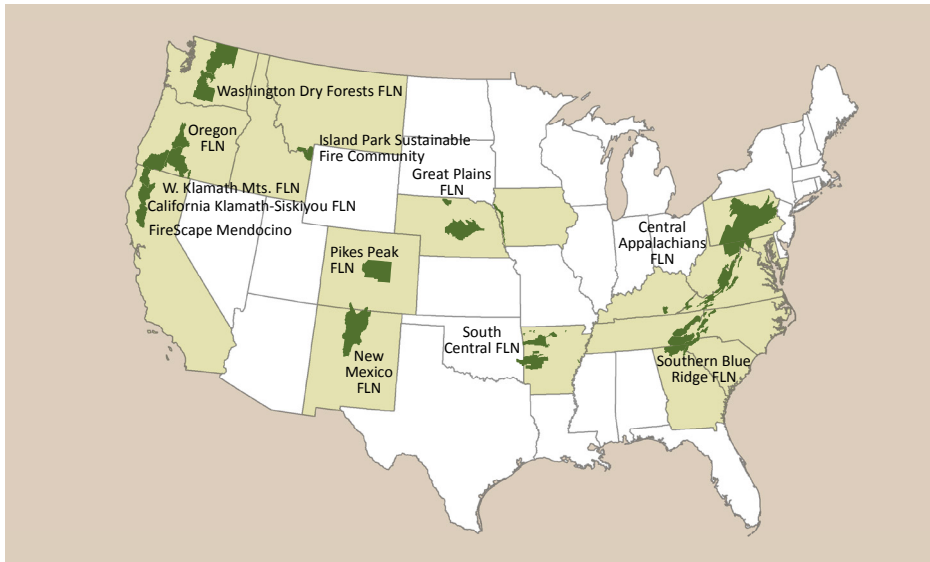


Fire Learning Network

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.

Highlights from around the Network: July-December 2016



The FLN continues to assess challenges and opportunities, push at boundaries, try new things, learn and change as needed, in support of Cohesive Strategy goals: resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities, and safe and effective wildfire response.

This fall the FLN supported work in 11 regional networks and large landscapes. Recent changes in the network include the addition of a landscape, in Maryland and West Virginia, to the Central Appalachians FLN. On the Idaho-Montana border, focus was tightened, with the Island Park Sustainable Fire Community joining the FLN network in addition to its engagement with the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net). The Washington Dry Forests FLN took a brief break to reorganize its administration and align its FLN work even more closely with the FAC Net. FireScope Mendocino began incorporating community adaptation to fire in its work, and, with a tragic late wildfire season, the Southern Blue Ridge FLN is accelerating its FAC efforts. The New Mexico FLN also continues to expand the scope of FLN work with the Burned Area Learning Network, addressing post-fire recovery and restoration.

The FLN continues to be the foundation of the wide range of work in progress and developing under PERFECT, and beyond. For example, FLNs in northern California hosted two TRES this fall—as well as providing other trainings, planning workshops, guidance and facilitation for the prescribed fire council, and meeting with state forest, fire and air quality staff to enable more use of good fire. In Oregon, the prescribed fire council—again, with leadership from the FLN—is providing comments to the state EPA to help shape smoke regulations, and the FLN is working with the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network to address social concerns about smoke; together, these are building the enabling conditions for using fire at the scale needed. In the Southern Blue Ridge region, relationships developed over years of FLN work together were reported to have made response to a severe late fall wildfire season more effective. And the partnerships grown in the South Central FLN are now forming the core of broader partnerships such as the multi-state Shortleaf Pine Initiative and, most recently, growing the Ozark and Ouachita Interior Highlands Restoration Collaborative into a broader range collaborative.



California Klamath-Siskiyou FLN

“We have been working closely with a landowner-driven watershed association that represents 80,000 acres of prime rangelands and forestlands in eastern Humboldt County to further their capacity for prescribed fire. In August, we hosted a learning exchange with prescribed burn association leaders from the Great Plains FLN. It included field exchanges with local ranchers, a large workshop in Eureka about prescribed fire on private lands, and a field exchange and workshop in Ashland, OR. The exchange generated significant excitement about prescribed fire on private lands, so we followed up with a training focused on fire behavior, burn planning, ignition techniques, permitting, and other topics. That training had 72 people in attendance, including 25 from VFDs.”

“We think that on-the-ground success, like live-fire trainings, will be important to gel some of these concepts from this work, and make prescribed fire a more attractive or feasible tool for landowners.”

Partners in the Great Plains FLN, including members of prescribed burn associations, traveled to California (and then Oregon) late in the summer to share and learn about strategies for expanding private burning.

