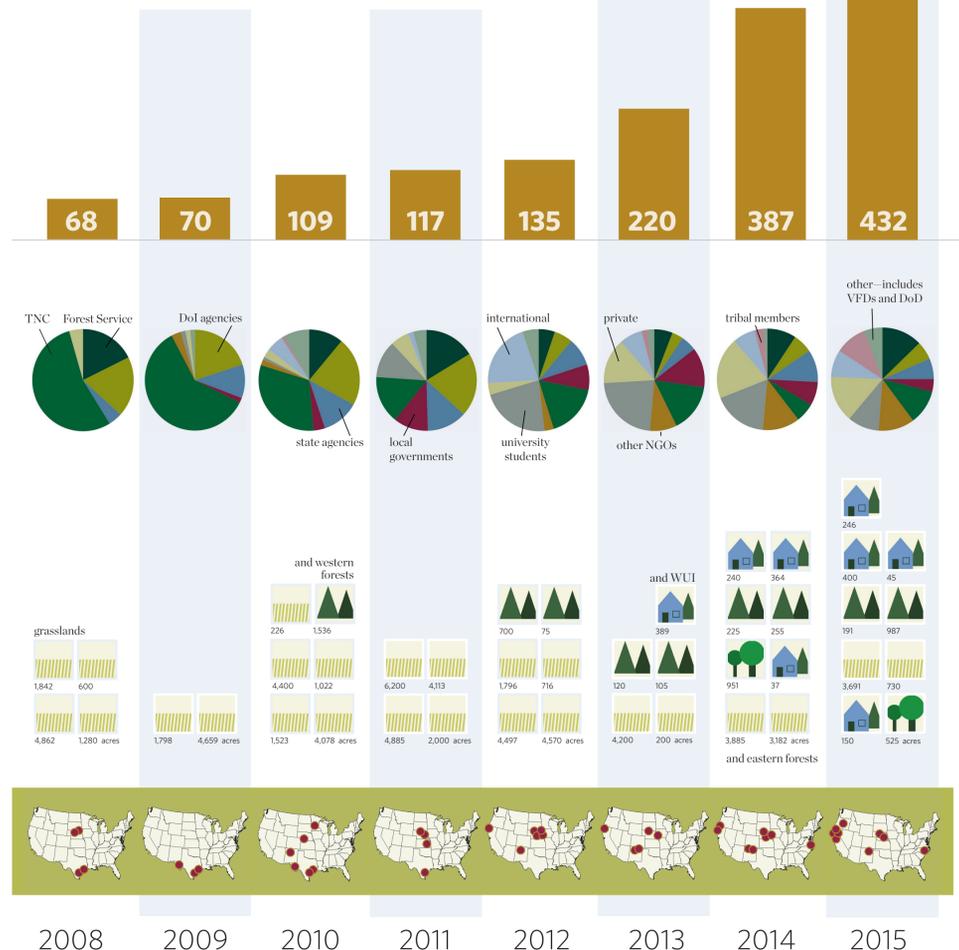
NEW MEXICO

Hosted in the ponderosa forests of the Southern Rockies, Spanish-speaking land managers from around the world join the FLN team every year for a TREX conducted in Spanish. These TREX provide opportunities for cross-pollination on a wider scale than most, bringing together practitioners with experience on three continents and a wide range of ecological and social variation. Participants in these TREX exchange their knowledge through working side-by-side on fires, discussions on field tours to the sites of epic fires like the Cerro Grande and Las Conchas, conversations with agency staff who reflect the rich and varied heritage of the state, and hearing the debates between the virulently anti-fire groups and agencies who sometimes smoke out the capital city—and the efforts to bridge this divide.

EASTERN U.S.

Building bridges between the different standards, qualifications and expectations of state and federal agencies has been the key goal for TREX events in the East. The Central Appalachians and Southern Blue Ridge FLNs have built solid partnerships among fire management agencies and other stakeholders. Most are supportive of managing their lands with fire—but were hindered by lack of coherent standards that would allow them to work together. TREX events in Virginia and North Carolina have enabled fire managers and leaders from different agencies to learn more about their colleagues. Basic NWCG courses (in some cases provided under Scaling-up to Promote Ecosystem Resiliency) have been offered for state agency staff to allow them to burn with federal practitioners. TREX participants from other parts of the country shed light on how challenges are met elsewhere (and are taking lessons from this region home with them). TREX have been an important piece of FLN strategies here that are leading to increased cooperation and sharing, which is leading to greater efficiency, effectiveness and scale of treatments.

Trends in TREX Growth & Diversity



number of participants

The number of TREX participants continues to grow, and we have more applications every year than we can accommodate. Capacity—both the number of events offered and the number of people each can accommodate—rather than lack of demand is what keeps growth from being even more rapid.

participant diversity

Diversity of background and level of experience creates a richer learning environment, fosters new kinds of professional networks, and ultimately builds a more robust fire management workforce. Participant diversity has increased steadily over the years, and the mix of participants originally envisioned in 2008 is now seen on the ground.

diverse ecological and social contexts

From a start in the grass- and rangelands of the Great Plains, TREX have expanded to encompass a wide array of natural and human communities. Each TREX is grounded in the unique characteristics of its landscape, and its relation to the larger fire picture. By selecting from the various TREX offered each year, participants have opportunities to burn in a range of fuel types, in a variety of contexts, and to meet diverse ecological and social objectives.

geographic range

The first TREX took place in Nebraska and Texas, then expanded into other central states. Since 2012, the model has been adapted and expanded to sites in California, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon and Virginia.

An underlying premise of the TREX strategy is that so-called "barriers" to prescribed fire are simply challenges that have not yet been overcome. Once "can't" is no longer an option, attention and collective effort can be turned to finding a solution.



We provide opportunities to burn for people who normally do not have them—and enable their integration into crews with fire professionals—by conducting basic firefighter training (SI30/190) and providing personal protective equipment (PPE) as needed for every TREX. © TNC/Mary Huffman



Differences in experience, organizational affiliation and roles are strengths to be sought out. From the Type 3 Incident Management Teams that run an event to the individual squads on each task, we work hard to make sure the biologists, firefighters, managers, land owners, researchers and others are mixed together, working together and learning from each other.



Conveying the value and necessity of "good fire" is essential to long-term success. TREX embrace the media, invite them to the fireline, and provide TREX participants with training and practice in communicating their messages. © TNC/Mary Huffman



Niobrara TREX (NE) 2011: 6,200 acres



Spanish-language TREX (NM) 2013: 120 acres



Niobrara TREX 2014: 3,885 acres



Above: TREX are designed to allow crews to focus solely on implementing prescribed burning for two weeks. During burn season, every day might be a burn day. TREX go forward even if the beginning looks inauspicious. Left: We start every day looking to burn—and for the days we can't burn, plan alternate activities, from scouting and unit prep to classroom sessions and field tours of previous burns. © TNC/Mary Huffman



TREX events give managers opportunities to demonstrate and explore innovative ideas and explore alternative methods for meeting objectives. © Mid Klamath Watershed Center



TREX rely heavily on fire management agreements to allow burning on multiple ownerships—often combining private, state and federal lands—and with multi-agency crews. The agreements increase the scale at which TREX can work, and allow participants see the variety of laws and standards that apply to different ownerships, and how to manage for those differences.

TREX is part of Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency and Fire Adapted Communities Together (PERFACT), 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 (800) 520-0524). In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call toll free voice (866) 632-9992, TDD (800) 877-8339, or voice relay (866) 877-8642.

