September 2004

FLN DISPATCH

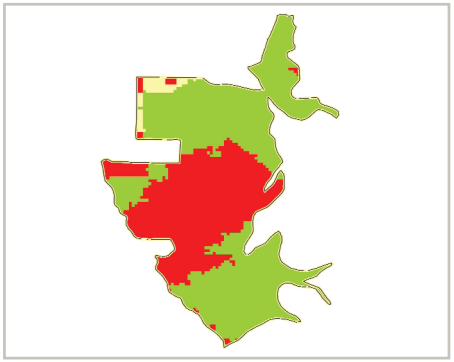
Emerging Lessons From The Fire Learning Network

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://tnc-ecomanagement.org/fire

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY FIRE INITIATIVE This 15-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/initiatives/fire

The Bureau of Land Management manages nearly 13 million acres in New Mexico—land that is valued by conservationists, outdoor recreationists, and ranchers alike. Unfortunately, a large percentage of grasslands in the southwestern U.S. are losing their value due to long-term fire exclusion, which has allowed these areas to be invaded by woody shrubs, or undergo other changes related to altered fire regime. BLM staff in New Mexico recently began the process of amending their fire management plan, and as part of that process adopted the explicit, long-term goal of restoring the historical role of fire in the ecosystems they manage.

To address the scientific barriers to achieving this goal, BLM developed the Rangeland Ecological Assessment (REA) project in partnership with The Nature Conservancy. The Conservancy's Steven Yanoff is managing this three-year undertaking, which will quantify the spatial extent and assess the ecological condition of grasslands, and identify opportunities for restoration using fire and other tools.



Example of state-transition mapping for the 4,500-hectare Sandy Ecological Site, northeast of Deming, NM. In this model, several processes may contribute to conversion of grass areas (green) to shrub (red), including introduction of shrub seeds, reduced grass competition, and lack of fire.

The REA project has four main components:
(1) Map the extent and condition of BLM and adjacent grasslands statewide in a series of expert workshops;
(2) Map ecological states using state-transition models developed by the Agricultural Research Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and others;
(3) Determine Fire Regime Condition Class; and
(4) Verify the maps and assessments via field visits.

Yanoff has been impressed with just how challenging—and important—it is to understand how fire and a host of other factors such as current and past grazing practices, climate, soils, and plant species composition are inter-related. Without this larger context, it's just not possible to understand, let alone restore, the natural role of fire in New Mexico's diverse grassland types.

Both the technical challenges and the collaborative nature of the REA project make it an ideal participant in the Southwestern Fire Learning Network (SWFLN). As part of the SWFLN, Yanoff and his team will receive peer review on their objectives, methods and products; promote a regional approach to managing for sustainable grasslands; and transfer the methods developed and lessons learned in New Mexico to other states in the region. Hence, thanks to the network, a 13-million-acre project will influence many more acres of fire-dependent ecosystems.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- **For more information about the Rangeland Ecological Assessment, contact Steven Yanoff at 505-642-5363 or syanoff@tnc.org**
- **To get involved in the SWFLN, contact Anne Bradley at 505-988-1542 ext. 218 or abradley@tnc.org**
- **Next SWFLN workshop: Silver City, New Mexico; week of Nov. 8, 2004**
- **BLM-NM web site: http://www.nm.blm.gov**

GET INVOLVED!

If you're interested in participating in a regional or national level meeting, representing your agency on the FLN advisory council, or just learning more:

- **Browse the FLN Web site**
  http://tnc-ecomanagement.org/fire
- **Join and contribute to the FLN listserv**
  http://tnc-ecomanagement.org/fire/resources/#listserv
- **Contact TNC or agency leads:**
  Lynn Decker, The Nature Conservancy Fire Initiative ldecker@tnc.org; 801-973-0804

  Anne Jeffery, Dept. of the Interior
  anne_jeffery@nifc.blm.gov; 208-387-5458

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