The PERFACT partnership uses a nuanced suite of strategies to support activities that will lead to more sustainable fire management systems and improve fire outcomes for people and nature. Two frameworks are central to our approach: one that helps clarify the context we are working in—the kind of problem—and the other describing five modes of scaling, which characterize different models for systems change.

What Kind of Problem Are We Working On?

People that work in our sector sometimes refer to “the fire problem.” But that phrase doesn’t capture the reality that we face: a stretched and stressed centralized fire management system; communities largely distanced and decoupled from their roles in human, fire and land management relationships; and worsening fire outcomes.

Dave Snowden and Mary Boone describe a framework for decision making that can help us parse out the context we’re working in so that we can use the appropriate tools and strategies to engage. In “A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making” they lay out five kinds of contexts: simple, complicated, complex, chaotic and disordered. This framework—called cynefin (kuh-NEV-in) from the Welsh for “habitat”—has been used to better understand everything from the response to the 9/11 attacks to pharmaceutical product development. And it can be used to guide engagement with our fire management system, helping us improve the relationships among our nation’s communities and fire. By determining what context we are in and responding using the tools required for that context, we can achieve better outcomes. In fact, Snowden and Boone suggest that many of the challenges leaders face are actually a result of trying to apply tools and leadership styles more appropriate to a different context.

Leaders who try to impose order in a complex context will fail, but those who set the stage, step back a bit, allow patterns to emerge, and determine which ones are desirable will succeed.

Snowden & Boone (2007)

“In a complex domain, one solves problems through learning.”

Hogarth (2018)

What Is PERFACT?

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Consider the description provided for complex contexts:
In a complicated context, at least one right answer exists. In a complex context, however, right answers can’t be ferreted out. It’s like the difference between, say, a Ferrari and the Brazilian rainforest. Ferraris are complicated machines, but an expert mechanic can take one apart and reassemble it without changing a thing. The car is static, and the whole is the sum of its parts. The rainforest, on the other hand, is in constant flux—a species becomes extinct, weather patterns change, an agricultural project reroutes a water source—and the whole is far more than the sum of its parts.

Both complicated (Ferrari) situations, and complex (rainforest) situations are embedded in our fire management system and the relationships and dynamics among communities and fire. We know, for instance, a lot about the complicated way homes ignite. We can use expert knowledge to understand a particular structure’s vulnerabilities and how conditions are likely to impact it. At the same time, we are also faced with complex issues: How can we best organize the assets of community partners? How will we develop the trust needed among participants for cross-boundary burning? Responding to the complex problems requires emergent strategies, while the complicated and simple problems can be addressed with a defined set of best practices to achieve relatively predictable outcomes.

To reach our goals we need to make progress across the full range of contexts. We can’t stop at the simple and complicated contexts and expect to reach our intended outcomes. To reach those outcomes, we have to be able to correctly identify and apply the tools appropriate for the job. For example, if a community needs a cooperatively developed fire plan, we could prescribe a planning tool and help them apply it to solve a complicated problem. But this wouldn’t necessarily get the desired outcome—depending on the circumstances, fostering cooperation may be as important as (if not more than) the resultant plan. That is a complex problem, and would require a different approach. Similarly, we see smoke issues popping up as a barrier to prescribed burning in numerous places. This requires a variety of solutions: Some are technical and transferable (for example, smoke regulations or burning practices). Others, such as addressing the needs of specific sensitive populations or businesses impacted by smoke events, are more complex issues, with unique solutions that will be based on the unique concerns and assets in the community.
What Kind of Change Do We Want to Make?

Ask anyone at a fire management conference to fill in the blanks of this call to action: “increase the ______ and ______ of treatments (or restoration).” Nine times out of ten they’ll say “pace and scale.” It is an extremely common refrain in our sector and is generally understood as a mandate to do more, faster, in a bigger area. And certainly, the urgency and stakes we face make this an understandable desire. But how might this fixation with a narrow kind of “pace and scale” obscure our view when there could be excellent strategies that are not about the big levers and wins of scaling up, or the expanding reach of scaling out? The work of Gord Tulloch offers a broader view of scaling that encompasses more dimensions and paths to increasing impact (see Figure 2).

The PERFACT partnership invests in a number of modes of scaling—distributing our resources among many worthwhile ways of making change.

