

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges and Cooperative Burning

Experiential training events in support of landscape restoration and resiliency, fire adapted communities and workforce capacity-building



PERFACT staff and partners continue to deliver capacity-building training to diverse participants through Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX). The events strategically address barriers to safe, effective implementation of prescribed fire at the scale needed to meet restoration and community safety needs.

These experiential trainings provide opportunities for professional fire practitioners to gain experience, learn about integrating conservation and cultural issues in fire management, and receive position task book evaluations in trainee positions. They also actively engage other practitioners—including private contractors, ranchers and tribal members—into events that meet NWCG standards, helping these practitioners work more safely and effectively. In addition, some participants may have never burned before: university students, resource managers, researchers and regulators, for example, have taken part in TREX to better understand how fire affects their work so they can make more informed fire-related decisions.

Spring TREX

Four TREX were hosted by FLNs and a SPER project this spring. Three were repeat events, building on the efforts and successes of the year before (and in the case of the two Nebraska events, on the successes of many previous years). Land and program managers who use TREX events find them successful and often continue delivering TREX year after year—a testament to the importance of all hands/all lands approach, and how effective TREX is at delivering it. The TREX model is newer in Oregon, but two were held there this spring, near Bend and Ashland. Federal partners from the BLM-Medford District, Rogue-Siskiyou NF and Central Oregon Fire

Management Service filled key roles in both of these leadership teams. Literally before the smoke had cleared, people were beginning to talk of “next year.”

In addition to the PERFACT TREX, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Northern Plains Region hosted two back-to-back TREX in South Dakota in May. These had originally been planned, with the Great Plains FLN, for last May, but were cancelled shortly before their start date due to severe drought. It was encouraging that much of the planning was able to be put to use this year—and by local practitioners, without further support from the FLN.

Spring 2016 TREX, Cooperative Burning & Training



		people	acres
Loup River Valley TREX	NE	29	2,464
Niobrara River Valley TREX	NE	38	119
Central Oregon TREX	OR	43	850
Ashland Forest Restoration TREX	OR	44	338
Cooperative Burn Week	IA	39	1,083
Volunteer Fire Department Training	CA	22	22
TOTAL:		215	4,876

TREX Offspring

Cooperative burning is also an important strategy for teams that are building local capacity. Less time-intensive (in both planning and implementing) than TREX events, cooperative burning can hit a “sweet spot” for balancing available resources and burn windows. And by intentionally incorporating a variety of training opportunities and by giving participants experience with more complicated burns than they are able to conduct individually, these events build the skills, competence and confidence of the work force for lasting impact. This spring, a Cooperative Burn Week got more than 1,000 acres of fire on the ground, revitalizing not only the Iowa Loess Hills grasslands and prairie, but also a fire partnership working there. In northern California, two training efforts are growing from TREX, The

California Klamath-Siskiyou FLN developed a curriculum for a two-day live fire training for volunteer fire departments, and delivered it for the first time this spring in Trinity County. VFDs are a critical fire management resource in the region, and the training helped prepare them both to assist with the prescribed burning needed there and to more safely and effectively provide fire response to wildfires. Also this spring, FLN staff, leads and partners in California worked out a new pilot program that is being called CalTREX. Building on a foundation laid by a state-wide fire partnership MOU last fall, CalTREX—modeled on TREX and other successful training models—will be a flagship initiative of the capacity-building workgroup of the partnership.



Evening and night ignitions extend the burn windows during warm, dry weather. © Ben Wheeler

Loup River Valley TREX

Ord, NE March 14-26

Excellent weather paved the way for several burning opportunities during Nebraska's Loup TREX in late March. A crew of 29—from Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan and Nebraska—put almost 2,500 acres of healthy prescribed fire on native mixed-grass prairie in central Nebraska. The Loup TREX has been active since 2009, and their cumulative work has helped restore and maintain over 25,000 acres of central Nebraska grasslands.



Niobrara River Valley TREX

Ainsworth, NE March 19-27

As the longest running TREX—now in its eighth iteration—the Niobrara TREX has been used as a testing ground for several strategies including contractor development, volunteer fire department training, private land owner burn co-ops, and partnerships with universities. Recently, regional neighbors, including the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the University of Nebraska and Nebraska State Parks are becoming more involved and are working with the planning team.

The Niobrara is also known for wicked weather—including weeks with red flags then blizzards then red flags again. This year's TREX started warm and dry, then saw a storm that dropped 7 inches of snow. But every day was treated as a burn day. This kept everyone on task, and offered many training opportunities for new fireline leaders. One of the hardest skills to master is getting the crew and equipment prepared and organized efficiently. But come a good burn day, repeated practice pays off. The 38 people at this TREX completed two burns at Fort Niobrara NWR—and left the event with smiles on their faces, happy with a successful learning experience.

