



Fire Learning Network
Notes from the Field

Networking to Build Wildfire Resilience

FLN-FAC Learning Network
National Workshop

Santa Fe, NM

June 2-5, 2015

Eighty people—members of the Fire Learning Network (FLN), Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net) members, guests and partners—came from landscapes and communities across the country to meet in Santa Fe. This was the second national-level joint workshop of the two networks, and was aimed at strengthening ties within and between the networks, as well as sharing knowledge and working together.

Eighty people, of course, brought 80 sets of expectations and goals to Santa Fe, but some overall objectives of the workshop included:

- Increasing the synergy between the networks;
- Creating new—and strengthening existing—connections;
- Sharing ideas and innovations;
- Better understanding FAC and learning networks;
- Capturing some of the learning of the FLN;
- For members of the FAC Net, getting a clearer understanding of the network's purpose and direction, and how everyone fits in;
- Launching an effort to encourage and support communities of practice; and
- Beginning work on the coming year's work plans, with peers and staff available to discuss and help shape ideas.

Day 1: Learning in the Field

The workshop's location in northern New Mexico provided an excellent opportunity to explore numerous fire-related challenges—and approaches to meeting them. The challenges

here are big: The Southwest has been significantly impacted by climate change over the past decade, and is currently in a deep drought. The Santa Fe area has been affected by numerous large, destructive fires in recent years, including the Cerro Grande and Las Conchas fires, which burned much of the same area 11 years apart. Large areas of WUI add complexity, and a high proportion of the state's water supply clearly depends on healthy forests.

To meet these challenges, both the FLN and FAC Net are active in this area. The FLN, led by The Nature Conservancy, is working on watershed resiliency (through the Rio Grande Water Fund) and is developing a Burned Area Learning Network to mitigate and address the myriad consequences of the inevitable big fires. The FAC Net, led here by the Forest Guild, is working in a full range of fire adapted communities efforts, from outreach to targeted fuel treatments. Together with numerous partners, these local leads planned a full and fruitful day of sharing some of the problems they face, and the solutions that are being used and developed.

In the Santa Fe municipal watershed, Bill Armstrong (Santa Fe National Forest) talked about the

history of the Forest Service's management. They have treated 6,000 acres over the past 13 years, starting with thinning and progressing to the use of prescribed fire. He stressed the need to listen to stakeholders, and the importance of bringing residents and elected officials into the watershed to see demonstration areas showing what various prescription options mean and look like.



The large group split into three smaller groups to better facilitate discussion at stops during the day. Bill Armstrong (above) fields a question from one group, while others (below) discussed funding issues.

Photos: TNC/Liz Rank; IAFC/Shawn Stokes

Nearby, Dale Lyons (The Nature Conservancy) and Alan Hook (Santa Fe Water Division) talked about efforts to secure long-term funding for ongoing restoration and maintenance in the watershed. A collaborative group was able to make a strong



enough case for active restoration that the City of Santa Fe now shares ongoing program costs with the Española Ranger District, funded by water customers. Also at this stop, Eileen Everett (Santa Fe Watershed Association or SFWA) and Sandy Hurlocker (Santa Fe National Forest) discussed their organizations' roles in implementing the Watershed Plan. The SFWA leads regular field trips to the watershed (which is otherwise closed to the public). There is evidence that the group's work has made a significant difference in the public's acceptance of fire and other treatments in the watershed. These treatments, which are led by the Española Ranger District, began in 2001 with an infusion of \$5 million in federal funding.



Photo: Liz Rank

At Hyde State Park, conversations over lunch turned to local FAC work. Porfirio Chavarria (Santa Fe Fire Department Wildland Fire Division) talked about how a New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps crew has been trained to clear flammable vegetation from around Santa Fe homes. The Division also conducts home assessments and outreach to homeowners about defensible space. Eytan Krasilovsky (The Forest Guild) shared some of their work in convening peer learning workshops and other efforts to help a host of stakeholders advance FAC principles.

Near the Santa Fe Ski Basin, the group stopped at an overlook for more conversation. With Santa Fe in the background, Anne Bradley (The Nature Conservancy) led a discussion about the Burned Area Learning Network, which is forming to help communities and agencies prepare for—and later rehabilitate—large areas impacted by wildfire. Nearby,

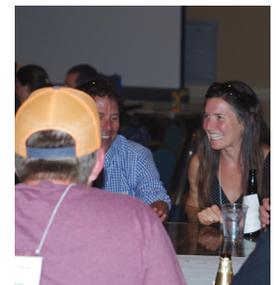
Laura McCarthy (TNC) discussed the Rio Grande Water Fund. She solicited peer feedback on whether the collaboration was on the right track to fund and implement its ambitious restoration plan, and heard from a participant who noted similarities to the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), a \$10.5 billion, 35-year undertaking to increase storage and water supply for the natural ecosystem, as well as for urban and agricultural needs. And a bit further on, Dale Lyons (TNC) provided an overview of an avoided costs analysis (a comparison of forest treatment / risk reduction costs to estimated cost impacts from a wildfire in the same area) that the Water Fund conducted to help make an economic case for investing in forest restoration.



