

# Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

Our mission is to connect and support people and communities who are striving to live more safely with wildfire. The FAC Net is a catalyst for spreading best practices and innovations in fire adaptation nationwide.

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net) is changing the way we live with wildfire in the U.S. We believe that supporting communities in fire-prone areas in various ways will help build sustainable, long-term, locally driven efforts that will increase wildfire resilience. Lives and livelihoods are at stake, and so everything we do has a sense of urgency. Network member efforts represent holistic approaches that have grown to typically include expanding on-the-ground mitigation work, building constituencies to address the health of the landscapes we live in, planning for wildfire response and recovery, and much more.

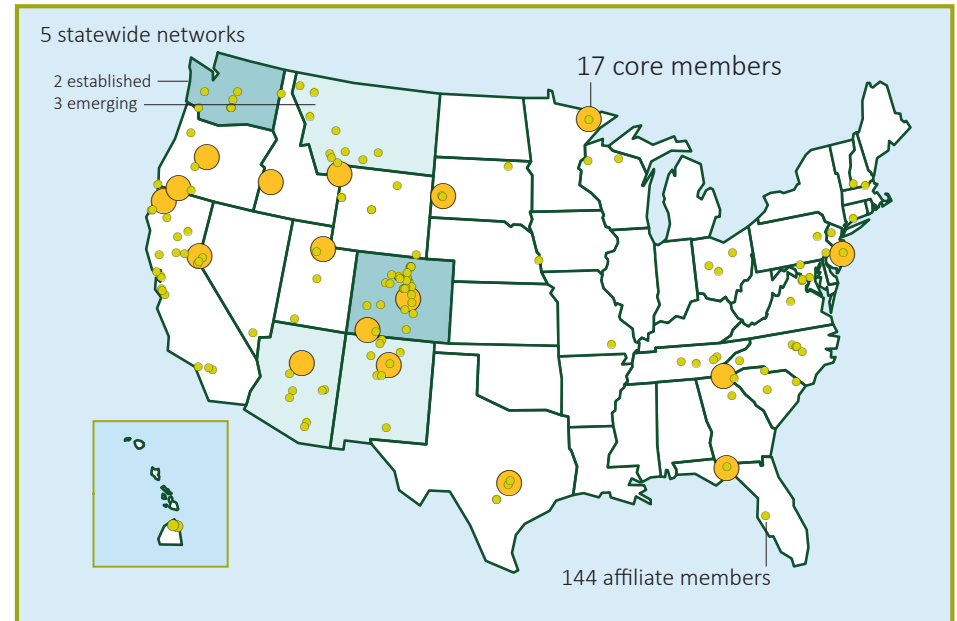
## Growing a Network Like No Other

FAC Net connects practitioners to transfer ideas and build relationships for peer support. We provide funding for critical local efforts for which there are no established funding sources. We offer professional development opportunities and support the creation of new resources and tools. We engage in national conversations about changing the country's dominant fire paradigm, offering solutions born and tested in the places where our members work. We are regularly asked to share our perspectives through national news outlets, and we present at and help

design influential meetings such as this year's Cohesive Strategy workshop.

FAC Net touches the ground in 17 core member communities (where more than 1,300 partners are engaged in this work), and where our 144 affiliate members live and work, and in the dozens of communities that participate in the state networks we've helped our members launch. When we look at our map, each dot represents a unique relationship, not just an entry on a mailing list. Our network of people and places is a resource whose potential we have only begun to realize. At first, we were surprised when other national programs started asking us to help them identify potential program participants, grantees and subject matter experts—but then we realized that our effort is organized differently than most, emphasizing the value that comes from the grassroots and a focus on “know-who” as well as know-how.

