

## Deconstructing the Fire, Rebuilding the Landscape With Fire

By Anna Tortosa and Frances Boix

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TRES) are learning exchanges designed to empower communities and professionals as they work together to safely conduct prescribed burns that benefit both human and natural communities.

Paredes de Coura, in the far northwest of Portugal, was once again the location chosen for the third Alto Minho Traditional Fire TRES. The TRES was led by team of international group of international fire professionals, Paredes de Coura Municipality, Comunidade Intermunicipal do Alto Minho, Gabinete Técnico Forestais, Sistema Municipal de Proteção Civil, and Flanco Norte and supported by the TRES Coaches Network, Fire Learning Network (FLN) and The Nature Conservancy.

This TRES highlighted the essential role of traditional and pastoral fire, since Portugal has a culture closely linked to the use of fire and landscape management through it, related to agro-pastoral work and maintenance of land for feeding livestock. Forty-five participants from five countries worked together over seven days, burning in different types



It is a small group, but it is very big in willingness, in growing, in learning, big in everything that is good. © Emanuel Oliveira



Lifting the plume' to get good ventilation during one of the burns at Paredes de Coura. © José Luis Duce

of fuels, using different techniques for different purposes and under different weather conditions. Participants also shared knowledge and experiences about the fire ecology and fire history in Portugal, and the importance of traditional fire and land management, while using fire on about 45 acres in different municipalities in Alto Minho.

The TRES was also an intense week of exchanging and learning about the importance of human elements and diversity, burn planning and patterns, fire behavior, safety, and agencies' cooperation. Participants learned about protocols and realities in other landscapes, agencies and countries through different presentations—and met amazing people.

Operationally, the TRES was organized under the Incident Command System (ICS), and the burns had several objectives—wildfire prevention, plantation and structure



Read more at <https://www.facebook.com/altominho.trex>



Night Operations to reduce fuel in a pine plantation at Valença do Minho.  
© José Luis Duce

The steps accomplished in previous Alto Minho TREX events—marked by a use of prescribed fire more oriented to the management of fuels, and taken hostage by the forest fire extinguishing culture and system—led to the necessary change in this latest event. Alto Minho TREX 2023 marked a turning point, towards the search for a more ecological and traditional fire, which for thousands of years has maintained the landscape of this territory. For the first time, TREX took on the dissemination and training of the use of ancestral fire in Europe, based on ancestral traditional techniques and knowledge, stripped of the excess of technification of current prescribed fire perspective and with the aim of deconstructing the use of the so called “technical fire.”

Emanuel Oliveira

protection, pasture regeneration and landscape resiliency. Each day started with a briefing, with participants grouped in teams and divisions. At the end of every shift, the group had time to review and reflect on lessons learned and potential uses of them in the future in their home units—one of the goals of TREX.

The TREX ended with a workshop, “The Right to Use Fire,” in Paredes de Coura, with key decision-making agencies and regulators taking part. The workshop focused on the need to maintain good fire in the landscape, to work in a solutions-oriented way with communities, and to promote synergies and the reconciliation of interests among fire users.

Fire is an ancestral land management tool. The current problem is not in using fire but in eliminating its use without applying the appropriate techniques for landscape management and traditional uses such as good pastoral fire.

Thanks to all those who have made this TREX possible and, especially, the local people and the *sapadores forestais* for their great and tireless work.

Until next time!



Emanuel Oliveira and Will Harling: two fire brothers  
photo courtesy Emanuel Oliveira

For more about Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges, visit:  
<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges are 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](mailto:marek_smith@tnc.org).

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