

# COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT HIGHLIGHTS: 2007 - 2010

## EDUCATION & OUTREACH

The Fire, Landscapes and People (FLP) cooperative agreement's Education and Outreach program bolstered the understanding and support for beneficial wildland fire and related restoration efforts among both key stakeholders and the public at large, and within the Conservancy and FLP partner agencies.

### Strengths and Innovations

Broad public and stakeholder support for hazardous fuels reduction is a critical component of building fire-adapted communities. FLP partners rightly predicted that if they worked on fire outreach together they could accomplish significantly more than they would individually. We were able to reach larger, more diverse audiences by tapping into each other's constituencies; we were also able to learn from each other's successes and failures, and use the knowledge gained to adapt. For example, FLP partners were very successful placing both feature articles and shorter updates conveying shared messaging in the quarterly magazine, *Nature Conservancy*, which has a circulation of more than 700,000, as well as in Conservancy chapter newsletters. We developed tools, templates and training that enabled others—including Fire Learning Network (FLN) partners—to communicate effectively about fire. Tools and tactics included:

- **Research and practical recommendations** on effective messages, messengers, language and other detailed communication information through the first-of-its-kind Partners in Fire Education (PIFE) effort
- Annual fire **communication kits** with messages and sample press releases and opinion pieces
- Advanced **media training** for key agency and Conservancy staff and partners
- **Train and assist** FLN partners and fire training exchange staff in developing and implementing outreach plans to further their project objectives

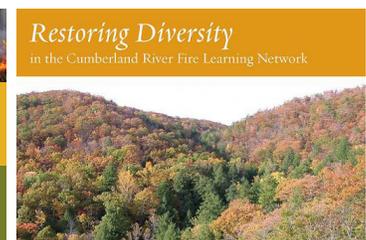
*"The Partners in Fire Education information has worked really well for us in the mountains of North Carolina, especially the language recommendations. I also use the findings related to messengers."*

*Communications Director*

*Outreach staff worked with training exchange cadre and FLNs to deliver fire messages that increase public support for fire, and develop the communication skills of practitioners. Clockwise from upper left: In NC, FLP partners were key to the governor declaring a state-wide Prescribed Fire Week. Landscapes in the Southern Blue Ridge FLN received support to develop brochures introducing the FLN and highlighting the beneficial effects of fire; the brochures had a common template which was customized for each landscape. Many prescribed fire training exchanges resulted in stories being published in local papers, including the Gothenberg (NE) Times. Wildland fire stories are popular with visitors to the Conservancy's web site*



- controlled burns reduce the chance of wildfires, help make our communities safer for everyone and improve the health of our longleaf pine ecosystem.
- games
- food and music
- fire equipment
- smokey bear
- live animals
- controlled burn
- raffles
- face painting



#### What is the Cumberland River Fire Learning Network?

The Cumberland River Fire Learning Network (CRFLN), initiated by the Daniel Boone National Forest, is one of dozens of multi-agency, community based demonstration areas within the US Fire Learning Network (USFLN). The USFLN engages an array of partners including USDA Forest Service, US Department of the Interior and The Nature Conservancy who are working to accelerate the restoration of landscapes that were historically shaped by fire. Located in the Daniel Boone National Forest's Stearns and London Ranger Districts, the CRFLN is home to ridge-top habitats containing a diversity of fire-adapted plants and animals. The CRFLN includes partners such as Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, Kentucky Division of Forestry, Daniel Boone National Forest, The Nature Conservancy, Kentucky Heartwood, University of Tennessee – Knoxville, and University of Kentucky. These partners are working to apply science based restoration practices including controlled burns and mechanical treatments to improve habitats threatened by altered fire dynamics due to decades of fire exclusion. Since the inception of the CRFLN in 2007, 20,000 acres of controlled burns and 2,000 acres of mechanical thinning have taken place in the area.



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the planet, animals and natural resources that support the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the land and seas they need to survive.



