



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

In a remote, mountainous region of the Pacific Northwest the Cultural Fire Management Council (CFMC) met twice a month through the summer and fall to plan a cultural burn training exchange (TRES) on the Yurok Reservation. After months of planning, the announcement and application went out to federal, state, tribal and non-governmental agencies, private practitioners, university faculty and students. More than 30 people responded to the call to participate in the CFMC/Yurok TRES.

The training took place on private and tribal land within the boundaries of the Yurok Reservation. It was conducted as a Type III incident under the National Incident Management System, with participants serving in both NWCG qualified and trainee positions. Nine people came to the TRES with open position task books. Each of them was assigned a trainer for the five days of ignitions—a mentor to guide them in on-the-ground experiential knowledge specific to the tasks they were focusing on.

Multiple objectives were set for the burning. These included propagation of basket weaving materials, medicinal plants and traditional foods; prairie restoration; home protection; and fuel reduction along the Highway 169 corridor, an area rated by CAL FIRE as a very high fire hazard severity zone. The TRES met all of these objectives.

The TRES started on Sunday morning with participants checking in and getting their basic safety qualifications squared away. Pack tests, shelter deployment tests and the NWCG safety refresher course were provided by the Karuk Fire and Fuels Program Manager. Participants toured the burn units and did some unit prep, then gathered together at the Incident Command Post at Morek Won for a dinner of barbequed salmon. At the

dinner, they were welcomed by members of the community, and the CFMC Executive Director shared information about local history and culture. The CFMC President did a basket demonstration and shared a glimpse of the Yurok world view, and dependence on fire for the continuance of their culture.

Participants' skill levels ranged from new FFT2 trainees to firefighters with decades of experience. Despite these differences—or perhaps because of them—the team quickly bonded, burning and learning together. One experienced firefighter said that he'd "never been part of a group that has come together this fast, done this much, and learned so much; it was phenomenal."

Over the course of a week the TRES crew burned about 92 acres on tribal and private land. In one burn, a Burn Boss from Woods Fire and Emergency Services



The cultural exchange that began during the welcome dinner continued out in the field throughout the TRES, as a CFMC Board Member pointed out different kinds of tea, medicinal plants and food sources as she worked alongside other members of TRES.

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For more information about the Yurok TRES, contact:

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and the Planning Section Chief led a burn above and below an elder's home in the Weitchpec area. The homeowners were overwhelmed at the outcome. "You just wiped the worry from my mind, you have no idea how grateful we are," said one.

The Firestorm Burn Boss managed the State Responsibility Area burn; this burn had multiple objectives—providing home protection for several families, improving wildlife habitat and hazel stick propagation, and reducing fuel load. "It was a beautiful sight to see the line of fire backing its way down slope to meet Highway 169," according to one local participant.

As the TRES drew to a close, a 30-year fire veteran summed up the experience: "It was mind-blowing for us to do what we did. From learning about fire to learning about the ecology, what fire means, where it came from."

This TRES was a collaborative effort between The Nature Conservancy, Cultural Fire Management Council, Yurok Tribe, Karuk Tribe, Mid Klamath Watershed Council, CAL FIRE, Terra Fuego, Firestorm, Woods Fire and Emergency Services, U.S. Forest Service, Yakima Training Center, Siskiyou Permaculture, and Humboldt State University SAFE Program. Joining this team of prescribed fire lighters was a local water tender, and two dozers were on standby courtesy of local landowners. Meals were provided by Patty Cakes Catering, chef extraordinaire.

TRES are 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 PERFACT, contact Lynn Decker at ldecker@tnc.org.



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