North Carolina TREX

Neither rain nor snow nor ice could slow down the North Carolina TREX. A hardy group of prescribed fire practitioners braved the elements to participate in a Prescribed Fire Training Exchange in the North Carolina Sandhills. Despite some of the coldest temperatures on record and precipitation in the form of rain, snow and ice, the 58 participants shared knowledge and techniques to enhance controlled burning skills.

As is typical of TREX, participants with a wide range of skill levels and from diverse geographies—in this case from 15 states and Spain—came together to teach and learn from one another. Thirty organizations were represented, along with one private landowner. Thirty-five of the participants were working on their position task books for NWCG qualifications.

The North Carolina TREX got off to a good start—one the second day, participants worked together to burn 163 acres of longleaf pine habitat on three tracts owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NC WRC). As the weather took a turn on the third day, with a rainy mix not conducive to burning, the training and knowledge exchange was just beginning. The next few days were spent learning about the need for fire in the longleaf ecosystem, local ecology, weather monitoring and forecasts, smoke modeling, medical planning, operation of pumps and engines, firing techniques, and other topics, with lessons both in and out of the classroom.

Participants improved conditions for longleaf pine seedlings. Photo: TNC/Kara Karboski

Participating Agencies & Organizations

- Bureau of Land Management
- Department of Defense—Camp Lejeune, Fort Bragg, Joint Base Lewis-McChord
- Duke University
- Fort Bragg
- Mecklenburg County
- National Park Service
- National Center for Landscape Fire Analyses
- Northern Prairies Land Trust
- Nebraska Game and Parks
- North Carolina State Parks
- North Carolina Forest Service
- North Carolina State University
- North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission
- The Nature Conservancy
- University of South Carolina
- Xerces Society
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA Forest Service
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

While North Carolina was, of course, well represented at this TREX, participants came from across the country. They brought with them varied ecological and fire culture experiences that enriched the event.

TREX participants taking part in a field tour with author and ecologist Bruce Sorrie. Photo: Nancy Lee Adamson
Four days later, the participants got back out to burn some more, treating 102 acres of longleaf pine on NC WRC and TNC land. They also conducted pile burning on private lands, which served as a training opportunity for participants to work on skills to suppress a “wildfire.” The weather held the next day, allowing 258 acres of burning on three tracts owned by TNC and one on private lands. The weather then went from bad to worse—but morale remained high, and the dedication to training did not end. Classroom and other non-burning field training continued. And on the last day of the TREX, participants were rewarded, when a small burn window allowed for one more acre of burning, and all of the participants had a chance to practice their skills at initial attack on several “wildfires.”

During this TREX, about 525 acres of longleaf forest were burned on both private and public lands. But by many accounts the most valuable aspect of the TREX was the exposure to the techniques, approaches and cultures of fire programs from many different organizations and different states, and learning about experiences in different fuel types.

Despite the poor weather, we maximized the training opportunities on each burn by having solid plans, motivated participants and well-coordinated operations at each prescribed fire.

Mike Norris, Incident Commander

Funding for this TREX was provided by the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS) Prescribed Fire Working Group led by North Carolina State University, The Nature Conservancy, the Fire Learning Network, the North Carolina Prescribed Fire Council and others.

The North Carolina Chapter of The Nature Conservancy took the lead in coordinating logistics, planning and prepping burn units, and providing Incident Commander Mike Norris. Based on how well this TREX went, he is already starting to make plans for another TREX in May 2017.

For more information about this TREX, contact: Mike Norris

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For more information about TREX being offered elsewhere across the country, visit:

http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges