

# Lessons from FAC Learning Network Fire Adapted Communities

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network was launched at an April 2013 workshop, with teams from communities in California, Colorado, Georgia, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington. The first eight pilot communities represent a cross-section of community fire management efforts in the US. The communities—of various sizes, with differing jurisdictional and regulatory structures, and unique cultural and institutional contexts—demonstrate a range of innovative approaches to community fire adaptation.

The communities have organized local coordinating groups that are led by “hub” organizations whose responsibilities include connecting the local group to the national FAC Network to facilitate sharing and learning from peers, as well as leading demonstrations of tools, programs and approaches. Taken together, these actions promote fire resilience in communities across the country.

At the end of the year, leads from each of the eight community hub organizations were asked to reflect on their work to date and share some of the lessons—large and small—learned along the way.

## On the central importance of communicating, and some ways that have worked well

“Telling the story is essential to success. We can develop the best program anywhere and if we don’t tell everyone who will listen, we will not be successful.”

“We **embraced ‘the power of yes’** and strove to communicate FAC concepts at as many venues as possible. We believe this greatly increased our exposure to segments of the population we don’t always reach.”

“Web traffic spiked leading up to our November community meeting, indicating that strategic posts paired with media pushes ahead of fire season should see meaningful increases in the use of that resource.”

“Free defensible space inspections and curbside chipping are staple services provided by the fire districts, and provide many opportunities to talk about FAC with residents. However, the attention that these programs need often competes with our efforts to expand our focus to the community level with FAC.... Ideally, some staff would be dedicated to FAC outreach to prevent a busy fire season from derailing outreach efforts.”

## On the essential role of strong partnerships

“**Partnerships at all scales are critical** to making headway on complicated issues like fire management. From neighbors connecting with local emergency response personnel, to state and federal agencies engaging with communities in landscape planning and treatment, to national level coordination between decision makers, researchers and network organizers, all of these human relationships reinforce the power of partnership.”

“Key community leaders primarily drove the selection of pilot neighborhoods. This made clear the **importance of having an educated and enthusiastic resident** to help craft FAC outreach and events.”

“Partners such as state forestry, USFS, RC&Ds, regional commissions, local colleges, local utilities, civic clubs, HOAs and local governments are essential to the success of the FAC program. **If all of these partners buy in and share ownership, it will be successful** because it benefits all sectors of the community.”

“People bringing their best thinking & effort to the work is the force behind making positive change.”



## Lessons from the 2013 wildfire season

“Given the extreme conditions, some of our existing landscape treatments were not effective. There is a general consensus that we need more treatments and that those **fuel treatment prescriptions need to be larger and more aggressive** to adequately address the kinds of conditions we’ve been experiencing.”

“**Understanding how Incident Command works** and how to interface with them helped us move knowledge between Incident Commanders and local leaders, and facilitated better outcomes for our community. We worked with IC to get messages relevant to local tourism and businesses integrated into official communications with great success.”

“Facebook has served as a real-time communication tool and has been a great way to stimulate dialogue, share information, and **reflect on what we want to do the next time** we have a wildfire.”

Work days bring people together to complete treatments that make their communities safer. *photos: Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP, CO), North Lake Tahoe FPD (NV)*



## On what people need

“This community is **hungry for wildfire resilience and improved wildfire preparedness**. Specifically, organizations and community groups are hungry for the ‘how to’—how to update a CWPP, how to become more fire adapted, how to improve participation in the Firewise program, etc.”

“We found that landowners across the economic spectrum need cost-share programs to initiate mitigations, and that those programs are limited and challenging to identify and access.”



Public outreach about FAC concepts and available resources can take place through booths at fairs, school presentations and civic proclamations. *photos: Towns County (GA) RC&D*

“Chipper Days” offer both a fuel treatment service and an opportunity to reach out to community members. *photos: CUSP (CO), Towns County RC&D (GA), North Tahoe FPD (NV)*



## On the time, effort and administration needed

“We began this area of work—to act as a **statewide resource** for FAC and wildland-urban interface topics—with an incomplete understanding of both the **quantity of time required** of this objective and its impact.”

“GIS work is expensive.... deliverables should be itemized in contracts...[and] factors to be included should be discussed **between meetings** with the contractors for efficient use of funds.”

“Website updating and maintenance can be a full time job in itself!”

“The financial side of managing this work has been unexpectedly challenging because of the involvement of multiple fire districts.... I will be taking extra steps in 2014 to **better incorporate other districts** into the Learning Network.”

“We found it **easy to underestimate the effort required** for planning relatively small events. Seemingly small details, such as health permits for food, toilets, dumpster security, and other logistical issues can end up taking substantial time.”

## Working with Community Wildfire Protection Plans

“The **relationships developed** over the course of creating our CWPPs and Fire Plan have been critical.”

“Locally, **there isn’t a shared understanding** regarding what it means to be a fire-adapted or Firewise community. More direct and consistent communication is needed to support an understanding of why it is important to be proactive about community fire risks. There is a need for the community to have a clear idea of what the goals are and what strategies will be implemented to achieve these goals—**CWPPs help with this!**”

“We learned that the community’s CWPP does not necessarily need to be detailed at the lot-level to be effective. **A plan that is more broad-brush, but is used will be much more effective in the long-term.**”

“We discovered the importance of **working with adjacent CWPP areas** to develop a consistent update process as well as plans which can be incorporated together in a county-wide wildfire protection planning effort.”

“In an attempt to reduce costs and streamline the update process, we developed a collaborative CWPP update process with all seven fire districts. Although this is beneficial, differing budgets, timelines, and availability have delayed the process.”

## On bringing the pieces together

“By engaging with the Fire Learning Network on Scaling-up to Promote Ecosystem Resiliency (SPER II) funded work, it became apparent that this FAC needs to have **complementary implementation components** that support learning by doing and yield on—the-ground results.”

“‘Prioritization’ is a challenging concept to advance in an era of limited budgets and unclear agency management mandates. **Collaboratively designed risk assessments** based upon integrated treatments that balance forest restoration goals with habitat considerations, economic feasibility and strategic fuels placements for homes, communities and the forest are helpful.”

“Integrating Cohesive Strategy goals, like **fire adapted communities** concepts, into **collaboratively designed** federal forest restoration assessment and recommendation efforts has proven fruitful.”

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