

Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

Partners work by accelerating the development of prototype **fire adapted communities** in a **landscape context** ... accelerating integrated efforts for restoring and maintaining resilient landscapes through multi-scalar collaboration, effective planning processes and transformative **learning** and networks ... building operational & **social capacity for response** to wildland fire in a changing world ... **accelerating** the adjustment of landscape-level strategies for a changing climate ... integrating science, cultural knowledge & adaptive learning to resolve key barriers to transformative **resilience**.

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC LN) fosters and manages a national network, models best practices at the local level, builds regional networks to support learning across communities of practice, synthesizes trends to advise programs and policies in support of fire adapted communities concepts, and builds support for a FAC approach among key stakeholders and leaders.

The FAC LN was launched at an April 2013 workshop, with eight “hub” organizations leading efforts in pilot communities in California, Colorado, Georgia, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington. Those first eight pilot communities represent a cross-section of community fire management efforts in the US. The communities—of various sizes, with differing jurisdictional and regulatory structures, and unique cultural and institutional contexts—demonstrate a range of innovative approaches to community fire adaptation. Another 10 hub organizations joined the network in March 2014, guiding efforts

in communities in Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Montana, New Jersey and Texas. The addition of these organizations and communities to the network broadens both its geographic and contextual scope.

The FAC LN is grounded in the knowledge that in-person, interactive communications are the most effective way to make and move knowledge, best practices and innovations among individuals, institutions, communities and geographies. The hub organizations are thus a critical part of the FAC LN strategy: these local coordinating groups lead demonstrations of tools, programs and approaches in their communities, and they connect those communities to the national network to facilitate sharing and learning from peers. By leveraging, integrating and building upon existing FAC strategies, tools and programs, the FAC LN is an essential strategy for accelerating the growth and practice of fire adapted communities across the country.

Trial by Fire: Promoting Community Resiliency during the Mills Canyon Fire (WA)

The Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition created a customizable *After the Fire* toolkit to help homeowners and businesses prepare for flooding and other potential post-fire impacts. When the Mills Canyon fire started near Entiat, WA, Coalition director Annie Schmidt provided the materials to the Incident Management Team for use in public meetings and press releases. The kit was also shared with other FAC practitioners, so they could adapt it for their communities. In a blog about the kit, Schmidt stressed the importance of coordinating with IMTs early, and engaging other partners such as NRCS and the National Weather Service.

Toolkit: <http://afterthefirewa.org> Blog: <http://facnetwork.org/afterthefire-toolkit>

FAC PROFILE **Hub Organization: Florida Forest Service Pilot Community: Baker County, Florida**

The Florida Forest Service joined the FAC Learning Network in 2014 and is working with a county that has a long history of wildfire activity. Community members are also keenly aware of wildfire risk, and there is a spirit of teamwork and cooperation among all in county government and the forest management and wildland fire-fighting community.

Wildfire Prevention/ Mitigation Coordinator Ronda Sutphen of the Florida Forest Service shared her thoughts on the value of being part of the FAC Learning Network: “I see this in the long run as being able to showcase Baker County as a fire adapted community to the rest of the Florida Forest Service. The way we are set up with our mitigation specialists in each district, I think eventually they can take this model and expand it and ultimately we can become a fire adapted state through the support of the Florida Forest Service.”

Ronda also sees Baker County being able to expand their efforts by working with a number of community members, including civic leaders, to more broadly apply FAC concepts. She is excited to share the fire adapted communities message with others and learn what other hubs are doing in the field. “FAC made sense that when I first heard it. It was the approach we’ve all been looking at already but didn’t know what to call it. Now we know what a fire adapted community is and how to reach that goal.”

In their FAC LN work plan for the coming year, Florida Forest Service and its partners plan to hold a town hall meeting for community members to learn about FAC concepts and their importance to both Baker County and surrounding communities, integrate the concepts into Baker County’s CWPP, and conduct a mitigation mowing and burning demonstration for the community and media.