Together, our network is more than the sum of its parts. Members work together and do more than they could have separately. And staff—and, increasingly, network members themselves—work to make sure the connections that make this possible are tended and grown. Then, through our blog, website and social media channels we amplify the voices in



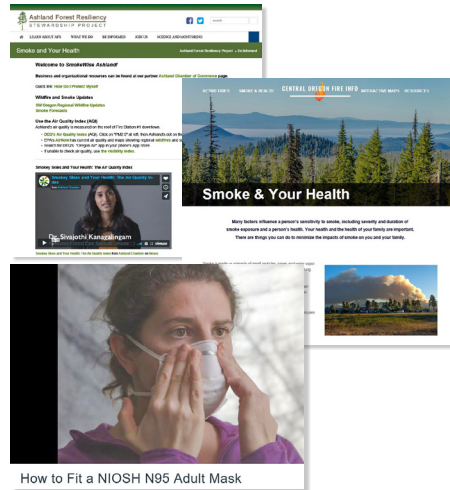
our network, reaching thousands of people, and influence conversations about how to effect the kind of systems change our wildfire situation requires.

*Now everybody is struggling with “What scale we should do this at?”, when five years ago it was just “What should we do?”*

## Network Relationships Make a Difference

Leading local community wildfire resilience efforts is tough. It takes knowledge, patience, careful communication, faith and persistence. There are the long days and weekend work, plus the stress that comes with knowing what you do—or don't do—can affect lives and livelihoods, and that the work will really never end. Pats on the back may be few and far between, and encounters with vocal

opponents can be common. The work is largely behind the scenes—some members describe their role as “glue” or “connectors.” It can be difficult to keep a positive outlook, and burnout is a real possibility. On the flip side, the work is meaningful and never boring, and the relationships one builds are deeply gratifying. The network serves as a supportive environment for the people doing this work, and a reminder of what is possible if you keep trying. It helps keep the balance between hard work and gratification healthy for the people doing the work. FAC Net also makes it easier for members to try new things to better serve their communities. New things entail risk—but failures are accepted in our community, as a necessary step in learning. Members share their time—as sounding boards and mentors and peer experts. And since it’s a given that no one has extra time, our members excel at honing approaches and resources that can be shared and then tweaked by others for use in their own local context. Members also raise the bar for each other. Lately, we’ve noticed more members drawing inspiration from the network to expand their visions of what is possible and address new issues. Numerous members have



FAC Net practitioners are expanding the range of issues they work on in their communities. For example, several members are expanding their smoke outreach programs with an eye toward helping residents avoid or mitigate health impacts. Members in Arizona, New Mexico and Oregon launched or upgraded their smoke-related websites this spring. Oregon’s SmokeWise website includes content from healthcare providers—a pulmonary critical care specialist from a local hospital was recruited to make a video about the Air Quality Index and what to do when smoke levels get hazardous. In another video, Alison Lerch of Ashland Fire and Rescue demonstrates the proper way to don a NIOSH N95 mask for protection from the particulate matter in wildland fire smoke.

Screen captures: <https://www.ashland.or.us/smoke>  
<http://www.centraleregonfire.org/wildfire-smoke-your-health/smoke-air-quality/>  
<https://vimeo.com/257185210>

local efforts to help residents mitigate smoke impacts, and through the network are learning (and borrowing) from each other, making each effort more robust. A member from Tahoe said that a learning exchange with the Karuk Tribe “revealed the need for us to dissolve our concepts of social and ecological systems as being competing objectives, and to consider instead how prescribed fire can support sustainability and resilience for both



The FireWise of Southwest Colorado Neighborhood Ambassador program has 126 FAC Ambassadors from 11 communities who lead mitigation projects, write Community Wildfire Protection Plans, organize meetings and recruit new partners, together contributing upwards of 20,000 volunteer hours per year to their communities. The program is a model that others in the network are adapting for use in their own communities; most recently, the City of Santa Fe launched its ambassador program in May. © FireWise of Southwest Colorado

communities and landscapes.” With inspiration and guidance from our member in New Jersey, our member in northern Minnesota is planning a wildfire response drill that will include an evacuation exercise for residents of a small community.

## Adapting to National and Local Changes

Members are telling us that federal and state funding for local wildfire capacity building is drying up, and FAC Net support is more important than ever. Steady investments from the network have allowed local FAC coordinating groups to take root and flourish. While they hold broad knowledge and diverse talents, showing up day after day after day—picking up the phone to answer a resident’s questions, organizing meetings and outreach events, hosting

field trips, writing grant proposals, spearheading efforts to update CWPPs—is what our members do. This is the less-than-glamorous work that is necessary to bring about change, and it’s difficult to fundraise for such work. But it is the foundation.

