

Fire Learning Network

A cooperative program of the Forest Service, Department of the Interior agencies and The Nature Conservancy, the FLN has a 15-year track record of helping to restore our nation's forests and grasslands and to make communities safer from fire.



A new FLN Director, Marek Smith, took over guidance of the network this spring, and the transition has been virtually seamless: FLN partners continue to assess challenges and opportunities, push at boundaries, innovate new tools and methods, and learn and adapt as needed to lead and exemplify the integration of Cohesive Strategy goals: resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities, and safe and effective wildfire response. This spring, 12 regional networks and large landscapes advanced collaborative restoration and integrated fire management in 30 landscapes across the country. The FLN also continues to anchor and support the wide range of work under PERFACT, and beyond. For example, the California Klamath-Siskiyou FLN has been an active leader in a statewide fire MOU advancing policy, training and communications

goals across organizations and agencies. This included clarifying and expanding CAL FIRE's role on private burns, and engaging air regulators in collaboration on burn-day alignment and air quality monitoring to increase the windows of opportunities to burn. The Washington Dry Forests FLN developed an agreement between the Yakama Nation, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and U.S. Forest Service to enable the Yakama Nation to lead burning on state lands. In the Southern Blue Ridge, Washington Dry Forests and Island Park Sustainable Fire Community FLNs, integration with FAC Net and application of FAC strategies are increasing. And many of the TREX this very busy spring season grew from (and were hosted by) FLNs in the Great Plains, New Mexico and Oregon.

Highlights from around the Network: January-June 2017

California Klamath-Siskiyou FLN



A local landowner enjoys her first experience on an ignitions crew during an 18-acre training burn at Hunt Ranch. The June burn was hosted by partners in Humboldt County for VFDs and community members.

© UC Extension (Lenya Quinn-Davidson)

Private-land burning in California is challenging, but connections to others in the national FLN are being used to address that. "Fire practitioners tend to be very place-based, and the successes of other states or regions can sometimes fall on deaf ears. It's not uncommon to hear people say, 'Well, they can do that there, but things are different here.' But through the FLN, we know that Nebraska fields very successful prescribed burn associations, a cooperative burning model generally absent from the West. After hosting fire practitioners from the Great Plains FLN last fall, California partners traveled to the Midwest this spring to reciprocate the learning exchange. Rather than seeing differences, participants saw in both places the need for prescribed fire to control woody species in rangelands, the resources inherent in these landowner communities, and the ways that people can organize and share their resources to build capacity."



In a June workshop, twenty leaders from regional FLNs across the country met to review accomplishments from the past 15 years, share lessons learned, strengthen ties within the network, and plan the network's future direction and coming year's work. Hosted by the Western Klamath Mountains FLN in northern California, there could not have been a better setting—among the people, in this place, with the deep integration of cultural and ecological history of fire—for FLN leads to gather for this work.

© TNC (Marek Smith)



In the Central Appalachians FLN, a small group session at the Potomac Headwaters landscape's first workshop provided hands-on exercises in spatial planning and burn unit design using maps of the Sideling Hill Wildlife Management Area—an area participants saw in person during the field learning experience.

© TNC (Marek Smith)

“We burned all day then barbequed into the evening, just like they do in Nebraska, and we were reminded that the prescribed fire community is not just local or regional—it’s everywhere.”

“The most significant accomplishment in the Loess Hills was the mentoring that took place during the cooperative burn week. It was recognized that the current burn bosses and leaders in the Loess Hills fire community are not going to be here forever. A lot of interest was generated in mentoring the next round of burn bosses, ecological prescription of fire, formal NWCG training and experiential training, and documenting skill sets through position task books. This is a fundamental shift.”

Central Appalachians FLN

A January workshop kicked off the work of the Potomac Headwaters landscape in Maryland and West Virginia. It was more popular than expected—the organizers intended to cap participation at 50, but close to 60 people took part, including FLN colleagues from Pennsylvania and Virginia. Since then, staff from the Maryland chapter of TNC have met with state Wildlife and Forest Service staff and moved forward with planning cooperative burns. This new landscape serves as a key connector, stitching together the northern and southern portions of the regional network, which now spans nearly 19 million acres. It also leverages the regional network’s collaboration goals with new partnerships and expertise, only an hour or two drive from the nation’s capital.



FireScope Mendocino

Community engagement work guided by Jana Carp work revealed that within the scope of FireScope Mendocino there is good potential for increasing community engagement—for bringing existing assets to bear on community challenges—in the Covelo/Round Valley and Lake County focal areas. Following this asset-based approach, future work will emerge from community strengths that “create conditions for new, fiscally neutral, locally appropriate partnerships to realize their shared fire management goals. The asset-based approach revealed strengths that we probably would not have found through our workshops and field learning exchanges, like the Middletown Art Center that has served as a community hub for recovery from the Valley Fire.”

