



Fire Learning Network
Notes from the Field

Black Lake TRES

Angel Fire, New Mexico September-October 2014

Lessons Learned from Controlled Burns in the WUI

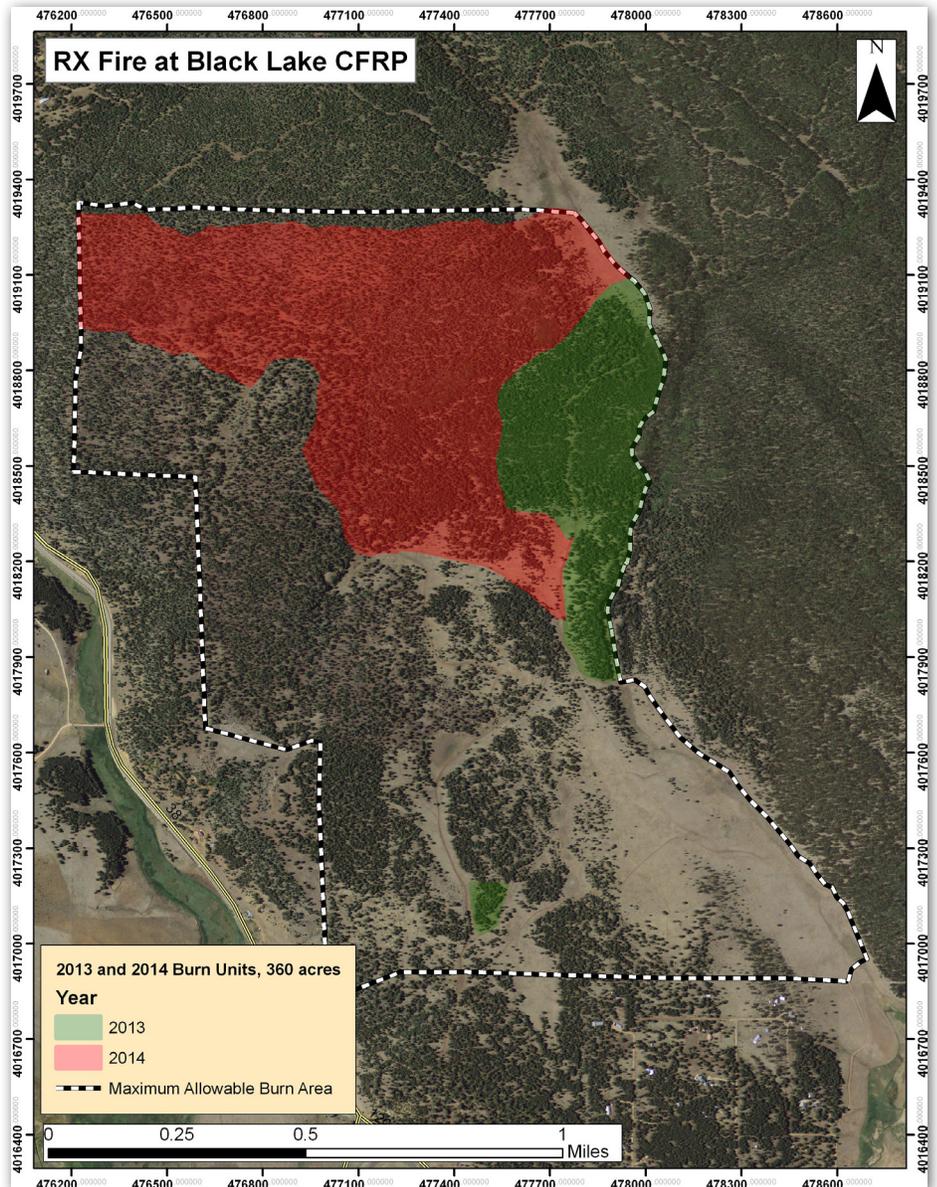
*Eytan Krasilovsky
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The Forest Guild has led two prescribed fire training exchange (TRES) events in northern New Mexico, in 2013 and 2014. The Black Lake TRES have returned fire to 360 acres of high-priority ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forests in the greater Angel Fire wildland-urban interface (WUI). Partners include the New Mexico State Land Office, HR Vigil Small Products, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, Bureau of Land Management (Taos office), Moreno Valley Fire Department, Village of Angel Fire (Fire Department) and the Fire Learning Network.