**Scaling up** is what you do when you have power to leverage. Our partnership uses this mode of scaling by creating feedback loops between communities and decision makers. Creating a flow of information between these levels of operation helps identify inflection points where institutions and governance can support better fire outcomes, and is critical to minimizing unintended negative outcomes. This kind of scaling has been demonstrated in California where, after a decade of PERFACT support and learning, state agency partners have invested $20 million in forest and fire management capacity-building guided by that learning (READ MORE). This kind of change-making is important, but is often over-emphasized by funders and other players eager to make big changes.

**Scaling out** is what you do when you have an effective solution to a complicated problem, which can be applied elsewhere. PERFACT uses our peer networks to test many approaches to a particular issue, and then to share those solutions and spread replicable practices. For example, the Fire Learning Network was able to export an established, tried-and-true approach to private lands burning from the Great Plains to northwestern California, and now the prescribed burn association model is spreading across California and into the Pacific Northwest (READ MORE). The networks have also elevated the importance of post-fire recovery planning and frameworks for communities and landscapes—at a learning exchange in Washington, for example, the experiences and practices of the host communities inspired partners in Oregon to begin long-term recovery planning in earnest.

[Figure 2: Expanding conceptions of scale. In the 2018 blog post “Problematizing Scale in the Social Sector: Expanding Conceptions,” Gord Tulloch expanded on the work of Darcy Riddell and Michele-Lee Moore, who in 2015 proposed three kinds of scaling: scaling-up, scaling-out and scaling-deep. Work has also begun on means of evaluating these five dimensions of scaling.]

*Diagram adapted from Tulloch (2018)*
Scaling deep is embedded in the fire networks’ values. We know we need to increase diversity in fire management—it’s the only way we’ll find new paths forward. To get the benefits of more diversity, we have to do the work to improve justice in the sector and in our workplaces. We cannot ask people who have been marginalized to join us in this work unless we are willing to make this space an equitable one. We provide training and strive to lead in ways that support justice (READ MORE). PERFACT invests in scaling deep—in impacting the culture of fire, and the cultures of our members’ communities—by supporting and integrating DEI into how we approach our relationships and the work.

Scree scaling “legitimizes a multitude of different small and more relevant solutions.” Scree scaling is foundational to a transition from a centralized fire management system to a more resilient, dispersed set of systems and solutions. Successfully sharing ownership means being adaptable in terms of what that preparedness, response and recovery looks like in any given place and among any set of partners (READ MORE). The variety of members represented in our networks, and of approaches they take, demonstrate the fundamentally local nature of our engagement and investments. We aren’t trying to clone communities or strategies, but to support leadership and strategies that emerge in each unique place.

Scaling initial conditions is what our capacity-building work aims to support. We know we need to build capacity—for action on the immediate opportunities we have to improve fire outcomes, and also for leadership to navigate beyond established and proven practices. People are doing good work. We can spread that work and continue to dial in its deployment, but without vibrant local leadership and vision we won’t get to the transformative changes that will build more sustainable fire management systems. Our capacity building-approach includes training and best practices to address the complicated problems fire can present. But it goes beyond, to support leaders who can also operate in the complexity our situation demands (READ MORE).

A Multitude of Paths
To achieve better fire outcomes for people and nature, we need the technical solutions to our solvable complicated problems, and the adaptive capacity to engage with the complex ones. For nearly 20 years, the PERFACT partnership has been evolving to work across the full range of contexts, and to support best practices, good practices, emergent practices and novel practices as needed to meet different kinds of challenges with the necessary leadership and resources.

The work is at once local and intimately place-based, and also governed by layers of wider influence and power. The only way to be effective in such a system is by understanding context, and using a variety of scalar strategies to reach different dimensions of the complexity. While progress is neither linear nor even in tempo, each year we can look back at successful outcomes, both planned and surprising. From individual Aha! moments at workshops on diversity, equity and inclusion, to the rapid spread of prescribed burn associations in California, this year was no exception. And those outcomes lay the foundation for further opportunities as the networks and their members develop and share responses to complicated problems and embrace emergent strategies to address complex ones.

MORE FROM THE FIRE NETWORKS
Scaling up— Focus on California: PERFACT Investments Spark Widespread Progress
Scaling out— Focus on Learning Networks: Prescribed Burn Associations: Shining a New Light on Private Lands Burning in the West
Scaling deep— Focus on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: Building Skills for Inclusive & Equitable Relationships
Scree scaling— Focus on Resilience: Framing the Post-Fire Conversation
Scaling initial conditions—Focus on Capacity: Building Capacity That Distributes Power and Honors Local Knowledge and Leadership

An index to these documents and more is at http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/Pages/fact-sheets.aspx
FOCUS ON LEARNING NETWORKS:

PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATIONS: SHINING A NEW LIGHT ON PRIVATE LANDS BURNING IN THE WEST

Peer-to-peer learning through PERFACT spreads good ideas.

