



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

After the Fire Workshop: Connecting People, Ideas and Organizations

Wenatchee, WA
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Fire adaptation is about more than pre-fire work. It's also about considering the needs of a community and the land post-fire. In Washington State, the last several fire seasons have given communities lots of opportunities to learn about post-fire recovery. Last month, members of organizations that work on community issues, landscape resilience and disaster-recovery gathered to share some of the things they've learned.

Recovery after a wildfire is complicated. Complex needs in both the community and the surrounding landscape determine where recovery efforts are focused. Many people will play various roles: depending on your area of expertise or experience, you may think of post-fire flooding or maybe you prioritize emergency housing. Maybe you think of your own immediate needs or you picture a long-term recovery plan for your community.

The goal of the After the Fire Workshop was to make progress towards a shared goal of increased community and landscape resiliency after a wildfire. Throughout the day, participants were led through a series of activities and presentations, working to identify and understand each other's roles in the post-fire environment. The day began with an overview of various post-fire expertise areas, including post-fire flooding, working with private landowners, community recovery and forest restoration on federal lands. People were then encouraged to learn and connect with others, and to identify opportunities for collaboration and increased capacity. Several key questions¹ guided the discussions: What do we do when working on post-wildfire recovery? Why is your work important to you? What is critical but uncertain in our work?

Meeting workshop objectives

In the context of this workshop, our definition of recovery was basic. Recovery can be defined as a return to a state of health, mind or strength, while increasing future community and landscape fire resilience.

Returning the landscape to a state of health means incorporating an ecological understanding of past, present and future roles of fire in the vegetation and aquatic systems, and doing so with our social and economic interests as well. It means encouraging and supporting our communities as they return to a state of mind and strength that was present before the fire and prepares us for future fire.

We could go on and on about what it means to prepare before fire, respond during fire, and take action immediately after fire and onward over the years needed to fully recover. But that's the point. It's complicated, and it involves a lot of key players in different roles and organizations. So how do we start to develop resiliency before the fire to obtain best possible results after the fire? Get people talking. Start building relationships now by learning from those who have been through it. In short, start by hosting a workshop!

Carrying forward momentum

The complicated and complex nature of post-wildfire recovery establishes a need for relationship building before the fire



Participants share why their work in the post-wildfire environment is important to them.

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*“When you boil it down,
it's all about the people
and the landscape.”*

happens. By understanding the roles and responsibilities involved in the recovery process, we can better integrate cross-boundary efforts, and encourage interagency coordination. Together, we may all work towards a shared goal of increased community and landscape resiliency after a wildfire.

Those who took part in the workshop have shown interest in staying connected to learn from one another, share resources and continue to build their post-fire networks. It's a sure sign that we have a lot more networking to do!

¹ These questions were taken from the Liberating Structures framework set out by H. Lipmanowicz and K. McCandless (<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/>).

*“Learn, and apply
the lessons learned.”*



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Bringing Us Together

Collaboration made this workshop possible. Six organizations, each representing various geographic and expertise areas, contributed to the planning team and inspired a productive agenda and a well-rounded invite list:

- Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition
- National Weather Service
- Northwest Fire Science Consortium.
- Sustainable Northwest
- The Nature Conservancy
- Washington Resource Conservation and Development Council

Other Participating Organizations

- Cascadia Conservation District
- Federal Emergency Management Agency, Region X
- Forest Stewards Guild
- Kittitas County Conservation District
- Methow Conservancy
- Okanogan Conservation District
- Okanogan County Long Term Recovery Group
- Perteet
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- USDA Forest Service
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Washington Emergency Management Division
- Washington Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network
- Washington State Conservation Commission
- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington State Department of Natural Resources
- Washington State Legislature



The director of the Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition leads a discussion on community recovery. © Washington RC&D (Kirstin Taggart)

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“Because the workshop was locally focused and drew the key players from the region, the discussion quickly got down to the details that mattered—the real nuts and bolts. As a participant from another region I didn’t understand all of the local references or know all the people mentioned, but it was still very useful to be part of the discussions. The situations were familiar—and the solutions applicable to New Mexico.”

The Fire Learning Network and Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network are part of *Promoting Eco-system 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 the PERFECT partnership, contact Lynn Decker: ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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