Building Locally

Support for the two TRES from the New Mexico State Land Office, FLN, and the Forest Service Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) provided training for more than 20 first-time firefighters as well as training opportunities for higher-level NWCG positions. The TRES also successfully engaged local fire departments in their first controlled burn, engaged communities through education and outreach events, and are part of a change in New Mexico toward local and state agency support for the use of good fire.

Building on 2013 efforts led to an even better outcome for the 2014



Black Lake TREX. The acreage treated nearly doubled, thanks to both returning partners and newcomers Taos County and City of Santa Fe Fire Department Wildland Division. New Mexico State Forestry also provided significant support for the controlled burn, with crucial contributions such as drip torches, radios and post-burn site patrolling by the Cimarron District engine.



Lessons in Communication

New this year was a formal communications plan that sent information officer resources to “trap-line” around town on ignition days. This effort was led by New Mexico State Forestry District Forester Mary Stuever, who instructed Forest Guild staff on what public information officers call working a trap-line: how to make the rounds to distribute press releases, ask questions, listen, and insert project talking points into answers as a way of building public knowledge—and eventually having members of the public relay our information to others around town.

For example, on the first ignition day, folks at the Mini Mart were relaying concerns to us that many hunters—elk season had just opened—were



upset and concerned that the TREX was going to ruin their hunts or the hunts they were guiding for. The information officer was able to respond that, relative to the size of the game unit, the burn was small, smoke was dispersing well, that this was leading to long-term habitat improvements, and that immediately after the burn wildlife like to lick and roll in the ashes. On the phones that day, hunters showed that they understood the scale of the impacts, but mentioned that the burn was in their favorite hunting spot due to the thinning and 2013 burn—thus confirming the conventional wisdom about thinning, prescribed fire and wildlife.

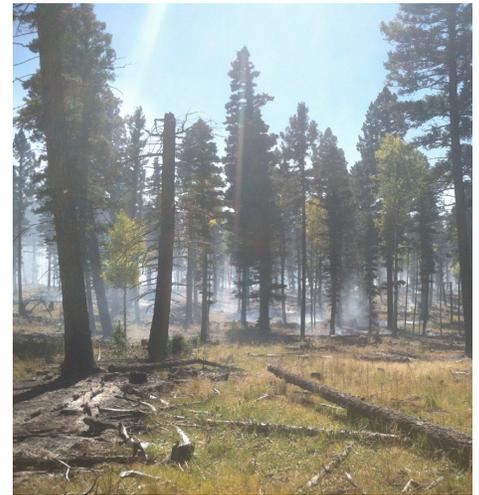
On the next ignition day, during the morning trap-line route around town, Mini Mart staff (without prompting) related all the hunting-related talking points back to the information officers and said, “I’m telling all the hunters that this will be a great spot for next year and everyone else that this smoke is better now than more smoke in June!” There were no calls related to the burn this day.

In addition to the Forest Guild information officers who trap-lined on ignition days, we recruited a local retired wildland firefighter who then recruited an interested resident who had attended our public meetings. Together they drove—in their yellows and greens, in their own Type VI wildland engine—around the communities of Black Lake and Angel Fire to talk to folks about wild-fire risk and smoke, and convey project details, providing unanticipated community support. They



reported at the afternoon command and general staff meeting that they spoke to about a dozen residents and answered project questions.

In the future, the Forest Guild will continue trap-lining techniques before and during ignition days—as well as identifying, recruiting and training volunteer public information officers.



For more information:

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Information about the Black Lake burns, including media coverage and public meetings held before and afterwards, can be found at:

www.forestguild.org/blacklake

Prescribed fire training exchanges (TREX) 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.

For more information, contact Lynn Decker at ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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