April 2018 marked the network’s fifth year of operations. Nearly every network member has told us that their capacity, connections and influence



An asset-based community development (ABCD) approach can help a community identify the resources it already has to address a challenge; this can lead to sustainable efforts that residents own and carry out largely with existing resources. Jana Carp (left, in the foreground) leads a discussion with FAC Net members and partners from New Mexico and Colorado during a community asset mapping workshop in Santa Fe. Working with the Fire Learning Network, she recently completed pilot projects in two northern California communities that are facing serious fire threats, and has been adapting ABCD to wildfire resiliency.

© Forest Stewards Guild (Matt Piccarello)





The Washington State Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (WAFAC) has spent a good deal of effort cultivating relationships with policymakers as part of the network's response to several bad fire seasons. This work paid off in May, when they hosted Washington Governor Jay Inslee, Regional Forester Jim Peña, Senator Brad Hawkins, Representative Mike Steele, and representatives from the office of U.S. Senator Patty Murray, the Bureau of Land Management and Washington State Department of Natural Resources for a Governor's Roundtable. This gave WAFAC and key partners from the national network a chance to share many of their insights and lessons from years of intensive work in the field. After the roundtable, several of the participants spoke to members of the PERFACT networks at the national Fire Networks Workshop. Governor Inslee (above) shared some encouraging words about proactively addressing wildland fire issues, and the need for climate change mitigation. © WRTC

*Input and feedback from other FAC Net members helped us identify new ways to accomplish our goals—and talking with them and helping solve their problems gave new insight on how to approach ours.*

have grown considerably as a direct result of their involvement with us. While the wildfire picture nationally has not improved, our members remain hopeful and motivated to continue their work because they are seeing results and are deeply invested in their communities.

When asked how things have changed over the past five years, FAC Net members said they were amazed and gratified to be able to reflect on the positive developments. Local FAC coalitions are getting more done by addressing a wider range of issues, by employing new strategies like developing or formalizing FAC ambassador programs, and enlisting new partners such as health departments and state prescribed fire councils. They're seeing more movement at larger scales as well, perhaps most notably this spring in Washington, where the relationships that the Washington State Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network has carefully tended over the years positioned them to convene a roundtable with the Governor and other key policy-makers.



Austin includes ecosystem health and prescribed burning as community wildfire resilience strategies under the umbrella of their climate change resilience efforts. Austin's Office of Sustainability developed a Climate Resilience Action Plan that highlights wildfire as one of four significant risks to the city: "Greater risk of wildfire could create safety risks for emergency personnel and staff, interrupt utility service where there is a lack of redundant energy supplies, disrupt the transportation system, and challenge egress and ingress routes during major wildfire events." Studying ingress/egress for flood- and wildfire-prone neighborhoods and identifying safety zones for residents is one of the plan's Phase 1 actions. The Austin FD also partners with Austin's Green Building Program to incorporate wildfire resiliency into their rating system; more than 100 homes are now in voluntary compliance.

Screen capture from: <http://austintexas.gov/page/climate-change-resilience-and-adaptation>

## Community Wellbeing and Landscape Health Are Deeply Connected

More and more wildland fire professionals and fire adapted communities practitioners are approaching their work with the understanding that there is no line separating work in communities from work in the surrounding landscapes. It's not just that these bodies of work are connected—each is necessary to make the other possible. From a community engagement perspective,

*Work with FAC Net has helped us to develop a vision for our landscapes where community fire adaptation and forest restoration are complementary and additive, rather than just compatible.*



A group of FAC practitioners from Tahoe learned to weave baskets at a workforce development learning exchange with the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership and the Karuk Tribe this spring; the basket materials they used came from a site they had visited during the week, where cultural burning had been done to improve the quality of the materials. The Lake Tahoe region is a good example of a place that is thinking differently about the relationship between healthy forests and safe communities because of its engagement with FAC Net. This workshop was particularly important for Tahoe partners, as it helped catalyze a shift in their vision about the relationship between people and place.