Photo: TNC/Jim Beck

Making Connections

The evening poster session and reception then gave participants opportunities to catch up with old colleagues and get to know new ones. In addition to having some free time to mingle, there was a trivia game based on the posters from all the FAC Net members and FLN landscapes. The evening also kicked off the networks' take on "StoryCorps," with pairs of people assigned to record interviews with each other. (Interviewing continued



Teamwork was called for at the poster session, where teams scrambled to recall facts—trivial and otherwise—from the posters of the 30 FLNs and FAC members attending the workshop. Many of the posters will be repurposed for outreach use at other events.

Photos: TNC/Liz Rank

over the next several days, and yielded a treasure trove of stories—along with plenty of "Aha!" moments as participants got to know people they might not otherwise have had a chance to sit down with.) The evening was rounded off with remarks and reflections on the day Vicki Christiansen (Forest Service Associate Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry) and Terry Sullivan (The Nature Conservancy New Mexico State Director).

Day 2: Getting to Work

After a brief welcome session, the FLN and FAC Net worked separately for much of the day. Their tasks reflected the networks' different stages of development: the FLN aimed at capturing some of the big picture learning of the network, while the FAC Net worked on building, refining and solidifying their direction.

Fire Learning Network

The FLN set two tasks for itself on this day: capturing some of the learning about process that has occurred over its long history, and setting some focus for the coming year's work plans. The number one ground rule for the day was "have fun."

The group that gathered was atypical of recent FLN workshops, with numerous FLN partners and leads attending for the first time in place of "older" members. There were also several guests from partner agencies present—in short, not everyone knew each other, so introductions were in order. Going around the room with name, role and "tell us something no one in the room knows about you" set the stage well for a fun day—from whistleblower to toilet paper, everyone got an earful.

Attention then turned to the work of the day: creating a game. Small teams were given blank game boards and supporting items, and tasked with turning the game of forest and fire restoration that lives in their heads into a concrete, visible game. The goal of the exercise was to capture in a different way some of the processes, relationships and results that move projects ahead or back (in the same vein as “Chutes and Ladders”). The room filled with talk (and laughter) as the five teams took on this task. In the end, five very different games were produced, along with a whole array of obstacles and their remedies. But perhaps more interestingly, a number of questions with great real-life analogs came up: What constitutes a player? What is the goal? How much emphasis should funding have? How do you win a collaborative game? The process of working through these questions together—especially with such varied teams—was valuable in itself.

The exercise was also a good segue into the last session of the day. During discussion about the new year’s work plans, FLN partners were encouraged to think outside the box when it comes to their project proposals.

Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

The day started with reflections on the evolution of the FAC Net since its inception in 2013, with members sharing FAC Net related lessons or insights. Many focused on the importance of building relationships and keeping the collaborative process with stakeholders moving forward. One person summed it up as “Be the glue”—an expression that resonated well and “stuck” throughout the week.

A good portion of the day was spent on reasons for engaging in the network (“individual value propositions”), the overall purpose of the network (“collective value proposition”), and potential operating principles members might want to adopt. Participants said they joined the FAC Net for a wide variety of reasons—from learning from the community



After developing the games, each group walked everyone else through their game, leading to lively discussions about similarities and differences, and the varied solutions hit upon by the groups. *Photos: TNC/Liz Rank*

and receiving feedback to being part of a national movement to having a source of inspiration. Working in small groups, members discussed a draft collective value proposition, and together came up with a good working version: We help society live safely with wildfire.

Participants then turned to the operating principles for the FAC Net, discussing the norms they want to foster within the group, and reflecting on some of the ways the network can support its emergent culture.

Reading assigned before the workshop—*Connecting to Change the World*—suggested five principles: make the network do the work; do everything with someone, not alone; let connections flow to value; keep network information and decision making open and transparent; and keep plans flexible. Members added others, including: lead by example; foster continued learning; always re-weave the net; and document change and adaptation. These ideas will form the foundation as the group continues to implement and refine its operating principles as the network evolves.