Across the United States, private lands burning is gaining interest and momentum. Some regions, like the Southeast, have had successful models for many years, with robust networks of private contractors, certified burners and experienced landowners who can plan and implement burns with little outside support. Other areas, including the West, have struggled to envision prescribed fire outside agency umbrellas, and the few private lands burns that occur in those places are often planned and led by fire suppression agencies. However, recent decades have seen the emergence of prescribed burn associations (PBAs), first in the Great Plains, and now—thanks to interstate inspirations and connections—in California.

A Brief History of PBAs

Prescribed burn associations are true community cooperatives, premised on valuing landowner training, empowerment and collaboration. Unlike government assistance programs or private contractor-led models, PBAs are naturally grassroots, and they represent year-round, local, low-cost prescribed fire capacity in the places where they are active. PBAs also promote a stewardship ethic that is inherently inclusive—because they rely on volunteers and all are welcome—and sustaining, because the projects are motivated by and in service to landowner and community needs.

In the Great Plains—a landscape dominated by private lands—PBAs were first inspired in the mid-1990s by the need to scale up burning to address landscape-level challenges, like the invasion of eastern red cedar into rangelands and prairies. Led by community members—including ranchers and land managers—the first PBAs took root in Nebraska and Wyoming. Over time, they took hold in Kansas, Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota, and their influence spread across the Great Plains and to other parts of the United States and Canada. Their success inspired a new model for fuel reduction through prescribed fire in the West.

The prescribed burn association model has successfully traveled from Nebraska to California—with a little help from the Fire Learning Network. © UCCE (Lenya Quinn-Davidson)

In January 2020, prescribed burn association leaders from across California came together to connect and share with one another. Over two days, they were able to delve deeply into issues like liability, organizational structure, and statewide strategy. One outcome of that meeting was the development of a website to serve PBAs throughout the state, www.calpba.org. California PBA leaders continue to meet regularly for shared learning and collaboration.

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and farmers—PBAs in the Great Plains have been able to pool resources and equipment, leverage grants and other funding, and coalesce a volunteer workforce that is using prescribed fire at a truly meaningful scale. A 2015 survey led by John Weir at Oklahoma State University showed that in just an eight-year period, 27 PBAs in the Great Plains had implemented almost 1,100 burns for a total of more than 470,000 acres—mostly with little more than blue jeans, t-shirts, pick-up trucks and ATVs.

Connecting Through Our Networks

As co-leads of the TREX Coaches Network, Lenya Quinn-Davidson and Jeremy Bailey had worked on workforce and training issues for years, but they had never explicitly discussed models for private lands burning. However, 2016 had brought an outpouring of private landowner interest in prescribed fire in Humboldt County, California, where Lenya is located, and she and her local colleagues were looking for new inspiration and ideas. So Lenya called Jeremy to inquire about PBAs. The result—thanks to Jeremy’s vision and support—was a learning exchange with several PBA leaders from the Great Plains, all of whom had been affiliated with or supported by the Fire Learning Network (FLN) or Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX) over the years.

In August 2016, these leaders—including Emily Hohman from Iowa, and Ben Wheeler, Scott Stout and Mark and Deb Alberts from Nebraska—came to Humboldt County to share their stories, walk potential burn units, and better understand the issues facing their California counterparts. They were shocked by the curvy roads, the rugged terrain and the rigid air quality regulations, but the personal connections and parallels were strong, and the visitors left a major impression on the community. They also invited the California contingent to visit Nebraska, and in March 2017, Lenya and three Humboldt County partners spent five days burning with PBAs in central Nebraska.

The Ideas Take Root …

They came home from that trip and decided there was absolutely no reason why the PBA model couldn’t work in the West, and in June 2017, they hosted their first PBA-style burn, staffed entirely by community members and volunteer fire departments. In March 2018, they officially formed the Humboldt County Prescribed Burn Association—the first PBA in the Pacific West. This PBA has now implemented 24 burns for a total of almost 1,200 acres—and has one of the largest memberships of any PBA in the country.