Florida FAC Learning Network Partners

Baker County Fire Department
Citizen Corps
Florida Division of Emergency Management
Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners
North Florida Prescribed Fire Council
Northeast Florida Chapter American Red Cross
The Longleaf Alliance
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
USDA Forest Service



Community members take part in a Firewise clean-up day in the town of Taylor photo: FFS/Annaleasa Winter



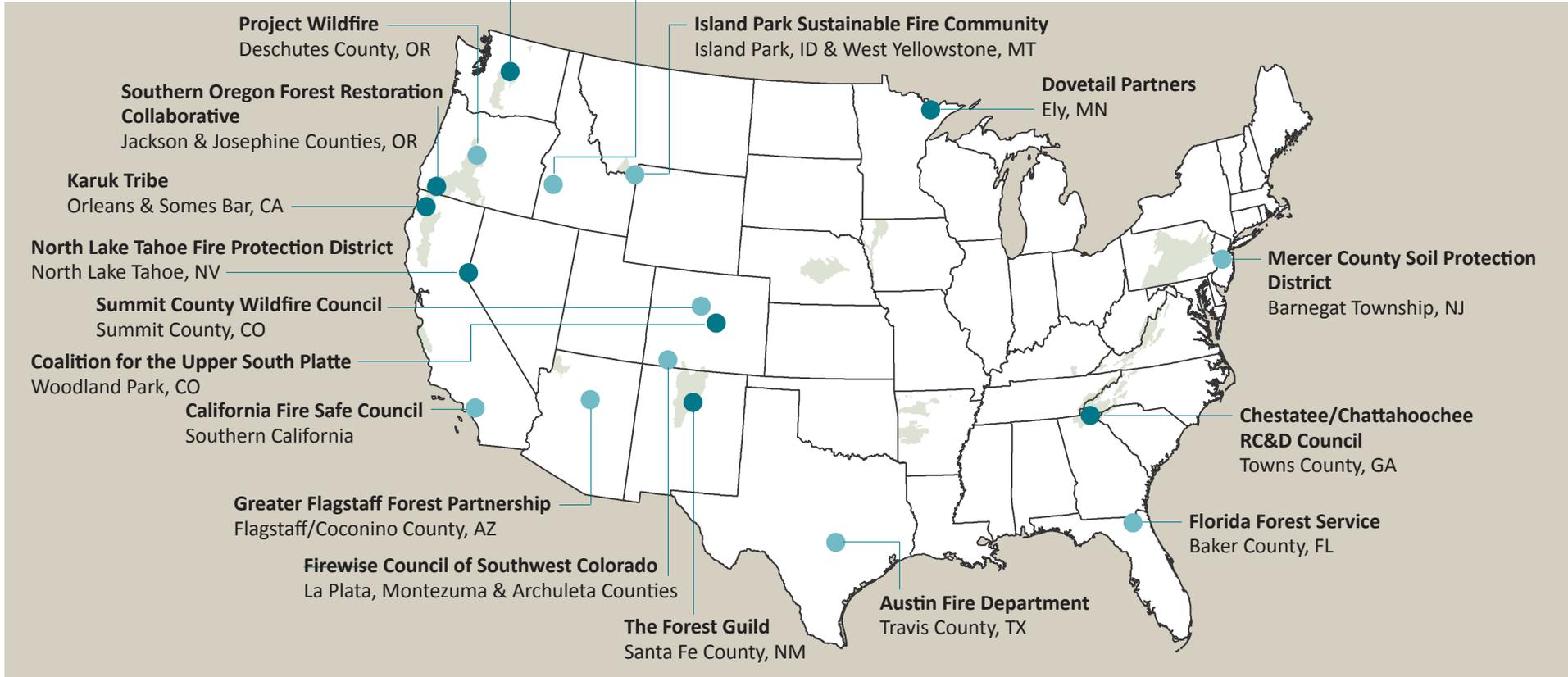
FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES LEARNING NETWORK

Chumstick Wild-fire Stewardship Coalition
Leavenworth, WA

Boise Fire Protection District
Ada County, ID

WHO WE ARE

The FAC LN began in 2013 with eight hub organizations (darker blue dots), and another ten hubs (lighter blue dots) joined this spring. Each hub focuses on a pilot community near them (though they often work more widely as well). These are the hub organizations and their pilot communities as of summer 2014.



HOW WE WORK: BUILDING ON STATE STRATEGIES

Plugging into and enhancing existing state-level fire preparedness services and networks is a key strategy for the FAC Learning Network. Each state forestry or natural resources department already provides technical assistance to communities, arranges conferences and workshops, and disseminates resources that help communities with local programs. Whether organized

under the guise of “Firewise,” “wild-land urban interface,” “living with fire,” or any of the myriad other program names, they all strive to support the growth of fire adapted communities. At their best, state-level programs and activities bring together diverse governmental and non-governmental partners to leverage their ideas, resources and energy in service to FACs.