In addition to presentations in the classroom and field tours of partner lands, they found time for a hike together in Redwood National Park.

© UC Extension (Lenya Quinn-Davidson)



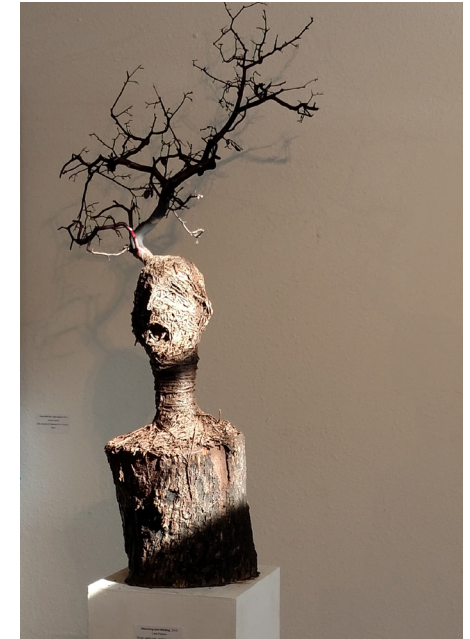
Central Appalachians FLN

FLN partners discussed integrating fire and mechanical treatments to restore shortleaf pine communities during the field day of the annual regional workshop, held in the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginia in early November.

© Lisa Kennedy

Speaking about the workshop, the new Director of Conservation for the Conservancy's Kentucky chapter said, “Being new to the FLN, the field trip portion of the regional workshop was invaluable in terms of building partnerships and gaining a better understanding of successes and challenges across the four FLN landscapes. Although classroom presentations can be useful and informative, there is little comparison to the impact of seeing mechanical treatments and resulting desired conditions in the field, or the thought-provoking discussion of using fire to restore hydro-tables to benefit species of concern.”

“These in-field discussions resulted in new contacts, new relationships, and a better understanding for me of how we can leverage the FLN across geographies for common conservation goals.”



FireScape Mendocino

The sculpture “Watching and Waiting” by Lisa Kaplan was part of the “Ashes to Art” exhibit at the Middletown Art Center (MAC) marking the anniversary of the Valley Fire. The art center has become an important community hub, helping people to recover from recent catastrophic fires by using art to find beauty and meaning in their experiences. © TNC (Jana Carp)

“We have been testing an approach to developing fire adapted communities that is designed for low-resource communities, such as those within the geographic scope of FireScape Mendocino.”

“This fall’s work focused on interviews and field visits that will form the basis for asset mapping, a form of situation assessment. Preliminary findings suggest that communities in this landscape may not associate their sense of place with the Mendocino NF, and that people with energy for creating fire adapted communities are likely to come from non-traditional places, such as a public library or an arts community. Much of the Lake County fire management community is overwhelmed by the loss of homes and infrastructure caused by the past two years of wildfires.”

Great Plains FLN

“The Grassland Conservation Network is a Conservancy effort to share knowledge about grassland conservation, management and policy throughout North America. It has traditionally focused on developing expertise to support grassland conservation, develop partnerships and support best practices in grassland conservation. However, the fire ecology of grasslands and the importance of fire for management have not been a focus of the group in the past, although fire is clearly a significant factor in grassland ecology. The Great Plains FLN is engaging with this network, and can inform this conversation by discussing linked fire and grazing management, and by highlighting the use of prescribed fire for grazing management by private ranchers in the Great Plains, especially by prescribed burn associations.”

“If we can affect grassland management in these areas, we will extend our area of impact far beyond the bounds of our FLN landscapes.”



Bison graze at the Niobrara Valley Preserve, where fire is also used to manage the grassland.
© José Luis Duce



Island Park Sustainable Fire Community

In August, 28 community members took part in a tour of the Partridge Fire with USFS staff. Discussions focused on management decisions and the resource benefits of allowing fire to play its natural role when it's safe to do so.

© TNC (Matthew Ward)

“Folks participating in the tour had no idea they would see plants growing, willows sprouting and a beautiful flowing creek. I think they expected to see mainly damage from the fire. We had many comments about the good the fire did for the riparian area and how fast Mother Nature recovers after a moderate severity fire. It was a great demonstration of what the Forest Service would like to accomplish with prescribed fire. In short, the Partridge Fire tour opened the eyes of a few nay-sayers in other organizations to the benefits of fire and to the idea that all fire is not devastating.”

We also got one homeowner from Pine Haven interested in involving his entire subdivision in an evacuation plan and fuels mitigation work. He has actively pursued this since the field trip. This is a subdivision where IPSFC has been trying to drum up some interest.”