… and Flourish

Over the last year or so, the success of the Humboldt County PBA has catalyzed a movement in California, and community leaders across the state are spearheading PBA efforts on their own landscapes. By mid 2020, California had 15 PBA-style groups either active or in the process of formation. This momentum around prescribed fire on California’s private lands is daylighting important social and cultural norms in California’s fire culture, and it’s calling into question basic notions of who gets to use fire and how they should use it. California’s PBA leaders are paving a new, more inclusive and community-based model for prescribed fire implementation, and because of the urgency and gravity of California’s fire problems, CAL FIRE and other agencies have been generally supportive. In fact, the momentum around PBAs is giving everyone an extra nudge, and there is a new, shared excitement for prescribed fire across California’s private and public lands. In the past two years, it seems as if California’s prescribed fire stars have finally started to realign—and they point back to the shining success of the Great Plains.
FOCUS ON RESILIENCE:

FRAMING THE POST-FIRE CONVERSATION

Our fire networks are expanding the scope of fire ownership, shifting the regulatory, policy and funding environment, and changing the way communities live with wildfire.

As communities throughout the nation continue to be heavily impacted by wildfire, the need to address what happens after wildfires has become clear. The PERFACT family of fire networks is working to support communities as they wrestle with impacts to infrastructure, social systems, agriculture, housing, public health and more.

Wildfire Resilience Means Recovery Too

To better live with wildland fire, adaptation has to include our actions before, during and after wildland fire. Not only must communities prepare for the fire itself, but they also must prepare for what comes next.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM PERFACT POST-FIRE WORK

FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES

This graphic was developed and refined by members of FAC Net. Wildfire recovery shown on the inner teal ring is an important part of fire adaptation. Expanding our vision of what resilience entails—and more specifically, the concept that fire adaptation includes recovery—is a key outcome of the work of FAC Net and other partnerships under the PERFACT agreement. (Click on the diagram to see a full-sized version. It is also available in Spanish.)

The goal of the Burned Area Learning Network (BALN) is to improve scientific understanding, policy and management practices for burned areas to enhance long-term resilience of ecological systems and provide for human safety.

PERFACT investments in the Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition enabled the creation of the After the Fire Toolkit, a communications toolkit to help rural communities prepare for post-fire flooding and debris flow impacts. SEE THE TOOLKIT
Expanding our understanding of what happens after wildfire to include these partners enables a more connected, cohesive and effective approach to wildfire resilience.

**Framing of the Issue Expands the Scope of Fire Ownership**

Working to recover from wildfire, and even to better prepare for recovery, yields new relationships and expanded partnerships. Non-traditional partners such as public health practitioners, social service organizations, and utility companies all have a stake in wildfire recovery. Expanding our understanding of what happens after wildfire to include these partners enables a more connected, cohesive and effective approach to wildfire resilience.

**New Tools Empower Individuals to Share In, and Lead, Local Recovery**

A resident recovery guide, developed by Washington State Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network members and with support from the family of fire networks, is scheduled for release in 2020. Designed to kick-start resident recovery, the guide covers essential post-fire recovery actions. (Click on the diagram to see a full-sized version.)

The teal ring in this diagram contains broad elements of post-fire recovery actions. (Click on the diagram to see a full-sized version.)

The left half of the ring (below left), with elements like Landscape and Infrastructure, is organized topically, while the right half of the ring, with elements like Planning and Preparedness and Emergency Management, is organized chronologically. This blended framework of chronology and topical focus enables a more complete approach to what happens after a wildfire.
tools, tips and preparedness actions that can be taken to help recover better from wildfire.

Residents are encouraged to connect with local emergency managers, the developers of their Community Wildfire Protection Plans, and social service organizations ahead of a wildfire to ensure their community has the resources, connections and tools they will need after a fire.

Pre-Fire Planning for Post-Fire Recovery Creates Resilience

After participating in several PERFACT learning exchanges throughout the Pacific Northwest, Project Wildfire in Deschutes County, Oregon, was inspired to begin planning for long-term recovery. The effort is being led by the Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office, in partnership with Project Wildfire, the U.S. Forest Service, the Oregon Department of Forestry, and other federal, state and local agencies, who have come together with local residents to create a long-term recovery plan. Outreach has focused on creating an inclusive process for diverse stakeholders to have a voice in long-term recovery planning. Presentations on this effort to other fire network members have shared this collaborative approach and laid the foundation for similar work in other places.

Fire Networks Are Changing the Conversation to Support Integrated Fire Management

Participants in the family of fire networks are moving resilience forward by embracing the challenges and opportunities created by fire recovery. Network members

We began to think about our need for pre-planning for post-fire recovery because of connections we made through FAC Net.... You can read about post-fire planning needs, but they may not hit home and may quickly get brushed aside for other urgent work. FAC Net enabled face-to-face and place-based connections that gave us a deeper understanding of post-fire recovery and really started us working on this in earnest. Now we have a whole host of partners that have a better understanding of the need for, and their role in, post-fire recovery.