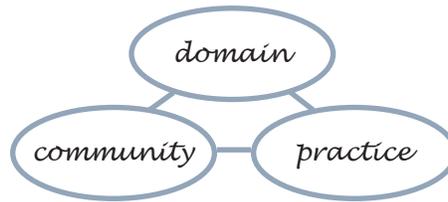
The afternoon then focused on the Connect-Align-Produce, or “CAP” sequence, designed to help members deepen their thinking about how connections and alignment of actions can lead to joint action. First, breakout groups—each led by a member—were asked to determine their collective years of FAC-related experience and consider a specific question, such as the advice they would give to a new practitioner building a FAC program. The group found it had a total of more than 400 years of experience. The advice shared highlighted the importance of connecting and aligning messages with one’s audience and their needs; leveraging non-traditional partner connections; getting compelling speakers; meeting people on their turf and working where they are most comfortable; and, importantly “failure is okay.” After the discussion, a worksheet template was shared, to encourage deeper exploration of the CAP sequence and stimulate thinking on how the upcoming year’s work plans can include broader peer engagement.



FAC Net members worked all together, in small breakout groups—and even, occasionally, alone—in a variety of exercises throughout the day to better define the network and its purpose, as a whole and individually. *Photo: WRTC/Michelle Medley-Daniel*

Day 3: Building Communities of Practice

The networks came together again to explore using communities of practice (CoP) as a way to both strengthen and take advantage of the existing networks, and to expand their influence outward. Bruce Goldstein (University of Colorado) and Nick Goulette (Watershed Research and Training Center) began the day with presentations about what CoPs are (and are not), and introduced a simple model of a CoP having a domain, community and practices. They highlighted that CoPs are good for addressing learning that is grounded in place and context, and about much more than just facts. Also key is that members of CoPs share a passion for what they do and interact regularly to learn how to do it better.



Community of practice, from Bruce Goldstein's presentation: The domain is what the people in a CoP care about or do, their common ground, issues. The community is the set of people who trust one another enough to interact effectively (and includes shared goals, beliefs; collective stories; a sense of purpose; a sense of common identity). The practice is the work or activity—the way things actually get done through methods, techniques, tools, specialized language and the stories told about using these things. Practice is not just expertise—it includes social interaction and cultural understanding.

The rest of the day was then spent working out the CoPs to launch in the coming year. Participants first brainstormed about potential domains (what the CoPs would be “about”), and then winnowed these down to a manageable number. A World Café session then helped flesh out many of the practices (the “how”) for the selected domains (along with a good deal of other useful conversation). And finally, work on the communities part (the “who”) got started, with people indicating their interest by signing on in various roles, from lead to “lurker.” This work will continue to

unfold over the coming weeks and months, and members and staff work to nurture and support the fledgling CoPs—and adapt as needed.

Closing: Taking it Home

Day 3 wrapped up with the first farewells, as FLN participants headed home after a busy, productive and fun few days. Back home, they are tasked with taking the lessons of the workshop—and the renewed connections—and applying them to their plans for the coming year. These will build even closer ties between the networks as time goes on.

Members of the FAC Net stayed on for one more half-day work-planning session. Building on the concepts and work of the previous days, they began refining proposals for their coming year's work. Several groups identified opportunities for joint projects and all developed new connections that will serve their work. In addition to the community-level projects and regional opportunities for joint projects, members are included support for growing the nascent communities of practice in their work plans. At noon, there was another round of farewells—but not really, as various projects and other ways of communication will keep everyone working together until we meet again.

Some Differences between Work Groups and Communities of Practice

CoP	vs.	Work Group
a practice		an assignment
open-ended		time-bound
performance		deliverables
continuous		finish up
it <i>is</i> the work		get back to work
my identity		apart from me
sustainable		not sustainable



Photo: TNC/Wendy Fulks

Communities of Practice: Domains Selected for Development

- Community Capacity Building
- Fire as a Tool
- FAC and the Fire Service
- “Next Generation” Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)
- Watershed Management
- Forest Treatment Economics
- Public Outreach and Engagement
- Working with Landowners / Homeowners

More Information and Resources

A more detailed account of the FAC Net part of the workshop is posted on their website at: http://facnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/SantaFe_FACNet_Workshop_Summary.pdf

A link to a presentation about the Rio Grande Water Fund avoided cost analysis discussed in the field is at: <http://www.carpediemwest.org/hh-abq-9th/>

Members of the FAC Net read from *Connecting to Change the World* (P. Plastrik, M. Taylor and J. Cleveland, 2014) to prepare for this workshop.

The Fire Learning Network and Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network 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 ldecker@tnc.org.



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