FireScope Mendocino held a compelling workshop exercise on fuels treatment and defensible space, featuring sand table landscapes with matchstick trees, rivers of blue paper, tiny houses, sticky note critical habitat areas—and real fire. Participants broke into three teams to study their landscapes and then implement a fuels treatment strategy—selectively removing “trees”—before a fire was lit and blown by wind from an electric fan.

© TNC (Marek Smith)

Great Plains FLN



Crew members keep an eye on the interior burn out during the Loess Hills Cooperative Burn Week. © TNC (Emily Hohman)

With 57 participants from nine agencies and six volunteer fire departments getting more than 2,500 acres of good fire on the ground, the numbers alone tell a story of the remarkable traction the cooperative burn week has gained in the landscape. Also important was incorporation of NWCG course S-219 (Ignitions) into the burn week at the request of the fire partners. “This is a change for the Loess Hills fire culture, this embrace of formal training and then the willingness to implement the new techniques in the field. They are also beginning to use the task book system. This influences the training options of the Iowa Fire Training Working Team (which also hosted an S-390 course last winter). The Loess Hills Fire Partners are driving the fire program and skill set of Iowa’s fire practitioners.”

Island Park Sustainable Fire Community



“My home was just burned up!”

And the conversations rolled on from there at the Island Park sand table wildfire simulation. Although few Island Park residents might be expected to be thinking about wildfire in April—like most Idahoans, they are usually focused on snow melting and greening grass—about 40 took part in this eye-opening workshop. © TNC (Matthew Ward)

A sand table exercise in which wildfire swept through town was part of a workshop that kicked off a summer “Are You Prepared for Wildfire” series. Although early in the year, the workshop was successful—as planned, it increased community engagement and improved participation in monthly meetings, as well as spurring new interest in evacuation and fuels reduction plans for housing developments.

In the larger landscape, the nearby Teton Basin has shown interest in the work in Island Park, leading to multiple conversations. “We are hopeful that this will be the beginning of a much larger collaboration that creates a catalyst to jump to the next level of FLN, FAC and landscape resiliency in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.”

New Mexico FLN

The Burned Area Learning Network has identified support for the use of existing tools like WFDSS and CWPPs. “We think there is merit in finding ways to encourage forest planners and managers to keep post-fire impacts in mind. While there are places where debris, flooding and sediment models have been developed, they are not well integrated into forest and fire management. We want to continue work on WFDSS/burned area information integration. The concept has been enthusiastically received where we have shared it We plan to test the idea in the Santa Fe Fireshed landscape, and continue our discussions with national WFDSS and BAER managers.”

At the Western Water Funds Workshop in Santa Fe, a Colorado team works out the geographic and political boundaries of their proposed water fund landscape. The workshop, hosted by the Rio Grande Water Fund, provided teams from four watersheds with resources, training and mentorship based on the collective experience of others that have used the water fund model to support restoration.

© TNC (Jackie Hall)



This spring’s PSAs about prescribed fire and smoke supported both the Ashland and Central Oregon TRES, and ran widely on social media, TV, radio, newspapers and at theaters (as seen here). © TNC (P. Caligiuri)



“I believe that the relationships that we’ve made in the FLN have had enormous impacts on the scale and quality of our prescribed fire program in the mountain region. We are now burning units that were inconceivable only a few years ago, and this year is a record by leaps and bounds in terms of acreage, complexity and agency cooperation. The only way you’re ever going to get comfortable with complex prescribed fires is to do more of them, and our involvement in the FLN has definitely facilitated that learning curve.”

Oregon FLN

In both central Oregon and Ashland, FLN partners are seeing the importance and the power of having a multi-faceted strategy about smoke outreach to reach an ever-growing and diverse audience of locals and visitors who care deeply about the forest. “Our key messages continue to be refined to their core elements that describe the importance of prescribed fire—and tolerance for some smoke—to the things that Oregonians care about. We have also begun to communicate more clearly about the value of clean air and the imposition of smoke on sensitive populations, and dialogue with the health community appears to be increasing support more broadly for tolerating smoke—particularly when paired with proactive protection and mitigation strategies for sensitive populations and individuals.”

Pikes Peak FLN

This FLN has been coordinating with internal and external partners in Colorado and New Mexico to provide training opportunities, increase resource sharing, and build capacity to use fire. Findings from their fire attitudes project will also be used to build a collective understanding of people and fire.