2018

A presentation to Incident Management Teams in Oregon and Washington focused on integrating post-fire recovery into fire response operations.

“State of the Knowledge About Post-Fire Response” report from the BALN highlighted post-fire research in a rapidly emerging field.

The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition demonstrated the value of “Pre-Fire Planning to Improve Post-Fire Response.”

Post-fire considerations were a major part of the fire networks workshop in Wenatchee, Washington. Participants explored post-fire policy changes and experienced a deep-dive into long-term community recovery.

Federal policies that guide and constrain Burned Area Emergency Response policy on federal, state and private lands are examined and conversations about changes at a national level begins.

Burned Area Learning Network: Leveraging Resources for Landscape Recovery

Efforts in New Mexico’s Jemez Mountains led to a successful Wildlife Conservation Society Climate Adaptation grant to complete a climate-ready reforestation project in the Las Conchas burned area. The project helps the landscape recover and plans for fire’s eventual return. By leveraging private grant funds to plant trees in groups that mimic their natural distribution on the landscape, a more fire-resilient landscape is created during recovery. Partners include the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, the Santa Clara Pueblo, U.S. Geological Survey and several universities. (READ MORE)
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Post-Fire: In the Words of Network Members

iBAER: How We Formed, Funded and Dispatched a State and Private Lands Burned Area Emergency Response Team
“Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams, the people who assess ecological, hydrological and forest conditions after a wildfire, are not cheap. And, BAER teams are usually federal employees, working on federal lands. What happens, then, when private or state lands burn in a wildfire and need ecological assessments? In the spirit of learning by doing, Washington funded and deployed nonfederal BAER teams (think “iBAER”) in 2014 and again in 2015, and we thought others could learn from our effort.” (READ MORE)

Block Captains: Community Leaders Emerge in the Wake of the 2017 Sonoma Fires
“Even as we put so much effort into recovering from the disaster that had just struck our community, we needed to build resilience into the future at the same time.” (READ MORE)

Equity in Action: Long-Term Disaster Recovery in North-Central Washington
“The Okanogan County Long-Term Recovery group dictum — ‘What does this person need to recover from this disaster in this community?’ — guides each step of the process. This is, in fact, the definition of equity: to give people what they need, taking what has been and is happening around them into consideration. Implicit in [their] motto is the idea that the people impacted by adversity know better than anyone else what they need, and it is up to them to define the terms of their recovery.” (READ MORE)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>2018</th>
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<tr>
<td>Santa Clara field tour and East Jemez “Landscape Futures” workshop builds the foundation for 2020 restoration and replanting work.</td>
<td>“After the Fire” storymap created to demonstrate lessons and best practices from burned areas in the Southwest. EXPLORE THE STORYMAP</td>
<td>FAC Net held a workshop on integrating post-fire considerations into Community Wildfire Protection Plans.</td>
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The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition briefing paper on post-fire impacts explored the true cost of wildfire and advocated for changes on the landscape. READ THE PAPER

The Seigler Springs Community Redevelopment Association, formed after the 2015 Valley Fire in Lake County, CA, joined FAC Net as a core member. Demonstrating that fire adaptation can begin at any point before, during or even after wildfire, the SSRA is sharing their experiences and challenges throughout FAC Net.
Fire is changing and we need to change, too. Yesterday’s fire management approaches—exclusive governmental control of fire and extinguishing virtually every wildfire as quickly as possible—no longer work. In fact, they have made our fire problems worse. Tomorrow’s solutions—sharing risk and responsibility for wildfires and prescribed fires, including managing more fires to provide long-term benefits to nature and people—require different skillsets and mindsets.

Successfully living with fire requires the engagement and commitment of everyone in the affected area. For those working to improve landscape and community resilience to wildfire, this can only be achieved through equitable partnerships that represent the full diversity of the area’s residents. Similarly, more diverse perspectives are needed—at all levels—if we are to improve our fire management system. To acquire these perspectives, fire management practitioners in leadership positions must both recruit diverse staff and create a welcoming environment where everyone feels safe speaking up, being who they are, and bringing their full selves to the table. PERFACT’s diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work equips practitioners with some of the skills needed to act more inclusively and nurture equitable relationships.

