



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Wildfire Training Exchange

TNC Crew 10

Wasatch National Forest

August 9-23, 2016

Hundreds of prescribed fire practitioners in The Nature Conservancy's workforce and in those of numerous partners are stuck in training bottlenecks. To advance and maintain their qualifications, wildland firefighters and prescribed fire practitioners must train and be evaluated on a wide range of specific skills and tasks. These peer evaluations—completing the tasks while being observed by someone already certified on the task—are logged in a practitioner's Position Task Book; when all items in the task book have been successfully completed, the practitioner can be certified as qualified for that position. Many tasks can be evaluated on any sort of fire incident, but some specifically require evaluation on a wildfire. Several key positions—including Firefighter Type One (FFT1), Engine Boss (ENGB) and Incident

Commander Type 4 (ICT4)—must be completed on a wildfire assignment. Therein lies the bottleneck, as wildfire assignments can be difficult to arrange for non-agency personnel.

The Fire Learning Network and its partners have long provided training—and evaluation opportunities—for a wide range of practitioners. Since 2008, Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREN) have provided more than 1,500 experiential training opportunities while completing nearly 90,000 acres of burning; they have encouraged agencies and organizations throughout the country to take a more blended and cooperative approach to their training and treatments.

This year saw an addition to the Training Exchange strategy: while all previous TREN events had been completed on prescribed fires, this summer the FLN coordinated a

Participant Organizations

TNC Crew 10:

Bureau of Land Management
Forest Stewards Guild
Pottawattamie County (Iowa)
The Nature Conservancy
USDA Forest Service
Wildland Restoration International

Host Unit:

USDA Forest Service—Wasatch
National Forest

Training Exchange on a wildfire. Working closely with the Wasatch National Forest—which in previous years sent numerous staff to train on prescribed burns at TREN events on prescribed burns—20 prescribed fire practitioners who needed additional experience on wildfires were able to get that experience.

The 20-person crew—called TNC Crew 10 (a type 2 IA crew, for those familiar with NWCG standards)—was made up of practitioners from TNC and partners from the BLM, Forest Stewards Guild, Pottawattamie County (Iowa), U.S. Forest Service and Wildland Restoration International. They assembled in Salt Lake City (Utah) on August 9, ready to assist area resources while gaining valuable experience.

The crew was first assigned to the Box Canyon Fire (near Kamas), but were almost immediately turned around and sent to the Mineral Fork Fire. The Mineral Fork Fire was burning between the Mineral Fork trail and the Twin Peaks Wilderness area and was accessed through



TNC Crew 10 hiking in to the fire

© TNC (Gabe Cahalan)

Big Cottonwood Canyon, a highly visited area a few minutes' drive from Salt Lake City. The plan was to manage the fire using modified suppression—objectives included keeping the fire out of the watershed drainage area to the west and allowing the fire to burn on the east side of the ridge for forest health and fuel reduction.

The crew was welcomed to the fire with a brief hailstorm but after stuffing tarps back into packs, quickly got to work. Over the next two weeks, TNC Crew 10 constructed fireline, staffed and led multiple burnout operations, helped clear a helispot, prepped a trail to be used in future burning operations—and sighted quite a few moose. Some of the crew rotated onto a Type 6 engine (on loan from TNC's Oregon chapter) that helped a local Forest Service engine with initial attack on multiple calls during the assignment. TNC Crew 10 members also helped install transects and photo points to collect data on fuel loading and fire effects, both in the footprint of the Mineral Fork Fire and in the surrounding area.

While accomplishing these tasks, the crew focused on providing training opportunities to crewmembers whenever possible by rotating personnel into different roles. TNC Crew 10 members worked on key task books that will help advance the conservation missions of their home units—these positions included Squad Boss, Engine Boss, Faller and Field Observer. Opportunities to engage in tasks that had been bottlenecks for these prescribed fire practitioners—such as “serve as a look out” or “size up a fire,” which have to be completed on an actual wildfire—arose every day, allowing crew members to demonstrate their proficiency.

The fire leadership team of the Wasatch National Forest and managers for The Nature Conservancy were all extremely pleased by the outcomes of this training and have plans to repeat the opportunity next year.



The Mineral Fork Fire, on the Salt Lake Ranger district of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, was started by lightning strike on August 6. At the crew's arrival, it was 2.5 acres and grew to 12 to 14 acres by the time the crew left on August 23. © TNC (Gabe Cahalan)



Above: Burnout operations are conducted by TNC Crew 10

Left: Signs alert visitors to the heavily-used canyon of fire activity. © TNC (Gabe Cahalan)

Below: The incoming TNC Crew 10 is briefed at the base of Big Cottonwood Canyon before reporting to the Mineral Fork Fire.

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The Fire Learning Network (FLN) and Training Exchanges are part of *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior.

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