

TREX Training Exchange

Notes from the Field

49 Days of Fire & Learning

February-April, 2011

Four prescribed fire training exchanges were conducted during the 2011 spring burn season. The exchanges were held at Refugio-Goliad Prairie, TX (February 7-21), Gothenburg, NE (February 28-March 6), Niobrara, NE (March 10-20) and Flint Hills, KS (March 28-April 10). Training exchanges are designed to create opportunities for trainees to work on their professional credentials, completing assignments in position task books and receiving evaluations from qualified trainers. The host units, meanwhile, get qualified workers to help with large or complex burn events.

The experience goes far beyond working on position task books, however. For example, hosts typically schedule activities to demonstrate the role of fire in conservation and local fire management practices, highlight local fuel types and fire ecology, and allow fire practitioners to work with stakeholders and natural resource managers. This integration of various aspects of fire helps practitioners prepare for the multitude of challenges that an increasingly complex fire environment presents. Each exchange also has its own focus, a function of host landscape needs and



Diversity is key to the success of training exchanges—in addition to taking place in a variety of landscapes, and with participants from a variety of agencies and organizations, crews are made up of practitioners at all stages of career development, working closely and learning from each other.

Above: At the Niobrara exchange, trainees from the USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service monitor progress of the burn.

Below: Dr. Penelope Morgan of the University of Idaho discussed fire ecology with trainees from Spain. The training exchanges are a key component of an academic fire training program being jointly developed by the University of Idaho with universities in Florida, Spain and Portugal.

I had no idea that [the exchange] was going to affect me to the degree that it has.... I couldn't have asked for more. To have the opportunity to learn from all of you, who come from different backgrounds and experiences, was priceless.

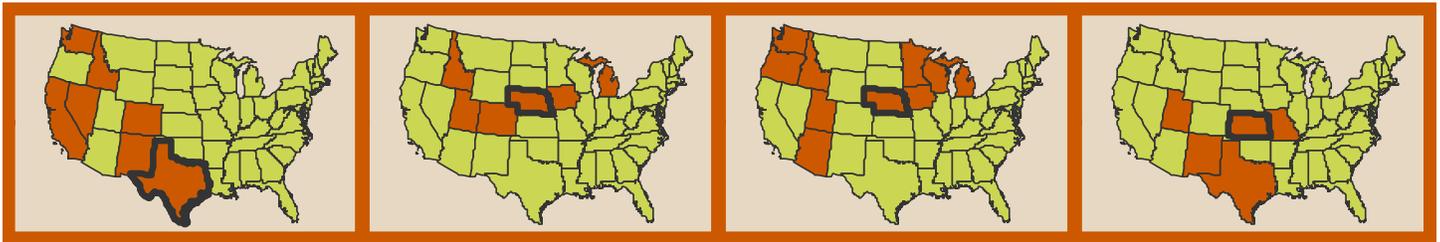
the composition of the participating crew. For example, the Texas exchange allowed burn bosses from the US Fish & Wildlife Service and Conservancy to develop regional teams; in the Loess Canyons (near Gothenburg), the exchange was designed to promote the use of local burn associations; at the Niobrara exchange, students from the University of Idaho's



In addition to having crews from numerous state and federal agencies, training exchanges generally integrate private land-owners and fire and forestry contractors.

Left: USDA Forest Service, state and private practitioners conduct a site inspection and briefing for a burn that took place on private land near Gothenburg, NE the following day.





Trainees and cadre for each exchange come from numerous states, bringing varied experience to the event.

Above, home states of participants at the Refugio-Goliad Prairie (TX), Gothenburg (NE), Niobrara (NE) and Flint Hills (KS) exchanges.

Spring 2011 Training Exchange by Agency & Role

			The Nature Conservancy	US Forest Service	US Fish and Wildlife Service	National Park Service	Bureau of Indian Affairs	Bureau of Land Management	State/Local Government	Military	Other Non-Profit	Private	University	International
Trainee totals:		81	4	19	1	4		5	20	5		6	15	2
Position	SIRB-FIRB/ENGB	19		7	1			3	4	1		1		2
	FFT1	39	3	5		2			8	3		4	14	
	FEMO	8		2		2			2	1			1	
	RXB2 / RXB3	15	1	5				2	6			1		
	cadre		13	1	5	1		1	6			1		

College of Natural Resources gained practical experience alongside working professionals; and in the Flint Hills, the exchange integrated state forestry, Conservancy, National Park Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service crews. In 49 days of work together, all these objectives were accomplished—along with the treatment of 14,785 acres of land in need of fire.



Because they are designed with the larger community in mind, training exchanges ensure that ecological objectives are consistent with the local socioeconomic context and also help rekindle a culture of fire in host communities. Some of the exchanges, such as the one in Niobrara, also give a much-needed economic boost to the community.

Above: The Bassett, NE paper ran a photo of the exchange crew. Good coverage of the exchange and cadre response to an escape was also published in the Ainsworth (NE) Star-Journal.

Left: Test fire for an 1,340-acre unit at the Flint Hills exchange

Training exchanges are 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 exchanges, contact Jeremy Bailey at jeremy_bailey@tnc.org or (801) 599-1394.