We have steadily increased our investments in DEI learning over the past two or three years, and look forward to further growth. In the past year, PERFACT has hosted about a dozen in-person and online trainings and workshops, supported a pilot Latinx engagement project in Washington, and organized a two-week learning exchange centered on women in fire.

Virtual Workshops Expand DEI Reach

In previous years, most of our DEI offerings were in-person workshops or sessions designed for members of a single Fire Network, such as Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net), or for a Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TREX). This year signaled two departures from this, as we...

Several years ago, FAC Net made it clear to me that our industry has a significant problem with diversity, equity, and inclusion. FAC Net has also provided numerous tools and resources to help our organizations address the problem. I appreciate that this has become a focus over the past couple of years, and would like to continue to follow the approach that FAC Net and its members are taking to push for progress.

I really appreciate getting to have these conversations with other fire staff who share values around DEI. Thank you for organizing and facilitating.

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designed a four-part workshop series that moved online, and was aimed at developing a new cohort of DEI learners from all the fire networks. There was considerable interest and we engaged 65 members and leaders, representing more than 25 organizations, in these highly interactive online sessions. Maria Estrada, The Nature Conservancy’s Deputy Director of Global Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, developed and led the sessions. These were designed to develop skills as well as model best practices to help participants champion DEI work in their organizations. The content was tailored for members of the fire management and fire adaptation community, drawing on numerous case studies from Maria’s work with members of the fire networks over the years.

Current events rendered this work timelier and more relevant than we could have imagined. The sessions had been designed from the start to be delivered online, to allow broad access, and so they were not derailed by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. More starkly, George Floyd was murdered just before the fourth workshop in the series. Like many others across the country and the world, cohort members’ eyes were opened. The work took on new meaning and immediacy. Maria re-designed workshop 4 to make space for participants to talk about what they were doing to learn about and practice anti-racism.

Media coverage of COVID-19’s tragic and disproportionate effects on Black, Indigenous and people of color, and those living in poverty, has also shown starkly how inequities manifest in life-threatening ways. Having already built a foundation for addressing DEI issues, the fire networks are in a position to help channel the current societal attention to these inequities into positive change for the fire management, community wildfire adaptation, and conservation communities.

Groundbreaking Pilot Explores Latinx Community Engagement

In 2019 PERFACT staff made introductions that connected people from The Nature Conservancy, Washington Resource Conservation and Development Council, Washington State Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (WAFAC) and the international Latinx sustainability and capacity-building non-profit Sachamama. Together, they developed a pilot Latinx community-engagement project in Wenatchee and the Yakima Valley in Washington. These areas were severely impacted by wildfires in 2014 and 2015, and it became apparent that the Latinx residents did not have access to resources necessary to prepare for, respond to, or recover from wildfire.

The goal of this pilot project was to develop a framework to engage the Latinx community in wildfire adaptation. More than 1,000 individuals and organizations—businesses, local school districts, Wenatchee Chamber of Commerce, Univision and local radio stations—have taken part in this
work thus far. Through a series of listening sessions, strategic partnerships were developed with four organizations: the Latino Community Fund, Community for the Advancement of Family Education (CAFÉ), Parque Padrinos and Nuestra Casa. Sachamama partnered with these organizations to host a series of workshops through a collaborative process that empowers the Latinx community to act on adaptation and resilience efforts through the lens of local climate concerns—in this case, wildfire. The Climate Innovation Lab nurtured connections with local fire adaptation practitioners, equipped community leaders with knowledge about wildfire adaptation, and provided them with leadership tools to plan and implement solutions based on community needs. The first phase workshops were conducted in person; as COVID-19 spread, the team pivoted and transitioned the remainder of the pilot to virtual workshops.

More than 80 community members took part in the Climate Innovation Lab. Participants are now advocating for Wenatchee and Sunnyside to adopt city-wide wildfire preparedness day or month proclamations to increase outreach to and engagement with Latinx residents. At the state level, the Latino Community Fund and Front and Centered—organizations on the frontlines of economic and environmental change for climate justice—have begun to lead a wildfire legislative agenda.

CAFÉ, Nuestra Casa and the Latino Community Fund have integrated fire adapted communities work into their programs of work, and are engaging residents and stakeholders in their communities to promote and coordinate wildfire preparedness efforts. They have also joined WAFAC and are collaborating with other organizations on wildfire adaptation efforts.