Our strategy involves empowering and supporting FAC Learning Network hub organizations in the non-profit and governmental sectors to incorporate the best practices and tools emerging from the U.S. Forest Service’s Fire Adapted Communities program, the FAC Coalition and the FAC Learning Network to enhance existing state-level capacity and networks. Each

state presents a unique social and institutional context, so we’re working on customized strategies with FAC Learning Network and agency leaders in states where we can add value and catalyze new strategies and investments. We will be profiling these unique strategies through our blog, briefing papers, and other channels throughout the coming year.

FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES LEARNING NETWORK NUMBERS

18 hub organizations guiding community efforts across the nation

425 partner groups working together to make the places they live safer

69 people learning and sharing in conversation

5,836 visits to the www.facnetwork.org website and blog in the last six months

281 topics on the Podio workspace

50 communities learning to live better with fire

1 growing community of practice

HOW WE WORK: LOCAL ACTION & LEARNING

Every hub in the FAC Network is connected with communities that are taking actions that are helping them adapt to wildfire. These include coordinating with partners, planning, outreach—and, most critically, getting the on-the-ground treatments done. When it comes down to it, making homes and businesses fire-ready usually requires some fuel management. Based on their experiences, network hubs share their insights about how to get that work done.

Demonstrations help people understand what they need to do

In Ely, MN, Dovetail Partners have found that demonstration treatments are critical. “I think people need to see an



Chipper days can help people get fuel treatment work done, as well as see the results of treatments in their area. *photos: Dovetail Partners*

example of a good fuels reduction on a property to start to ‘get’ it. I think they also need some help in getting it done.”

For best results, share responsibility

In Colorado, the Coalition for the Upper South Platte hosted work-day events “with several communities completing projects ranging from sign installation to chipping.” One thing they learned about pulling off a great event is how important distributing responsibility for planning and executing a multi-community event is. They suggest a steering team as a good format for leading events.

Help implementation crews understand the “why” of their work

The Forest Guild in New Mexico demonstrated the importance of engaging all sectors of the community in FAC education and action. They worked with their Youth Conservation Crew to present FAC concepts to 55 youth from communities in wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas during their

training. The work these crews then implemented helped address fuels reduction needs. The Guild recommends connecting the work that crews will be doing with the concepts delivered in training to strengthen the workforce’s understanding of the treatments being implemented.



The Forest Guild trains youth to conduct fuels treatments—and share fire adapted communities concepts. *photo: The Forest Guild*

Financial assistance for fuels reduction is critical—and so is landowner awareness of those opportunities,

According to the Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition, “Financial barriers are an issue when it comes to the completion of fuel reduction work on private land. It is not enough that people know they should treat or that they understand they live in a fire adapted ecosystem. We have to translate that knowledge into action.” In places where financial assistance is available for private lands treatment, outreach to get landowners to participate is sometimes required. For example, the Coalition recently sent a mailing to encourage use of the state Department of Natural Resources Fuel Reduction Program to 600 homes. This network hub also gave presentations at several neighborhood meetings highlighting the state program and worked to promote it through the press.

Shared equipment is a cost saver, but plan for treatment delays

The Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council has discovered this in their work in Towns County. The Georgia Forestry Commission has a masticator that is shared among communities in the northern part of the state. The shared equipment is used to complete fuels treatments around communities at low cost. While this is certainly a great asset, the Council has learned that it is important to remain flexible with implementation timelines when using shared equipment.



The North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District uses its work days to build community relationships while getting fuel treatments done. *photo: NLTFPD*

Relationships developed during implementation projects pay off down the road

Free defensible space inspections and curbside chipping were offered to communities in six fire districts in the Lake Tahoe Basin this past year. The North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District calls these activities “staple services provided by the fire districts... providing many opportunities to talk about fire adapted communities with residents.” While this model relies on the fire service to complete the treatments, engagement with residents and personal connections between citizens and their fire departments creates valuable relationships for future FAC activities.

