

# Indigenous Peoples Burning Network

The goal of the IPBN is to achieve fire-related cultural restoration—knowledge and practices—in large landscapes to perpetuate traditions and quality of the environment.

Native American people walk in two worlds: their ancestral tribal world and the contemporary world, which is led by other people. When we first started creating a network centered on fire management from an indigenous peoples' perspective, we laid out some principles for how this would be different from other fire-related partnerships. Some principles, like self-determination, are universal to indigenous peoples around the world; others, like preparing the next generation of cultural fire practitioners, are specific to the local landscape. For the IPBN, these principles mean operating our network from the indigenous perspective first, and designing connections with partners where there is synergy for reaching our vision.

Members of the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network are making important strides in advancing their priorities for revitalizing culturally-based fire management. Recent highlights include inter-generational learning, TRES, family-led burning, Healthy Country Planning, and exploration of new landscapes.

## Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk Landscape

In the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk landscape—encompassing 1.85 million acres of ancestral territory—the IPBN is supporting local people's ability to reclaim fire. Controlled burns conducted this spring through the Yurok TRES and family-led burns are improving fire safety, the quality of wild foods and medicines, and the availability of plants needed for basket weaving. With unemployment rates of 19-32 percent, these improvements

in forest resources have a significant impact on people's lives. News that cultural revitalization is progressing is spreading fast, elevating the sense of wellbeing within each tribe as a whole.

*The family-led burns this spring were important in building capacity for families to safely meet their sacred obligations. Caring for plants, animals and the balance of the universe through traditional fire practices is a powerful part of revitalizing local culture.*

## Family-led Burning

A primary goal in the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk Healthy Country Plan is to enable 40 families from the three tribes to conduct family-led controlled burns over the next three years. This year, participants in the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk landscape increased the number of participants and properties

involved in controlled burning. With support from the IPBN, a cache of tools and equipment has been assembled; items ranging from hand tools to a 2,500-gallon portable water tank and highway safety signs support safe controlled burning. Last fall, community members designed and delivered a one-day training class for families interested in burning their land. This spring, volunteers helped to prepare firebreaks on multiple properties. Four families completed controlled burns—an important step toward revitalizing the traditional practice of burning along family lines.

## Prescribed Fire Training Exchange

A community-wide TRES in mid-May gave 24 participants opportunities to advance their formal fire management qualifications while accomplishing 31 acres of culturally-based burning and fuel reduction treatments. Participants in the week-long Yurok TRES learned from respected tribal

leaders and firefighting professionals about both traditional and mainstream fire practices. This prepares them for jobs in fire management as well as for cultural survival.



The Executive Director of Cultural Fire Management Council looks on approvingly at the spring TRES. In addition to 24 local participants, as many as 35 personnel from CAL FIRE took part in some of the burns, strengthening relationships among fire practitioners in the region. © Elizabeth Azzuz

The apparently idyllic landscape of Round Valley has a complicated land use history, but interviews and conversations over the last year have revealed a shared desire for more proactive fire management. © TNC (Mary Huffman)



## Healthy Country Planning

The Healthy Country Planning methodology learned in Australia last fall was used this spring to develop the content for a strategic plan for the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk IPBN landscape. In Australia, both indigenous and non-indigenous people plan to sustain the living culture of Aboriginal people, while in the U.S., Native American culture is often viewed as something lost in the past. By using Healthy Country Planning, the IPBN is bringing this more holistic approach to the U.S.

The Conservancy's Director of Fire Management co-facilitated the workshop; combining his outstanding skills in working in cross-cultural settings with the Healthy Country Planning approach resulted in a process and plan uniquely suited to the place and people. Along with the mainstream



Healthy Country Planning team for the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk landscape

value of a “fire-maintained landscape,” the Yurok-Hoopa-Karuk Healthy Country Plan is centered on the values of “traditional fire practitioners, cultural perpetuation, right to use fire and economic security (including food security).” Strategies in the plan emphasize intergenerational learning and family-led burning, as well as state-tribal and federal-tribal relationships. A core team is working to capture the plan in a document that will be completed later this year.

*“We are amazed. You come in here and facilitate two workshops, and now we have a plan that feels like our own.”*

### Expanding the Network

To increase the ability of indigenous people to improve the well-being of their communities through traditional fire management, culturally specific efforts in two additional landscapes are being explored.

#### New Mexico— Rio Grande Water Fund

The first of these landscapes is in New Mexico, in the upper watershed of the Rio Grande River. Having worked in the

region for several years, particularly through the Rio Grande Water Fund project, The Nature Conservancy's New Mexico chapter has invited the IPBN to focus on the fire-related needs of multiple pueblos whose ancestral territories include large areas of fire-dependent ponderosa pine forests. Here as elsewhere indigenous people have much to contribute to region-wide problem-solving, starting with increasing culturally-based controlled burning on pueblo land and nearby national forests.

#### California—Round Valley

Round Valley is the ancestral territory of the Yuki people, which is now home to a confederation of six tribes forced onto the site during California settlement. Today, the area includes the Round Valley Indian Reservation, several private ranches and the Mendocino National Forest. As part of the FireScope Mendocino FLN's work, a community engagement expert has been working over the last year to ascertain the potential for communities surrounding the Mendocino National Forest to become better fire adapted. She has identified Round Valley as an area with high potential for community-

led fire management. A deeper dive in the coming months will further explore the opportunities here; if community interest remains high, the IPBN will assist local participants in beginning work on a community-based fire plan for Round Valley.

#### And Beyond

This year the IPBN connected with the Conservancy's Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities team, a global group that is focused on building partnerships around the world. Discussions on calls this spring highlighted at least nine collaborations in the U.S. in which the Conservancy and tribes are working together on fire-related restoration. Further coordination will provide opportunities for shared learning and problem-solving, and inform next steps in the growth of the IPBN.



The Indigenous Peoples Burning Network is supported by *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together* (PERFACT), 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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