© Karuk Tribe (Aja Conrad)

residents care about more than how their homes will fare during a wildfire. They also worry about how fires will impact the views they love, the places they like to play, their sources of water. That calls for more conversations about health of natural places, about ecology and fire management. It's also true that the work that residents do or don't do affects firefighting tactics, and in some cases, land managers' ability to use controlled burning for fuel reduction.

Land management decisions affect communities in numerous ways



New Jersey is facing serious forest health and wildfire issues, so efforts to improve community wildfire resiliency necessarily include discussions about forest management. During a prescribed fire learning exchange between Long Island, New York and the New Jersey Pinelands, foresters with the New Jersey Forest Service described restoration efforts in this Atlantic white-cedar swamp that was impacted by Hurricane Sandy.

© Forest Stewards Guild (Amanda Mahaffey)

beyond wildfire impacts, for example by providing jobs. Communities also have a stake because healthy landscapes draw tourists and recreationists who can support local business. And the arrow between communities and their landscapes goes both directions. For example, local workforce capacity and wood utilization infrastructure help make forest management viable.

Because of this, more FAC Net members are moving beyond a focus on mitigation and preparation in the WUI, and are adding forest health outreach to their plates. In New Jersey, “everybody is concerned about the fires. It doesn’t make any difference if you’re looking at a fuel load [for community safety] or if you are an ecosystem guy. If it burns, all the values suffer.” In northern Georgia, our members have long worked with the Southern Blue Ridge FLN to promote prescribed burning, and are now taking steps to launch a North Georgia

subchapter of the state prescribed fire council. And in Oregon, members partnered on the outreach efforts for the Central Oregon and Ashland TREX, both of which conducted prescribed burns in support of forest health near their communities.

### Reducing Wildfire Risk

And finally, in the place where the rubber hits the road, FAC Net members are regularly and increasingly doing the on-the-ground work that is reducing the wildfire risk to their communities.

- In New Jersey, tabletop exercises and live drills helped structural and wildland firefighters understand their roles in a major incident, and helped the community focus on preparedness and prevention efforts; developing a fuelbreak around these areas has become the top prevention priority project. Residents also signed up for alerts, and several people who would need assistance in an evacuation were made known to first responders.
- In Oregon, the Deschutes County FireFree effort has grown to include nine events in a four-county area this spring, collecting more than 32,000 cubic yards of debris from residents implementing defensible space projects on their own property.

- The Rapid City Fire Department used its Veteran Wildfire Mitigation Crew on three projects totaling 200 acres. The 80-acre Springbrook Acres project is on track to have the last piles burned this coming winter, and will help protect more than 250 homes from catastrophic wildfire, while the forest health benefits will enhance recreational trails within the project area.
- FireWise of Southwest Colorado completed four large mitigation projects in Montezuma County.
- The Wasatch Front Fire Adapted Communities Coalition’s “Home Assessment Round Up” gave fire departments a chance to share home assessment tools and compare them in the field; as a result they are working toward using a standard home assessment statewide, rather using different tools with potentially conflicting information.
- Outreach efforts by the City of Santa Fe and Forest Stewards Guild resulted in a spike of activity on [www.santafefiredshed.org](http://www.santafefiredshed.org) in April and May. They are now working through the requests for home site assessments, green waste pick-up and defensible space treatments that this generated.



In 2017, FireWise of Southwest Colorado started a defensible space cost-share program across five counties. This spring, the program was even more popular, due to a drought that started in the fall and two large fires—the 416 Fire and Burro Fire—that burned in June. After the 416 Fire, Durango TV interviewed homeowners and the Durango fire chief for a story about defensible space; mitigation work supported by FireWise was credited with helping prevent loss of homes in the fire.

Screen capture from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fA2CRgnTJU>

*Every encounter and interaction is an opportunity to learn, share and build a relationship.*

<http://fireadaptednetwork.org/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/FACNetwork>  
<https://twitter.com/fireadaptednet>



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