**Women-in-Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchange**

Women-in-Fire Training Exchanges (WTREX) are modeled after other Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX), but specifically focus on cultivating a more diverse, equitable, innovative and ecologically sound fire management system. In addition to operational fire training, WTREX events provide unique networking opportunities, mentorship, awareness and social connections. As a grassroots network that engages fire practitioners of all genders and backgrounds, WTREX is dedicated to evolving the fire culture through the empowerment and advancement of women, and to bringing awareness of the value of diversity in the fire workforce.

The fourth WTREX was planned for March 2020 in Virginia, after previous WTREX in northwestern California (2016), Yosemite (2017) and northern Florida (2019). WTREX 2020 was set to bring 45 people from 8 countries and 20 states to southwestern Virginia, where they would burn and train together, participate in workshops and discussions, and build peer and mentor relationships with one another. However, as the COVID-19 crisis unfolded in the weeks leading up to the

WORKSHOP 3
Putting Our Learning Into Practice

“"The topic is highly relevant and personally interesting as a white male. This is a skill I really want to hone in my effort to be a better ally.

“The real-life scenarios are powerful and effective.

““I always find it reinforcing to hear the words and phrases that Maria uses in this sensitive work. Receiving examples of good language to adopt is a wonderful and useful gift!”

WORKSHOP 4
Power Signatures and Grounded Journeys of Identity

**POWER UP**

Defines reality, “truth”
Sets rules, standards
Seen as normal

**POWER DOWN**

Expected to follow rules
Expected to fit in
Seen as less than
For more about the Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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Looking Forward

Participants in the virtual workshop series surveyed afterwards indicated a strong desire to diversify workforces, including within their organizations, and to better engage Indigenous peoples and Latinx communities. We are looking into a range of options to continue to engage this cohort of learners, including hosting monthly virtual workshops, expanding FAC Net’s existing DEI community of practice to include this new cohort, and developing a DEI-focused online workspace where people can connect.

In Washington, project leads are synthesizing what they heard, and putting together products to share what they’ve learned so far. Culturally appropriate wildland fire videos, with a written curriculum, workshop facilitation guides and sample agendas—in English and Spanish—will be produced to help others kick-start similar efforts in their communities.

And the virtual crew of participants in this year’s WTREX has been invited to the next in-person WTREX, planned for Virginia in March 2021, to continue and build on what they started together in this unusual year.

All of this DEI work is but an early step in a long-term journey for participants, and for PERFECT as a whole. We look forward to helping build a society whose response to fire is as rich and varied as fire itself.

For more about the Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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The U.S. has been centralizing fire management capability for nearly a century. This affords certain efficiencies and expertise to develop, but also concentrates power and homogenizes our fire culture. The country does not have a single, monolithic “fire problem.” Rather, we have hundreds of local and regional problems (and opportunities!) that differ in many important details. These situations require a range of options and capacities—and flexibility. And the communities addressing them need a system of knowledge sharing, relationships and actions that enable local solutions to land and fire management and, ultimately, resilience.

Complex Problems Call for New Approaches

PERFACT supports community-based leaders who are creating new approaches to fire management and community resilience. The partnership’s fire networks are designed to help transition from a centralized model “owned” by specialized professionals, to a model of decentralized approaches to fire management driven by local conditions, needs and assets.

To reach our collective goals of resilient landscapes and communities and more sustainable fire management systems, we need a capacity-building model that will support local leaders and strengthen the organizations and partnerships that house their work. Such a distributed approach to fire management requires many more people taking part, bringing a variety of skills, assets, visions and leadership to play roles in fire preparedness, management and recovery in their communities and landscapes.

What Do We Mean by Capacity?

Fire management capacity is a broad concept. It is far more than crews skilled in safely suppressing wildfires and conducting prescribed burns when time permits. We need to increase prescribed fire, for example. This requires training more
people as burn bosses, of course, but it often means getting them access to insurance. And much of the needed capacity has nothing to do with formal qualifications and drip-torches. We need local workforces that can support resident home hardening and mitigation—people trained in assessing a home’s wildfire risk, and folks with the skills and tools to do the retrofit work. If we want codes and ordinances that regulate development in fire-prone landscapes, we need planners and local government to be well-versed in fire issues. Businesses need to plan for continuity and long-term recovery. Individuals may need access to information about how to mitigate smoke effects. Neighborhoods may need to plan for evacuations. And virtually every community needs organizers—to bring people together, facilitate planning and build the most critical element of resilience: connections.

Each community has unique risks, a unique set of capacities and unique goals. Aligning those as they build a more closely connected relationship with fire is what the fire networks enable.