Twenty-one people from 13 organizations took part in a Pikes Peak FLN workshop on effective prescribed fire communications. Designed for fire practitioners, PIOs and land managers along the Front Range, it focused on developing compelling messages for the public and media to be used during the fall prescribed fire season. © TNC (Jason Lawhon)

South Central FLN

One of the large-scale efforts guided in part by partners in this FLN is the Shortleaf Pine Initiative. A pressing issue for the Initiative is the need to develop demonstration areas throughout the range and on a variety of state, private and federal ownerships. Doing this will “require small working groups from each demo area that begin to develop a ten-year work plan for the restoration of large landscape-scale areas. Lack of expertise in this type of planning and implementation across the range complicates the problem.” Lessons from the long-term successful collaborations demonstrated across the FLN will undoubtedly be key.



Ozark and Ouachita Interior Highlands Restoration Collaborative members toured the Gulf Mountain WMA in January, visiting restoration areas with demonstrated successes (and challenges) related to prescribed fire, timber management, mid-story treatment methods, invasive species control, and monitoring.

© TNC (McRee Anderson)

Among the 100 or so participants in the Klamath Fire Ecology Symposium in May was CAL FIRE Director Ken Pimlott, who affirmed his agency's commitment to increasing the proportion of good fire in California's forests in the coming years.

© MKWC (Will Harling)



Southern Blue Ridge FLN

The FLN set a record attendance at its annual regional workshop in north Georgia, coordinated with the Appalachian RC&D FAC Coalition. Workshop planning that had been underway was adapted to meet opportunities raised by increased public awareness in the aftermath of the fall wildfire season. Fittingly, the agenda had a strong FAC component. The “biggest gains have been in terms of public perception and acceptance of prescribed burning. Coordinating a response to the aftermath of the wildfires in a proactive, professional way, to engage the public, highlight issues surrounding fire and the need for prescribed fire, and show the benefits of ‘good fire’ has been a major achievement.”



The May workshop was an opportunity to reflect on and learn from the region's unprecedented wildfire season last fall, and to consider how the network might adapt its approach following such a significant event. Many discussions focused on human elements, and the need to better engage residents in building sustainable local wildfire adaptation capacity. But also highlighted were the potentially disastrous fires that were controlled due to effective response enabled by previous cross-boundary controlled burning and fire training that the FLN helped facilitate.

© TNC (Avery Lennard)

Washington Dry Forests FLN

Staff and other participants in the After the Fire workshop realized that in the cycle of “before, during, and after” fire, the “after” part—especially the forethought and planning needed before the fire to better address the after—is not well resourced. There are social and economic drivers to facilitate the pre-fire efforts—certainly in work on landscape resiliency, and to a degree in FAC mitigation efforts. Clearly, there are enormous resources applied during a fire. But the attention span and interest in the “after the fire” part is relatively short-lived. “From what we know about other areas of network formation and maintenance, having a “sparkplug” individual and adequate coordinating capacity are key.” Fortunately, those present at the workshop expressed overwhelming interest in staying connected to one another through future networking opportunities.

Western Klamath Mountains FLN

FLN support of the Klamath Fire Ecology Symposium (KFES) and workshops of the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership (WKRK) this spring had important impacts on the ground. With favorable conditions on the ground this year, there was a concerted effort by fire ecologists, tribal members and NGOs at the KFES to support federal line officers in managing wildfires for resource benefits this fire season. Later, a map exercise at a WKRK workshop focused on a 40,000-acre section of the upper North Fork of the Salmon River that hadn't seen fire in over a century; through the exercise and discussion, everyone came to agree that,



The After the Fire workshop brought together people from over 20 organizations (including the Southwest Burned Area Learning Network) to break down the idea of post-wildfire recovery as something separate, and to consider a more holistic approach—landscape recovery and community recovery, short-term recovery and long-term recovery. © WA RC&D (K. Taggart)

with careful management, this would be a place to manage wildfire.

Lightning struck in that area late June. The science and speakers at KFES, the mapping exercise, the ongoing public outreach efforts—these provided the social license for the Klamath NF Forest Supervisor's decision to manage the Island Fire for resource objectives, an important step toward more “good fire” in this landscape.

FLN members now turn to another year of identifying and meeting challenges. Their focus will be on improving and innovating methods of sharing FLN successes, expanding and diversifying participation in cross-network peer exchanges, developing succession plans for regional network leadership, designing approaches for more local partners to “touch” the national network, and continuing to cultivate and invest in leaders who build durable institutions, collaborating to solve our nation's fire problems.

The FLN is 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.

PERFACT is an equal opportunity provider.