HOW WE WORK: BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Online Conversations

Virtual tools help network members from across the country connect on an ongoing basis throughout the year. In addition to e-mail (and, of course, phone), informal conversations and sharing of resources take place on a private network workspace using the Podio platform. More formally, we facilitate exchange among participants in quarterly webinars. Topics cater to the interests and experience of network participants and partners. A wealth of information has been shared this way, and summaries/recordings of the



In June, leads from the FAC LN hubs each brought a key community partner to the national workshop in Colorado Springs, where they joined the Fire Learning Network for a poster session and field tour.

WEBINAR LINKS: Wildfire season lessons summary (<http://facnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/FAC-Net-Webinar-Summary-Sept-2013.pdf>) ~ Effective communications recording (<https://nethope.webex.com/nethope/lr.php?AT=pb&SP=MC&rID=68320677&rKey=0c1938502883264>) ~ FAC Coalition recording (<https://nethope.webex.com/nethope/lr.php?RCID=7b780cb43e35425eb5f41f96e48c8325>)

Face-to-Face Learning at Our Annual Workshop

More than 60 people from the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network and Fire Learning Network met in overlapping workshops in Colorado Springs during the first week of June. In the first part of the week, members of the FAC Network discussed key issues they face, learned about a community self-assessment tool now in development, and began laying out their work for the upcoming year. The workshop also included a number of small group discussions on topics such as regional networking, grassroots leadership, collaboration and integrating Cohesive Strategy goals into planning and implementation.

A field tour, taken jointly with the FLN, facilitated in-depth discussions about post-fire flood mitigation, fuel reduction treatments in natural areas and best practices for encouraging neighbors to work together to create defensible space.

This was the first official FAC Network activity for the ten new hubs, and it was an effective way to start integrating them into the group and help them make connections with their peers.

webinar proceedings are archived for reference (see links below). Two webinars were offered last fall—“Lessons from the Fire Season” (from the four FAC Net communities that had experienced wildfires during the summer of 2013) and “Effective Communications and Partnership Engagement” (in which another four hub organizations shared some of the lessons they had learned). The third webinar, held in March, helped introduce the FAC Learning Network and several partners in the FAC Coalition to each other. Network participants heard overviews of the Firewise and Ready, Set, Go! programs and a review of FEMA’s FAC training program. The presentations highlighted opportunities and tools network participants can use in their local and regional work, and helped expand the network of resources available. Quarterly webinars will resume in August with a discussion of work plans for the coming year.

Feedback after the Workshop

“I love seeing the diverse backgrounds of everyone in the network and how we’ve come together to work on the same issue.”

“The sum total of energy, optimism and great ideas brought by the people in this network is inspiring.”

“The trick is finding and empowering the right people at the right time—persistence pays off!”

HOW WE WORK: MEASURING PROGRESS

New: Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool

As the fire adapted communities concept is becoming more mainstream, so too are questions around what it takes to “create” or “become” a fire adapted community. The FAC Network coordinating team has been working to address this topic and help FAC Learning Network participants to define what it means for them to be fire adapted. The new Fire Adapted Community Self-Assessment Tool is part of this solution.

This tool is designed to help communities assess their level of fire adaptation and track changes in their capacity to live safely with fire over time. It draws on a number of successful models for measuring resilience and customizes them for wildfire. Through a series of questions, the tool helps a community identify and assess its values at risk, as well as the leadership, networks, motivation, skill sets, public outreach methods, policies, preparedness and training, and other resources and partnerships it brings to the challenge of addressing community wildfire risk.

Completing the FAC Self-Assessment is a four step process:

- 1) convene community members and stakeholders to discuss their goals for the assessment,
- 2) fill out an assessment table,
- 3) synthesize the assessment results by completing a prioritization table, and
- 4) outline the next steps—actions, partners and resources.

This process can be repeated at intervals to help communities continue evaluating and adjusting their adaptation to fire.

FAC Learning Network hubs have been, and will continue to be, integral to the development of this tool—several hubs provided initial feedback and comments, and all were introduced to the current version at the June workshop. At least half of the hubs have committed to using the assessment tool as part of their 2014-15 plan of work. Following this testing phase, a public version of the self-assessment tool will be released in 2015.



Self-assessment of progress will be key in helping more communities become more fire adapted more quickly. *photo: Andrew Holm*

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network is supported by the *Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency through Collaboration: Landscapes, Learning & Restoration* cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information, contact Nick Goulette (nickg@hayfork.net)