



Learning after Wildfire: Burned Area Learning Network Field Tour

Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Manzano Mountains, New Mexico
May 16, 2017

A May 2017 field tour of areas affected by the 2016 Dog Head Fire and the 2007 Ojo Peak Fire highlighted some of the successes and challenges in dealing with the aftermath of wildfires.

DOG HEAD FIRE

Heavy equipment being used to reduce fuel loads started the Dog Head Fire on June 14, 2016. From its start six miles northwest of Tajiue, New Mexico, it burned from Iseleta Pueblo land onto Cibola National Forest land and then to private land, for a total of 17,912 acres.

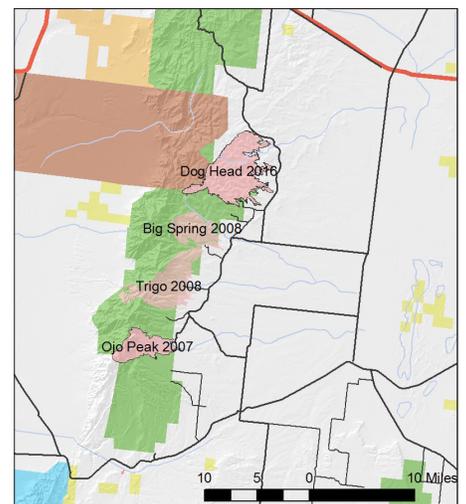
The first field trip stop was at the bridge in Chilili, where the Pueblo of Isleta, Chilili Land Grant, Army Corps of Engineers and the HESCO company had installed HESCO baskets to mitigate post-fire erosion. (The Edgewood Soil and Water Conservation District had secured State Disaster Assistance Funding to install the baskets.) Because of earlier fires in the area—Ojo Peak (2007), Trigo (2008) and Big Spring (2008)—local organizations were used to working together and generally knew each other personally. Solid relationships allowed the Dog Head Coordinated Rehabilitation Group to start responding even before the fire was completely contained. At the same time, the collaborative framework of the rehabilitation group did not always mesh well with the traditional Burned Area Emergency Response team format. The second stop was to a point in the interior of the fire where fast moving crown fire had destroyed homes. Here, U.S. Forest Service fire managers discussed the difficulty of fighting wildfire under the high wind and low humidity conditions that prevailed during the Dog Head Fire. One of the

challenges was that wind-lofted embers from the fire ignited spot fires more than two miles ahead of the main fire. Nonetheless, fuel reduction treatments and defensible space gave firefighters space to gain some control on the fire and protect homes. Though a dozen homes and many other structures were lost during the 2016 fire, some residents had already started to rebuild. The extensive areas of standing dead trees brought up questions: What kind of vegetation will grow back? Will all the dead wood contribute to future fire risk? In part to respond to these concerns, dead wood in some areas is already being masticated.

OJO PEAK FIRE

The group then traveled south to the area burned by the Ojo Peak Fire, passing the Trigo and Big Spring fire footprints, visible on the mountainside. The pattern of fires across the landscape highlighted that wildfire risk remains high for areas that have not burned.

On site, the district manager of the Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District discussed her involvement in the Ojo Peak and subsequent fires, highlighting the key role that SWCDs have played in the Manzano Mountain fires. SWCDs are local units of government that provide technical assistance and tools to manage natural resource management programs at the local level. Importantly,



Top: Dog Head Fire on June 18, 2016

Photo from inciweb.nwcg.gov

Bottom: Footprints of four fires that burned in the Manzano Mountains between 2007 and 2016



Tour participants discuss fuel treatment effectiveness, with the impacts of the 2016 Dog Head Fire visible behind them.

© Forest Stewards Guild (Zander Evans)



The district manager of the Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District shares her experience with fires in the Manzano Mountains and the importance of the long-term connections with the communities affected. © Forest Stewards Guild (Zander Evans)

SWCDs work directly with private land-owners and are eligible to become sponsors for the Natural Resources Conservation Service Emergency Watershed Protection program. Because SWCDs are local organizations with deep roots in the community, they have been a trusted source of information and help after the Manzano Mountain fires.



Near the village of Chilili, field trip participants learn about the installation and effectiveness of HESCO baskets. © Forest Stewards Guild

OX CREEK RESTORATION PROJECT

The final stop was at a restoration project in Ox Creek. Heavy runoff following the Ojo Peak Fire incised the channel by as much as four feet. The community was concerned that channel erosion might lower the water table in critical areas around springs. SWCA Environmental Consultants, working with the U.S. Forest Service, Southwest Urban Hydrology, Claunch-Pinto SWCD and the local community, designed channel restoration plans and secured funding through the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program to complete them. The Ox Creek drainage was chosen by assessing community values and technical feasibility. Administrative issues slowed implementation, but waiting until nearly six years after the fire meant that the most significant post-fire changes to the channel had already occurred. By 2013 restoration could be done in a more stable environment. Rock-rundowns, one-rock dams, log mats, log drops and Zuni bowls built with on-site material have greatly enhanced riparian function and wildlife habitat.



Local materials such as logs and rocks are being used for post-fire streambed erosion mitigation in the Manzano Mountains. © Forest Stewards Guild (Zander Evans)



In a residential area that burned in the Dog Head Fire, some residents are rebuilding while others have chosen to sell. © Forest Stewards Guild (Zander Evans)

LEARN MORE

Dog Head Fire

Rehabilitation Information for landowners

<http://www.claunchpinto.org/docs/dog-head-fire-rehab-update.pdf>

Fuels Treatment Effectiveness Monitoring Report

<http://www.claunchpinto.org/docs/dog-head-fire-ftem-report.pdf>

Private Land Fuels Treatment Effectiveness

<http://www.claunchpinto.org/docs/dog-head-fire-private-land.pdf>

Strategic Thinking Across Territorial Lines

<http://www.eswcd.org/app/download/7246109182/Dog+Head+Presentation+-+2017+WUI+Summit.pdf>

Ox Creek Restoration Project

About the project

http://www.forestguild.org/PostFire/Ox_Creek_SWCA.pdf

SWCA Environmental Consultants

<https://www.swca.com/>

Southwest Urban Hydrology

<http://www.southwesturbanhydrology.com/>

Collaborative Forest Restoration Program

https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r3/workingtogether/grants/?cid=fsbdev3_022022

HESCO (baskets to mitigate post-fire erosion)

<http://www.hesco.com/products/flood-barriers/>

For more information about the Burned Area Learning Network, contact:

Anne Bradley

abradley@tnc.org

Leonora Pepper

leonora@forestguild.org

Marie Rodriguez

promise.pces@gmail.com

The Burned Area Learning Network is an initiative of the Fire Learning Network, which 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 the work of PERFACT, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org or (919) 794-4374.



An equal opportunity provider

v. 8 May 18 / Zander Evans