Left: Local people—and local resources—play a key role in TREX. © TNC

Central Oregon TREX

Bend, OR April 25-May 6

The second Central Oregon TREX built upon the successes and lessons learned from year one to provide 12 days of applied, experiential learning on the ecological, operational, monitoring and public engagement dimensions of prescribed fire. All told, 42 people from 11 organizations—including seven National Forests, three TNC state chapters and three universities—took part. They completed 850 acres of prescribed fire in seven operations across the three districts of the Deschutes NF, the majority in high priority wildland-urban interface areas.

The Central Oregon TREX was a prime opportunity to engage the community about fire-adapted forest restoration, the re-introduction of “good fire,” and the building of fire adapted communities. This included some traditional approaches:



online content from the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project, social media, radio and TV. But it also included a prescribed fire open house held in partnership with GoodLife Brewing to coincide with the latest release in their “Sustainability Session Ale” series—Wildland Session Ale—to raise awareness of the need for fire-adapted forest restoration in and around Central Oregon.

Ashland Forest Restoration TREX

Ashland, OR May 9-21

The community of Ashland is embracing the all-hands/all-lands approach of the Ashland Forest Resiliency (AFR) project in the dry, fire-prone forest surrounding town and its municipal watershed. The community views the work as abating the threat of severe wildfire while setting the stage for beneficial, restorative fire that works for nature and people. This TREX focused on AFR burns, implementing the project's first burns on private land, as well as several others on Forest Service and city land. Discussions with local experts, a variety of fuels and terrain, and the diversity of land ownership and burn objectives led to a rich experience for this event's diverse team—which included numerous local partners, and people from six other states, England, Spain and Ashland's sister city, Guanajuato, Mexico.



© TNC (Darren Borgias)

“The [Niobrara] TRES continues to build social acceptance of fire in the landscape by demonstrating safe, thoughtful burns. The knowledge participants gain at TRES disseminates back into local culture through these people. We are supplying the mechanism for local partners to get the knowledge and confidence to implement prescribed fire on their own.”



Partners with a variety of equipment stage for one of the cooperative burns. © Kody Wohlers

Cooperative Burn Week

Loess Hills, IA April 4-8

The Cooperative Burn Week held by the Loess Hills Fire Partners provided a way to gather resources to accomplish fire management at a wider scale in the Loess Hills region of western Iowa than is typically feasible. It is a TRES in intent, though not in name or in the fire-line standards under which it is organized. This modification of the TRES model better fits the non-NWCG standards of the majority of Loess Hills conservation partners. The 39 participants came from three states, and from seven agencies and organizations, and also included volunteers, VFDs and private landowners. Their 1,083 acres of burning took place on state, non-profit and private lands. The event influenced multiple regional objectives—meeting fire management goals, providing fireline training, and improving collaboration among partners.

MORE ONLINE

Loup River TRES—A story featuring several participating firefighters appeared on the local radio station KNLV:

<https://tnc.box.com/s/tnkcrmc27xeom8opkntfk7szktz96qf>

Niobrara TRES—The team produced a video featuring an interview with a first-time participant from a local VFD:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgelD1PywuA&feature=youtu.be>

Central Oregon TRES—The Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project website carries information on prescribed fire and TRES:

<http://deschutescollaborativeforest.org/forest-restoration-work/prescribed-burning-deschutes-forest-bend/>

Ashland TRES—Jefferson Public Radio aired an interview with a member of the organizing team and a participant from the UK:

<http://ijpr.org/post/training-prescribed-burns#stream/0>

Cooperative Burn Week—A member of the organizing team wrote an FLN Notes from the Field:

http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/USFLNPublications/Documents/100_NotesFromTheField_LoessHills_CoopBurn2016.pdf

Volunteer Fire Department Training—A member of the organizing team wrote an FLN Notes from the Field:

http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/USFLNPublications/Documents/104_NotesFromTheField_CKS-VFD_May2016.pdf

Interview with TRES Lead Jeremy Bailey—“Promoting a Prescribed Fire Workforce” (*Two More Chains*)

<http://www.wildfirelessons.net/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=6c6dc6df-b275-d2dd-2c74-8a7bb3d9d259&forceDialog=0>

Volunteer Fire Department Training

Trinity County, CA April 30-May 1

Twenty-two volunteer firefighters from four departments in Trinity County took part in a new live-fire training that was tailor-made for them. Developed and implemented by the California Klamath-Siskiyou FLN, TNC, Shasta-Trinity NF and Firestorm, the two-day training included lectures, hands-on training and burn implementation on two units that totaled seven acres. The burns—on units identified as strategic for wildfire management in the area—provided excellent opportunities for training and local capacity-building as well as valuable treatments.

Looking Ahead

TRES Coaches Network Workshop

Twenty people—Forest Service partners, university professors, fire bosses, TRES experts and hosts, PERFECT staff and network design experts—met in June to

help design a network to increase the scale of TRES delivery. The goal is to develop a national network of 50-100 TRES coaches who can organize, plan and deliver TRES across the country.

<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>



VFD training participants learn to take weather measurements in the field. © WRTC (D. Jaramillo)



Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges are supported by *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together* (PERFACT), a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information, contact Lynn Decker at (ldecker@tnc.org) or (801) 320-0524. PERFECT is an equal opportunity provider.