



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Yurok TRES

Weitchpec, CA
Spring 2017

The first outcomes of the Yurok TRES that you see are the burns, completed in strategic locations that can be used in a few months as anchor points for burning under hotter, drier conditions of the fall. Or maybe it would be the local participants and local leadership that formed the core of the crew, and the strong participation from the state's fire management agency. Or maybe the good media coverage, telling of the historical relationship between the land, the people and fire.

But the most important outcome might be the thing that allowed and helped enable all the others—and that is process. While at first glance this perhaps not a very flashy outcome, it is at the center of this TRES, and central to the objective of building capacity in the Yurok community. Process is essential because of the deep need for developing productive relationships with local fire organizations and agencies. Process also touches on the role of burning in general—the treatment itself is the sum of many small knowledge- and skill-based actions orchestrated in a dynamic environment.

In this TRES, the process joined the skill-sets of local, state and federal personnel with those of tribal members and land managers, non-profit staff and university students. Through their cooperative work and attention to developing the skills and knowledge that underpin the burning process, participants gained meaningful experience with prescribed fire—and, working together, the team continued the arduous work of bringing fire back to the Yurok land.

Local media coverage continued to articulate the importance of bringing these resources to bear on the Yurok land. Cultural Fire Management Council (CFMC) representative Elizabeth Azzuz was instrumental in the success of this, with her clear and directed answers in media interviews.

CFMC recruited local participants to fill key leadership roles, which is a huge step toward realizing the capacity of the community. Returning tribal member Dominic Obie brought his background of wildland fire suppression—including Single Resource Boss and FFT1 qualifications and years of practical experience—to the event, having been recruited just weeks beforehand through the community garden project (headed by Ms. Azzuz). The future of prescribed burning in the Yurok area is poised for even greater success with leadership from folks like Dominic, Elizabeth and Clyde Trimble Jr. Their efforts today are the foundation of cultural prescribed fire for years to come.



Firefighter Dominic Obie from the Cultural Fire Management Council watches a landing pile scorch a tree, prepared for the potential of fire to climb toward the treetops. © Elizabeth Azzuz

Participant Organizations

- Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve
- CAL FIRE
- Cultural Fire Management Council
- Firestorm Wildland Fire Suppression
- Humboldt State University
- Stanford University Extension
- Terra Fuego Resource Foundation
- USDA Forest Service—Six Rivers National Forest, Orleans District
- Yurok Wildland Fire

With support from

- Debbie Myers Catering
- SeaDog Water-tender



Left: Tribal members, students and local residents work with agency personnel to begin ignitions and create a blackline for holding the unit. © Naomi Tora



Right: The crew conducts control and mop-up activities on a large pile burn. © Elizabeth Azzuz

Fire is essential for maintaining the supply of numerous culturally important resources. For example, basketmaking traditions cannot be sustained without the grasses and the straight, pliant hazel sticks that sprout after fire. Discussions of these cultural aspects of fire, and the effects of fire on key species, formed an important part of this TREX.

© Naomi Tora



TECHNICAL HIGHLIGHTS

This TREX took place on the Yurok land west of Weitchpec, CA, primarily from May 16-23, with an additional clean-up burn on June 7. Unlike other TREX, because the great majority of the participants are local, this event could have “floating date”—a wide window, with mobilization on 48-hour notice based on conditions. The 24 participants came from as far as five hours away and as close as a quarter mile. Thirty-five CAL FIRE personnel also took part on one or more days of the TREX.

Fire effects from the burning varied throughout the units, but significant results were achieved by burning piles along unit perimeters, red-slash along perimeters and interior of units, and on exposed ridges within the Transfer Unit. Areas burned were strategically chosen to support fall burns under more active burning conditions.

Treatment and training highlights included:

- 31 acres of burning over 8 days (11 acres of piles and slash, 20 acres of broadcast burning)
- working with CAL FIRE, constructed and improved 3,200’ feet of hand-line
- with CAL FIRE engines, implemented 3,000’ of progressive hose lay
- cleared significant blowdown across roads, gaining experience with sawyer techniques and safety procedures for limbing, bucking and felling technically complex fuel arrangements and species
- discussion with Humboldt State University undergraduate Tenaya Wood on the scientific basis for fire-dependent species and systems
- presentation from graduate student Tony Marks-Block on the effects of fire on hazel growth and regeneration
- learning from Margo Robbins about the role of fire in producing basket-weaving materials, and their role in the Yurok culture

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Elizabeth Azzuz logistics, local liaison
 Naomi Tora finance and planning
 Jim Wills operations
 Dan Kelleher primary burn boss
 Steve Graydon incident commander



Cultural Fire Management Council Executive Director Bob McConnell takes a break to watch the action.

© Elizabeth Azzuz



Local resident and sustainability enthusiast Devin Finnegan lights a pile; all told, 11 acres of piles were treated during the TREX. © Naomi Tora



All hands turned out to move a hose lay as the crew made adjustments for an operational transition.

© Naomi Tora

For more information, contact:

Elizabeth Azzuz
 Steve Graydon

eaazzuz@yahoo.com
 stephen@terrafuego.org

The Fire Learning Network is part of *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. For more information about PERFECT, contact Lynn Decker: ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



An equal opportunity provider

v. 5 Jul 17 / Steve Graydon (Terra Fuego Resource Foundation)