



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Northern California Prescribed Fire Training Exchange

October-November 2013

Redwood National Park, Orleans & Somes Bar, Hayfork, Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

Over the course of two weeks, more than 40 participants in the Northern California Prescribed Fire Training Exchange conducted 14 controlled burns, treating a total of 389 acres on private and federal lands, and assisted with another two burns conducted by the Forest Service and BLM. They burned across northwest California, from the Pacific coast near Arcata to the interior eastern extent of the Klamath Mountains near Redding. They burned in remote back country prairies and conifer forests as well as in the front country

treatments in high-priority locations that will help promote community safety and forest health in these fire-prone forests, while enhancing local capacity to help meet the next round of wildfires.

In the weeks leading up to the event, amidst ceaseless rains and a government shutdown, the organizing team debated canceling the event. Instead, they developed additional contingency plans, and



Hands down, it was the best training I have ever experienced, with an excellent balance of the science and application of Rx fire management, and a wonderful group of people to build working relationships with.

Fire Planner, US Forest Service

adjacent to homes. Participants ranged from university students, educators, researchers and scientists to municipal firefighters, federal firefighters, conservationists and private contractors, and included a fire photographer and even an air quality regulator. They came from various organizations throughout northern California, and from Colorado, Florida, Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and Spain. Together, they conducted



Top: The crew paused during their work at Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, the last burn of the training exchange, for a group shot.

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Bottom: A participant from the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District assesses a sappy, torching tree.

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Top: A fire captain with the Milpitas Fire Department, the Plans Section Chief for the training exchange, enjoys some awesome late-October fire behavior.

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Bottom: Crews adjust the hose lay on a burn on private land immediately adjacent to a structure.

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moved ahead: past controlled burns and training exchanges have shown that cancelling early is a sure way to not accomplish objectives. So the team stayed focused on mobilizing crews and being fire-ready.

As the start of the training exchange drew near, the stars aligned: the rains ended and a spell of perfect burning weather set in. Federal agency employees returned from furloughs. And the numerous host units and landowners were gracious, prepared for the group's arrival, and trusted the organization to lead burns and train on their lands. The caterer who traveled with the group—which relocated its incident command post four times—was superb, providing delicious home-cooked meals that nourished exhausted bodies and comforted the team's taxed spirits. Burning every day for two weeks is not easy.

According to Jeremy Bailey, who has organized such events for years, "There were numerous lessons learned, but the one that



After a summer of wildfires in the area, a landowner in Orleans expresses his "fire happiness" over the controlled burn in his back yard. © TNC/Mary Huffman

resonates most strongly with me is that despite many reasons and excuses to not conduct our controlled burns, by staying focused, working with our partners and neighbors, and through tireless planning and re-planning, we accomplished the burning." They were able to spread good fire—and, as one participant put it, "fire happiness"—to many

communities, parks, forests and individuals. This was evident in the days following the exchange, as both private landowners and the Forest Service expressed interest in taking part in the next such event.



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Prescribed Fire Council



The Northern California Prescribed Fire Council (and its director, Lenya Quinn-Davidson, right) took the lead in organizing the numerous partners that hosted this training exchange.

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