FLN

Fire Learning Network
Notes from the Field

Participants offered some images of what the landscape would be like with cultural burning restored: When our work is successful, life will be thriving: deer, birds, mushrooms, open prairies, grasslands and clear creeks. There is laughing. Kids are playing all over. All of the brush is gone and we can see the river. The land all the way down the road has been burned. It is like the pre-contact landscape, and we are able to truly live off the land. We get that humble and respectful feeling. Our prayers with our ancestors are heard because our connection with the land is growing stronger and stronger.

Klamath-Trinity Cultural Burning Network

Weitchpec, California   March 2015

Twenty-four community members from the Yurok, Karuk and Hupa Tribes, two staff members from the Six Rivers National Forest and two Fire Learning Network staff members met in mid-March to begin developing a new network in support of cultural burning practices. This network is focused on an area that includes the ancestral territories of the Yurok, Hupa and Karuk tribes, and is located in the mid-Klamath and Trinity watersheds. Tentatively called the Klamath-Trinity Cultural Burning Network (CBN), this landscape-level network is under the umbrella of a larger-scale CBN that is developing.

Workshop participants identified the following steps needed to create a path to restoring cultural fire in this landscape. In order of neither priority nor chronology, these include:

• Continue community education about the need for and benefits of cultural burning. Include maps that show where burns have taken place.
• Build local capacity to do the burns.
• Get the land ready to be burned.
• Secure equipment to do landscape burns safely.
• Involve the Warrior Institute in developing the next generation of cultural burners.
• Work on private land or reservation land for intergenerational learning.
• Implement the "Roots to Shoots" project, and expand it to include private, tribal and all Forest Service land in the network area.
• Continue securing landowner permission and air quality permits in advance of burning.

• Enable cultural practitioners and managers to conduct traditional burns in treated areas.
• Secure the ability to do landscape burns and smaller, family burns for gathering.
• Provide liability protection for cultural burn practitioners (insurance would cost about $10K a year).

Our culture is completely dependent upon fire. Without fire, our culture will not survive. It's that simple.
Margo Robbins, Cultural Fire Management Council, Yurok Tribe

• Evaluate the effectiveness of burns through cultural perspectives. Were objectives, tangible and intangible, met?
• Clarify agency policies relating to cultural burning and explore avenues for collaboration. Agencies include the Bureau of Indian Affairs, USDA Forest Service, CAL FIRE and the California Air Quality Resources Board.
• Explore how agency funding can be used to accomplish cultural burning.

From top: Cultural burning among the Yurok, Hupa and Karuk territory will clean around tan oak trees, to reduce the pests that infest acorns, limiting the supply of this food staple.
Photo: Billie Sanderson

Basketweavers from the Karuk, Hupa and Yurok Tribes display hazel sticks collected after a controlled burn accomplished by a recent Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TREX). Basketweaving is deeply embedded in local culture, and hazel must be burned periodically in order to produce straight, usable shoots.

A Yurok basketweaver peels a hazel stem that sprouted after a TREX controlled burn (*left*) and then (*right*) shows the FLN director a basketweaving technique. *Photos: TNC/Mary Huffman*

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