

Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

Networking to Build Community Resilience to Wildfires

Launched in 2013, the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network is stewarded by the Watershed Research and Training Center and The Nature Conservancy. Together with the USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior, we share a vision to accelerate the adoption of fire adapted community (FAC) concepts across the nation using a tested learning network approach.

The FAC Learning Network is modeled after—and integrated with—the Fire Learning Network, which has been focusing on restoring fire-adapted landscapes since 2002. Learning networks are ideal vehicles for addressing complex issues such as wildland fire adaptation. The FAC Learning Network connects people and projects to avoid “reinventing the wheel,” and encourages the development and sharing of innovations.

In just a few years we have created a community of FAC practitioners that includes non-profit groups, fire departments, Fire Safe Councils, Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Firewise Communities boards, community collaboratives and others. Everyone in the network knows that they can call on their peers for advice, feedback and resources. Participants

routinely take tactics that others are using to help communities live with fire and adapt them for their own circumstances. Across the country, interest in the network is high.

Although creating fire adapted communities is itself one of the three broad goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, in reality helping communities live with fire involves all three goals:

- Restore and maintain resilient landscapes in all jurisdictions;
- Prepare communities so they can live with and withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property; and
- Safely, efficiently and effectively respond to wildfires when they happen.

A Sampling of Projects Supported by the Network

Network participants are helping their communities become more resilient by taking action before, during and after wildfires. Some examples are:

- Creating and distributing an After the Fire Toolkit (Washington state)
- Developing and beta-testing a Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool (national network)
- Holding a Citizen’s Fire Academy and Firewise Networking Day (Bend, Oregon)
- Hosting Forestry Field Days (Towns County, Georgia)
- Collaborating to complete the Travis County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (Texas)

As well as FAC outreach at community wildfire preparedness and Earth Day events, public demonstrations of defensible space and fuel treatments, and awareness campaigns through websites and social media—in communities across the country.



Seventeen pilot communities are currently active in the FAC Learning Network, with plans to continue expansion. Each community is building capacity and raising awareness about wildfire resilience through a host of preparedness, mitigation and recovery activities.



Learning together and working together: Field tours like the one near Orleans, CA (top), bring together residents, NGOs and agencies to learn from recent wildfires. Community work days, like the one near Woodland Park, CO (bottom), let “many hands make light work” while strengthening community ties.

Photos: WRTC; Coalition for the Upper South Platte

Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network Values

- Adaptation is critical to a positive future.
- Collaboration and partnerships are keys to successful adaptation.
- Investment in local-level capacity, partnerships and responsibility yields the best outcomes.
- Supporting the coordinating function within communities is essential to leveraging the range of resources, institutions and individuals necessary to build fire adapted communities.
- Investing in learning across communities and geographies is a strategy that works at multiple scales, including:
 - Facilitating the adoption of best practices and innovations;
 - Building a community-of-practice to fuel inspiration and innovation;
 - Aggregating lessons learned to advise the design of programs and policies in support of fire adapted communities; and
 - Leveraging lessons learned to inform policy and resource allocation, as appropriate.



How Does the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network Work?

Most of the 17 organizations leading community efforts in the FAC Learning Network receive modest funding from the program to support local FAC work and promote the expansion of FAC to new communities. A core team of “netweavers” and coordinators works directly with the network participants to foster connections among them. Network participants also meet in person annually, and quarterly through webinars. On a day-to-day basis, members use an invitation-only online workspace to share successes and resources, and to pose questions and engage in conversations.

In addition to netweaving, core team members support the deployment of a variety of local FAC tactics and strategies, and harvest learning from them. Capturing the network’s learning, they



In 2014, the Network met in Colorado Springs for several days of presentations, discussions, a field tour with the Fire Learning Network—and plenty of one-on-one networking. *Photo: TNC/Liz Rank*

produce quick guides, communications resources, and reports such as an annual State of Practice Report.

We reach out to a broader audience through our website and blog, where we share important resources and post regularly about key FAC issues and best practices, pilot community successes, resources and other topics of interest. Core team members and

other network participants also attend conferences and give presentations about FAC and the FAC Learning Network.

We are connected to the larger FAC community through the Fire Adapted Communities Coalition, which includes the Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Association of State Foresters, National Fire Protection Association, National Volunteer Fire Council, U.S. Fire Administration, NWCG WUI Mitigation Committee, the Watershed Research and Training Center, and The Nature Conservancy. Together we are helping homeowners, communities and land managers in fire-prone areas to prepare for and recover from inevitable fires—to “live with fire” safely.

www.FACNetwork.org

Top row: Communities from coast to coast are threatened by wildfires. *From left:* one of the many 2008 fires, as seen from Hayfork (CA) High School; 2011 Los Conchas Fire in Santa Fe National Forest, NM; 2007 Warren Grove Fire near Barnegat Township, NJ. *Photos: WRTC; International Space Station; NJ Forest Fire Service.*

Bottom row: Communities in the FAC Learning Network work at many different scales to mitigate wildfire risk, from promoting individual and neighborhood action to addressing landscape resilience and fire-related policies. At the very local scale, we have learned that demonstration sites can be a powerful tool for convincing homeowners to take action. *From left:* pilot community demonstration sites in Barnegat Township, NJ, Leavenworth, WA and Island Park, ID. *Photos: TNC/Wendy Fulks; Andrew Holm; TNC/Guy Duffner*



The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network is supported by *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 through a subaward to the Watershed Research and Training Center. For more information, contact Nick Goulette (nickg@hayfork.net).