Fire provides numerous benefits in managing vegetation, said Nature Conservancy burn manager Jeremy Bailey at a prescribed burn workshop in Doonah. Those benefits include controlling the spread of eastern red cedar in pastures, improving wildlife habitat, reducing hazardous fuels around homes and preventing catastrophic wildfires, or reducing damage from wildfires, Bailey said. Fire also stimulates renewal of native grass species. The Great Plains evolved with fire, Bailey said. Woodlands would rapidly overtake grasslands without fire and thereby shift the obvious in habitats where woody plants have invaded grasslands. Bailey discussed a number of factors that affect the effectiveness and safety of controlled burning. He mentioned weather factors like temperature, wind and humidity, and also less obvious factors like topography. Fire runs uphill, he said, so canyons and narrow ridges and draws can affect fire behavior, as does time of day. Cooler temperatures and moist air in the morning suppress fire, but as the sun warms the surface of the earth, grasses become more available to burn. Fire gives off latent energy that nearby grasses absorb. Preheated and dried out, those grasses also become more burnable.

- **Targeted funding** for communication tools in FLN landscapes that identified outreach as a strategy needed to advance implementation of their restoration work

We used FLN, Conservancy and agency channels to efficiently target conservation practitioners, fire crew members, science staff and others using a variety of methods:

- Publication and broad dissemination of 9 issues of *FLN Dispatch*, 11 *Stories from the Field* and 4 annual *USFLN Field Guides* highlighting the lessons and successes of the Network, and distribution of several hundred fact sheets about the FLP partnership
- Bi-weekly production of the *FLN Networker*, a newsletter for FLN partners and other practitioners, with a primary mailing list of 300, and wide distribution by forwarding
- Presentations and posters given at dozens of workshops, conferences and symposia hosted by the FLN, The Nature Conservancy and agencies for practitioner and general audiences
- Education and FLN staff hosted 18 webinars on topics ranging from PIFE research to climate change adaptation strategies for fire restoration projects
- Web sites that reach thousands of conservation professionals across the globe (originally hosted at tnc-fire.org and now on the new Conservation Gateway)
- Updates in Conservancy-wide staff newsletters and a science newsletter also distributed externally
- The *NWCG Wildland Fire Communicators Guide*, to which FLP education staff contributed

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*"[The FLN Networker] is a great publication ... I am very grateful for your efforts. This is such an informative, succinct tool. Thank you!"*

*Land Steward*

*"I really appreciate how you guys find and then pass along highlights of emerging issues."*

*Forest Restoration Program Director*

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At a national scale, one barrier to effective wildland fire outreach comes about from having many different agencies and organizations with differing objectives, needs and opportunities needing to convey messages about fire. Our participation on the NWCG communications committee (which has had several names) helped integrate the disparate fire outreach efforts across the nation. This was accomplished through the sharing of plans, setting out best practices and distribution of tools such as the NIFC and USFS annual fire season messages. Conservancy staff also helped develop the committee's most recent strategic plan.

## Results

- FLP education and outreach efforts contributed to a marked increase in the understanding of wildland fire and ecosystem restoration issues within the federal agencies today when compared with 2007.
- Fire is now a key focal topic within The Nature Conservancy, with fire and forest restoration designated as one of six region-wide, shared priorities for the North America region.
- Fire communications conducted through the Conservancy have evolved from isolated efforts such as using pamphlets and door hangers to notify residents about upcoming burns, to the creation of sophisticated videos and interactive web features that are proactive, informed by public opinion research, and integrated with social media outreach.
- At the landscape scale we are noticing improved integration of fire education and outreach efforts among a variety of private and public partners.

In sum, through a host of FLN, training and education efforts, FLP partners are directly and indirectly influencing people and organizations such that a social license for ecosystem management will exist broadly.



Work conducted under the *Fire, Landscapes & People* agreement (2007-2010) continues under the *Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency through Collaboration* agreement. For more information on the education component of this cooperative agreement, contact Wendy Fulks at wfulks@tnc.org or (303) 541-0355

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