



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

March 2012

Allegheny Highlands: Big Wilson Burn

On March 15, partners began implementing the Big Wilson Burn, the culmination of many years of planning and developing the needed science, skills and credibility together. The burn had been attempted last year, but due to weather and other resource limitations, could not be completed. Part of the Warm Springs Mountain Restoration Project, the 5,800-acre burn unit spans parts of the George Washington National Forest and the Conservancy's Warm Springs Mountain Preserve. Last week, the first section, about 1,500 acres at the north end of the burn unit, was completed. The fire burned to Wilson Creek, where crews will pick up with ignitions again in the next weather window.

This was a Type One burn, officially overseen by a former Conservancy fire manager, Tom Ledbetter, who is now the FMO of the North Zone of the National Forests in Virginia. The Forest Service and Conservancy, along with other partners and volunteers, staffed positions all over the mountain. All told, the burn involved two hand crews, four engines, four UTVs, a dozer and helicopter, as well as vegetation and avian monitoring plots peppered across the unit.

This particular unit presented a unique opportunity for observers to view aspects of the burn—including aerial ignition by helicopter—from an outstanding viewpoint at a safe distance. Staff escorted media, donors and other VIP observers to an observation point on Warm Springs Mountain Preserve. Once there, they briefed the observers on the history of the partnership, the reasons for the use of controlled burning and the historic role of fire in the mountains, and interpreted the burn activities as they occurred, using maps and other props.

In spite of a few hours' delay due to a line of squalls, the burn went very well. Crews were able to pick up where they left off and finish all but a tiny portion of the burn unit. "All in all, a great day," according to Sam Lindblom.



The burn also provided an opportunity to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Conservancy's acquisition of Warm Springs Mountain Preserve, which helped make the FLN partnership in the Allegheny Highlands possible.



Because of the steep terrain—the unit spans 1,900 feet in elevation—aerial ignitions were used in the interior portions of the burn.

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Cooperating Agencies

AmeriCorps
Bath County Government and
Emergency Services
National Park Service
The Nature Conservancy
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USDA Forest Service
Virginia Department of Conservation
and Recreation
Virginia Department of Forestry
Virginia Department of Game and
Inland Fisheries

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The Fire Learning Network is a cooperative program of the Forest Service, Department of the Interior agencies—Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service—and The Nature Conservancy. It has a ten-year track record of helping to restore our nation's forests and grasslands and making communities safer from fire. For more information, contact Lynn Decker at ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524. *An equal opportunity provider.*

