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FLN



DISPATCH

*Emerging Lessons From
The Fire Learning Network*

FIRE LEARNING NETWORK A cooperative project of The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service, and the Dept. of the Interior, the network was created in 2002 to catalyze efforts to reduce hazardous fuels across the country. Part of the larger joint program *Restoring Fire-Adapted Ecosystems* that includes fire education and training components, the network operates at both local and national levels to overcome barriers to implementing ecologically appropriate fuels reduction and restoration projects.

<http://tncfire.org/usfln>

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY FIRE INITIATIVE This 19-person team is working to assess, abate and prevent fire-related threats to biodiversity conservation around the world. In the U.S., the Initiative is working with a variety of partners to promote ecologically appropriate fire management, develop and implement science-based planning tools and monitoring techniques, and further fire education and training efforts.

<http://nature.org/fire>

The USFLN recently expanded into Montana's Centennial Valley, one of the most biologically rich valleys in the West and a key component of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The landscape encompasses 450,000 acres of sagebrush grasslands, sandhills, aspen and conifer forests and extensive wetlands which together support rare fish, abundant wildlife and several large ranching operations.

Only about half of this remote valley is served by electricity, and ranchers graze their cattle here mainly in the summers. Private landowners in the valley are organized through the Centennial Valley Association, a non-profit group that meets regularly and works toward a vision of the landscape that values traditional family-owned ranches and thriving natural resources.

Some of the largest threats to those natural resources are the additive effects of a general lack of fire over the past



Land owned by the Huntsman family, a portion of the 100,000 acres in the Centennial Valley that are in private ownership.

—Photo by Jim Steinberg

CENTENNIAL VALLEY FIRE PARTNERS

- American Wildlands
- Bureau of Land Management
- Greater Yellowstone Coalition
- Montana Natural Heritage Prog.
- Montana Wilderness Association
- USFWS, Red Rock Lakes NWR
- Beaverhead-Deerlodge Natl. Forest
- Centennial Landowners Assn.
- Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
- The Nature Conservancy

For more information about the Centennial Valley Fire Learning Network, contact Nathan Korb at nkorb@tnc.org or 406-925-1144.

century. Nathan Korb, southwest Montana land steward for The Nature Conservancy and leader of the Centennial Valley FLN, is working with private and public partners to build upon and enhance existing efforts to reintroduce ecologically appropriate fire across the valley.

The network will facilitate learning locally and also generate information to help others outside the valley who are grappling with similar issues—issues such as how to best manage old-growth Douglas-fir forests in the face of a massive bark beetle outbreak. According to Korb, “insects could take out all the big trees and then you’d be left with nothing. We have a lot to learn even about the simplest system that we know most about, the conifers.”

Mike Parker, manager of the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, is also looking forward to having more and better information about how fire historically operated, especially on the valley floor, to inform the refuge’s planning efforts. “We need to know when, where and what changes fire brings about” said Parker.

To help tackle the Douglas-fir issues and also improve aspen regeneration, the Bureau of Land Management has proposed to make its 27,691-acre Centennial Mountains Wilderness Study Area a Wildland Fire Use area. They are also preparing to conduct about 8,000 acres of prescribed burns over the next 5–10 years. These represent significant steps in restoring the important natural process of fire to the entire landscape.

For now, the Centennial Valley FLN is focusing on five discrete projects in this one landscape, but there are plans to expand into similar ecosystems in north-east Idaho and southwest Montana.

GET INVOLVED!

If you’re interested in participating in a regional or national level meeting, or just learning more:

- Browse the FLN Web site
<http://tncfire.org/usfln>
- Join and contribute to the FLN listserv
http://tncfire.org/training_listservs
- Contact TNC or agency leads:
Lynn Decker, The Nature Conservancy Fire Initiative ldecker@tnc.org; 801-320-0524
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The Nature Conservancy
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