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FLN



DISPATCH

*Emerging Lessons From
The Fire Learning Network*

U.S. FIRE LEARNING NETWORK

A cooperative project of the The Nature Conservancy, Interior Departments and the USDA Forest Service, the network was created in 2002. Part of the larger joint program, **Fire, Landscapes and People: A Conservation Partnership**, which includes education and training components, the network operates at both national and local levels to overcome barriers to reducing hazardous fuels build-up and restoring fire-dependent ecosystems.

<http://tncfire.org/usfln>

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A long-standing public-private coalition in southwest Oregon's Applegate Watershed is expanding its approach to integrating social issues with biological and ecological objectives. Members of the local Fire Learning Network team, coordinated by The Nature Conservancy's Darren Borgias, have adapted the Conservancy's "Conservation Action Planning Tool" to help them identify critically important social values and management strategies, along with ways to measure effectiveness over time.

"The FLN was a godsend—exactly what we wanted to do here in the Applegate," said Gary Gnauck, a member of the Applegate Partnership's all-volunteer Board of Directors. "We're trying to restore the forest so it's fire-resilient. The Partnership wants to understand how the ecosystems work and manage them in a holistic way. However, all we can do is act as a catalyst, and we live in a world in which the condition of ecosystems is often secondary to social and political constraints."

The FLN team's first step was to organize community workshops and smaller meetings to learn about what residents value. The team learned that the community cares about their fire safety, locally supplied forest



The Applegate FLN team sponsors periodic field tours to share lessons learned about, and build support for, landscape-scale fire and fuels management.

—Photo by Joseph Vaile, KS Wild

APPLEGATE LANDSCAPE SOCIAL TARGETS

Forest Economy: Ecological restoration, Local employment, Supply of locally derived wood products, Forest operations land base, Harvest volume

Fire-Safe Community & Infrastructure: Strategic fire mgt. areas and units, Fire-safe structures, FIREWISE landowners, Landowner comfort with fire, Defensible space

Quality of Life: Naturally appearing landscape, Air quality, Quiet, Recreation, Solitude, Wildness, Human health and safety

Collaborative Land Management: Collaboration, Enduring relationships, Inclusiveness, Open communication, Shared understanding of underlying assumptions, Transparency, Trust

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products and workers, and recreational opportunities, and that they have a strong desire to collaborate in land management. While the community also cares about restoring forests, woodlands, grasslands and streams, these values are documented separately from the social targets. Because social values such as recreation and the local wood supply, for example, are expected to be affected by forest management decisions, the FLN team has agreed to track how factors such as recreational opportunities might change in response to future forest and fire management actions, including restoration.

Because some desired outcomes related to biological versus social targets appear to conflict, at least in the near term, team members also expect to use the new social information to modify some of their objectives for biological values. For example, cutting fewer large trees will help restore a more desirable age class structure to some forest areas, but it will also reduce the amount of merchantable timber harvested from those areas. As a result, said Borgias, "the team anticipates adopting an iterative approach to settling on a desired conditions map, and on priorities for restoration. We're adjusting desired outcomes in both the social and biological plans to strike a compromise and help ensure we can balance our social and biological objectives."

A key element of Conservation Action Planning is a customized Excel workbook that is used to document "targets," traditionally species or ecosystems with conservation value, what is known about the targets and their threats, indicators that can be used to monitor the condition of targets into the future, and needed management actions.

Thus far the time spent learning about social values has helped the Applegate FLN team engage the local community more deeply. Next steps for the team include improving its modeling approach and completing a map of desired future conditions by December to guide future restoration work. The team is hopeful that its work on social values in the Applegate Watershed will inform wildland fire and land management practices within and beyond the watershed.

The Applegate FLN team includes the Applegate River Watershed Council, the Applegate Partnership, the Bureau of Land Management, the USDA Forest Service, Out of the Woods Eco-Forestry, the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center, The Nature Conservancy, the US Geological Survey and a number of private citizens.

