

Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association: Increasing Community Support for Fire Through Participation

Southwest Oregon — Spring 2022

By Aaron Krikava and Darren Borgias

The Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association is the first PBA in Oregon. Its organizers are planning workshops across the state to spread the concept and approach.

Building on Community Support

Together with the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council and the Oregon State University Extension Service Fire Program, and with support from the Fire Learning Network, the Nature Conservancy and others, the Rogue Valley PBA is increasing community support for controlled burning through community participation in training, networking and prescribed burning on private land. Lack of public support is often mentioned by natural resource managers as a factor limiting the implementation of prescribed burning. The RVPBA seeks to build on existing community support by providing the public experiential knowledge and education in the use of prescribed burning. The RVPBA is currently organized by an eight-member steering committee and has enlisted 136 interested and participating members.

An interview on local public radio, along with a presentation to the Oregon State University Extension Program's Land



A participant on a Rogue Valley PBA burn practices ignition under the watchful eye of a trained supervisor. © Reanna Feinberg



Observers discuss a prescribed burn being conducted by the Rogue Valley PBA. © Terry Fairbanks

Stewards program helped spread the message of "good" fire while increasing public awareness and interest in the RVPBA. Outreach to supportive organizations led to the development of multiple grant proposals including an \$8,500 implementation grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and a \$7,500 equipment grant from the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District, both awarded to the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council. Still pending is a \$145,000 grant proposal to the Bureau of Land Management to support the PBA's efforts over the next three years.

How It Works

Community members have a chance to observe and participate in small broadcast burns implemented by NWCG-qualified firefighters, many of whom volunteer their time to help increase understanding of this important tool.

Participants learn about site evaluation and preparation, developing burn plans and prescriptions, important weather factors, and implementation methodology, as well as the use of hand tools, water handling equipment and drip torches. This hands-on experience greatly increases community members' comfort level and support for the application of controlled fire. They get to see the level of planning, preparation and equipment and personnel that go into

implementing a broadcast burn. Seeing the moderate flame lengths helps them better differentiate broadcast burning from the extreme wildfires they see so regularly on the news.

In addition to wildland fire fighting contractors donating their time, local fire departments have offered to provide equipment and personnel. These live fire events also allow the professionals to hone their skills in a non-emergency environment while helping to make their communities safer. Some are able to fulfill training requirements in their position task books as they work to gain higher qualifications within the NWCG system.

The RVPBA established a relationship with the Oregon Department of Forestry to allow for the loan of equipment for community burns, while working towards development of a shared equipment cache that the RVPBA can use during prescribed burn season, and ODF can use during wildfire season. The PBA also intends to explore hiring ODF to increase their capacity to implement community burns.

PBAs in the West

The RVPBA hopes to build on the successful and popular PBA model of collaborative controlled burning established in the U.S. Midwest and Southeast. This communal burning style is relatively new to the West, having started with the



Low intensity fire during a Rogue Valley PBA controlled burn provides an alternative vision of fire to those who are used to seeing media coverage of extreme wildfires. © Alan Journet

establishment of the Humboldt County PBA in 2017. Since then, the concept has expanded quickly with more than 20 PBAs in various stages of development throughout California.

Strategic action plans at the local, state and national level continue to highlight the importance of controlled burning to increase landscape resilience and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Prescribed burning is one of the most ecologically beneficial, efficient, and economical land management tools for both public and private lands. Worry and concern about fire and smoke from a weary public has made the implementation of controlled burning politically sensitive. Gaining the trust and support of community members is a critical step in making this valuable tool more accessible to land managers. PBAs are an important method for achieving this goal.

For more about the Rogue Valley PBA, contact:

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The Fire Learning Network is part of the *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together* (PERFACT) cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more about PERFACT, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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MORE ONLINE

Rogue Valley PBA website:

<https://www.roguevalleypba.com/>

“Prescribed Burning on Private Land,” presentation to OSU Land Stewards (January 2022):

<https://youtu.be/3G-btriZ2hw>

“Getting to Know the Elements of ‘Good Fire’ From Prescribed Burning Proponents,” interview on The Jefferson Exchange, JPR (May 2022):

<https://www.ijpr.org/show/the-jefferson-exchange/2022-05-02/tue-8-am-getting-to-know-the-elements-of-good-fire-from-prescribed-burning-proponents>