New Mexico FLN

During a multi-partner field tour of the southern Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Santa Fe Fireshed partners from the Tesuque Pueblo described the Pueblo's fire risk reduction work and why this area of the Sangre de Cristos is important to the tribe.

© TNC (Anne Bradley)

“As we have been launching the Burned Area Learning Network, we have been surprised by the lack of coordination, systematic processes and applied technology in planning, implementing and tracking post-fire actions. We see a tremendous opportunity to use tools from the fire community to support improvements in post-fire response and to integrate pre-fire planning, active fire response and post-fire response holistically.”

“Our efforts to take a big picture look at existing systems can contribute substantially to accelerating our learning, disseminating knowledge and ultimately improving practices and outcomes.”



Oregon FLN

Partners in the southwest Oregon Prescribed Burn Association discussed the Ashland Forest Resiliency project on a tour of the watershed with city officials. Work of this FLN, as well as Scaling-up to Promote Ecosystem Resilience (SPER) and the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, helps to protect the city's water supply.

© TNC (Darren Borgias)

“As we have been addressing the scientific uncertainty on the role of fire in our forests, we have found that there is a deficit of fire on the landscape across all fire regime groups. This is most prominent in fire regime group 1 (frequent fire systems), where the deficit of low-severity fire is significant. However, it is also interesting that test runs of the models indicate a small but nonetheless important deficit of high-severity fire in fire regime groups 3 and 5. Final results are not available yet, and test run results should not be shared, but the results look like they will provide important data bolstering the argument for the need for restoration, as well as the long-term role of fire in maintaining resilient landscapes.”



South Central FLN

Students from the Russellville High School AP Biology class toured one of the restoration areas on the Big Piney Ranger District of the Ozark National Forest. They learned about the role of fire in keeping the forest open to support increased biodiversity, and about the importance of the forest for the community's drinking water supply. © TNC

This FLN has taken a leadership role in formalization and expansion of the Ozark and Ouachita Interior Highlands Restoration Collaborative into a broader range collaborative.

“Many of the new partners in the Collaborative are hearing what has worked and what has not worked related to media outreach, funding proposals and restoration prescriptions that lead to manageable woodland conditions.”

Fire Learning Network
<http://www.conservationgateway.org/fln>



Southern Blue Ridge FLN

A visitor checks out the Fire Learning Trail on the Grandfather RD in the Central Escarpment Landscape. This means of outreach is spreading in the region, with the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment landscape installing a new trail in South Carolina's Table Rock State Park to interpret a 2016 wildfire. On that trail, signs will include QR codes that allow visitors to upload their post-fire pictures. © TNC (Adam Warwick)

While the unprecedented fall wildfire season interrupted planned work in this region, “we believe that the partnerships forged over the decade of FLN work greatly improved communication among those working on the late-fall wildfires that crossed agency boundaries or that had resources from other units. Not only did the FLN improve working relationships, but agency suppression decisions were influenced by the recognition that fire needs to be on the landscape. Over and over, we heard that these wildfires, when feasible, were treated in a similar fashion to prescribed burns. Rather than confining fires to the smallest footprint possible—for example with rapid fuel burnouts—natural firebreaks were used and burnouts took into consideration the amount of tree mortality the method would generate.”



Western Klamath Mountains FLN

Increasing the abundance of cultural resources through application of right fire is a cornerstone of FLN work in this landscape. The first day of burning at the Klamath River TREX saw good fire returning to a tan oak stand with the East Simms pile burn. Thinning and burning this area will greatly improve the quality and yield of tan oak acorns and huckleberries. © Jenny Staats

“This year, we implemented cross-boundary burning at a much larger scale than in previous years.”

“We also coordinated with more partners, including the Happy Camp VFD, during the implementation of burns, which greatly increased community support for that portion of the TREX. And we got more acres of right fire on the ground than at any previous TREX, despite this fall's challenging burn windows. We also demonstrated traditional fire management techniques by using changes in aspect and moisture gradients as burn boundaries, rather than the costlier use of firelines.”



Pikes Peak FLN

A water delivery system set-up was part of the mobilization for the North Catamount Prescribed Burn, before unsuitable conditions caused the burn to be postponed. © Colorado Springs Utilities

“This summer we finalized our communications guide and implemented it as we approached the fall prescribed fire season. The communications team did an excellent job using lessons learned from previous years to focus on methods that worked, like Twitter and our webpage. Work was also spread among more partners, resulting in a more fluid, manageable workload; this also allows the burn boss to focus on resource coordination, training and implementation.”



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. For more information, contact Lynn Decker at (ldecker@tnc.org) or (801) 320-0524.

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