



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Central Appalachians FLN Annual Workshop

Wintergreen, Virginia
November 2-3, 2016

More than 80 participants, representing 21 different organization and agency units, gathered in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia for the annual two-day workshop of the Central Appalachians Fire Learning Network (FLN). People came from across the network's four landscapes in Kentucky, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia, as well as from North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas. Consistent with this year's theme—Bridging the Gap: Managing the Ecological Needs and Social Perceptions of Fire in the Central Appalachians—discussions centered on the integrated management of controlled burns and wildfires to meet ecological needs, and on social perceptions of fire, including the need for improved public engagement to support further scaling-up restoration work.

The first day's agenda was rich with varied content and interactive sessions. Lessons from the Rocky Mount wildfire in Shenandoah National Park were shared



Top: Sam Lindblom (TNC) moderated an interdisciplinary, multi-partner panel on the Rocky Mount wildfire at Shenandoah National Park.
Bottom: Jason Hattersley (USFS) led the group through an interactive technology session.

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Adam Christie and Ryan Klopf (Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation) led a discussion on management of fire and sinkhole ponds at Mount Joy Pond Natural Area Preserve. © CAFMS (Jen Bunty)

by a diverse panel that covered public engagement challenges and successes as well as planning and management strategies.

The interactive *Talking Fire* session gave participants guidelines for telling a good story—followed by small-group exercises for practicing messaging techniques. Jenifer Bunty of the Consortium of Appalachian Fire Managers and Scientists (CAFMS) also gave a presentation on the Fire Learning Trail in the Linville Gorge Wilderness. Signage along this enhanced interpretive trail is supplemented with entertaining podcasts in which local fire practitioners introduce visitors to the role of fire in the area.

"Flash presentations" on research highlighted fire's role in American chestnut restoration (Matthew Vaughn, Texas A&M), fire scar and charcoal records in a rare Appalachian pitch pine bog (Dr. Lisa Kennedy and Chance Raso, Virginia Tech) and a synthesis of research from the

Fire in Eastern Oak Forests Conference (Helen Mohr, USFS/CAFMS).

During the Technology Café session, app guru Jason Hattersley (USFS) encouraged participants to pull out their smart phones and tablets to learn and practice techniques for distributing and using geo-referenced maps on hand-held devices.



Several partners shared real-time updates on workshop activities through social media, using the hashtags #goodfire and #FireLearningNetwork.

John Moncure (USFS) shared tips for making highly effective incident maps. Participants received a QR code link that downloaded Avenza maps to their phones, allowing for group participation during the indoor session—and practical application on the next day's field trip.

Wrapping up the day, breakout sessions permitted small group dialog on building capacity for monitoring and future research needs. This time also provided space for the initial meeting of the new Grasslands Working Group.

Discussions of media and public engagement were carried into the field on the second day, as participants visited three sites with different themes to explore. One site had recently seen a wildfire in designated Wilderness; the next was a shortleaf pine restoration project with both prescribed burn and mechanical treatment components; and a third demonstrated the use of fire to promote rare and endemic species in Shenandoah Valley sinkhole ponds.

In closing, the annual Partnership Award was presented to Steve Croy, Ecologist and Fire Planner for George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Steve was instrumental in planning the initial workshop of fire management partners across the Appalachians in 2006, which led to the formation of the Central Appalachians and Southern Blue Ridge regional FLNs. He has played a major role in planning and helping to fund fire history research across the region and



Sam Lindblom (TNC) presented the annual Partnership Award to Steve Croy (USFS) on behalf of the Central Appalachians FLN. © TNC (Marek Smith)



spearheaded the application of spatial tools, models and mapping that has helped prioritize the FLN's efforts to restore good fire on the landscape across agency boundaries. His tireless work on the ground also takes to the air: on any aerial ignition burn conducted over the past 10 years, Steve was probably in the helicopter or otherwise coordinating it.



Left: John Donahue (USFS) led a discussion on integrating fire and mechanical treatments to restore shortleaf pine communities. © Lisa Kennedy (Virginia Tech)

Right: Kurt Thompson (USFS) shared operational lessons learned from the Mills Creek controlled burn. © TNC (Marek Smith)

For more on the Central Appalachians FLN:

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FLN website: <http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/RegionalNetworks/Pages/CentralApps.aspx>



Learn more about the Fire Learning Trail:
<http://www.appalachianfire.org/thefirelearningtrail/>

The Fire Learning Network is 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. For more information about PERFECT, contact Lynn Decker: ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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