How Capacity Gets Built Matters

Our approach to capacity building can’t be just more of what we have now. The needed systems change will require the right capacities, at the right times, in the right places. At its best, capacity-building can be transformative, creating access to information, ideas, resources, peers and power. At its worst, capacity-building can be imperialistic and disenfranchising. The difference is in the details and deployment.

Capacity-building is often conceptualized as a solution “given to” communities that are viewed as poor, underdeveloped, uninformed or otherwise lacking. The logic is, “If only these people had this information (or other resource), we could solve their problem.” But, in fire management the problem is rarely one of purely information or resource deficit. Change requires new ways of working, not just the universal implementation of “best practices” from on high. Best management practices optimize outcomes in predictable systems; they do not shift power dynamics or help us manage complexity. So when building capacity for adaptable community fire management, we look to community organizing, social justice and assets-based development work. We don’t just bring tools to communities; we work with them.

Our Approach to Building Capacity

PERFACT has been helping dozens of communities and landscape partnerships build their capacity for nearly two decades. One of the most important things we’ve learned is that there is no single curriculum for this work that will set people up to successfully reach the goal. Why not? Because lasting change comes from true ownership, skill development and practice. So we invest in local leaders, support peer learning and connection, create access and make learning spaces where people are valued and power is built. We
support groups undertaking strategic planning processes—rather than assuming we know their communities better than they do and imposing strategies from the outside. Our capacity-building approach honors the technical expertise and knowledge that is needed to resolve some aspects of the challenge, while also investing in the leadership development, learning orientation and emphasis on connection that will make the capacity adaptable and enduring.

Recent Investments in Capacity-Building

PERFACT supported a broad range of capacity-building experiences for members and partners this year. We held technical workshops and hosted training events in prescribed fire and Community Wildfire Protection Planning. Professional development opportunities included a series of workshops on diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as coaching in facilitation techniques and virtual meeting design. Lessons learned through the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network were shared and explored in a pilot Beginners’ Working Group for non-indigenous land managers from The Nature Conservancy to begin to build equitable relationships with tribes.

The opportunities offered were informed by member priorities, first through insight gained at our annual workshops, and then revised when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. As all of our operating realities were suddenly turned upside down, we immediately asked members what they needed to stay effective and advance their goals. We were able to quickly adjust our plans and support based on this feedback and continue to make progress in spite of the challenges.

We are deploying capacity-building support in a virtual world. Our networks support leaders from 34 states and reach practitioners from 13 countries. The only practical way to keep those folks connected—sharing ideas, questioning what is possible and learning together—is through virtual learning spaces. The activities we supported this year were made possible because we listened to the needs of our members, and connected those people and organizations through a robust virtual system that supports peer learning and local action. The learning spaces we’ve built facilitate the transfer of ideas while keeping communication and ideas transparent and adaptable. We work hard to manage power dynamics that might disenfranchise participants, while encouraging critique and hard questions. Our PERFACT team works remotely across the country, and we have been operating virtual spaces for the past decade, so when COVID-19 required universal adoption of virtual engagement this spring, we were ahead of the curve.

A little boost can make the difference between a successful project and loss of momentum. Volunteer and grassroots groups across the country are mobilizing fire resilience projects in their communities. Many FAC Net affiliates lead or belong to these kinds of groups; in listening to their ideas for how we could support their capacity-building needs we heard that they FAC Net planned to meet in Salt Lake City in April 2020 for its annual workshop. In March, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, staff realized they would need to re-plan the workshop for a virtual platform. As they redesigned sessions, they recognized that the skills and tools they were using to adapt the workshop could be valuable to others faced with moving their work online. They developed “50 Tips Guide to Virtual Workshops” to help members and other community leaders design and run great virtual convenings. (Click the image to view this resource.)
could often benefit tremendously from a little bit of additional project funding enabling them to complete a demonstration project, or get the ball rolling on community organizing in a specific neighborhood. Based on the needs our members had articulated, FAC Net piloted an opportunity fund to support some of these projects. While funding support and capacity-building are not the same thing, giving these members the opportunity to test their partnerships, strategies and outreach by facilitating the completion of a project indirectly allowed them to strengthen those capacities. The fund makes targeted investments in on-the-ground projects that:

- need just a small boost to be completed, or a small gap in funding to be filled;
- expand the member’s fire adapted communities work into a new area or sector;
- support action in low-income or underrepresented communities; or
- serve communities recovering from wildfire.

This program launched in early 2020, and eight community projects were selected; unfortunately, the onset of COVID-19 delayed four of the projects, but the others were able to proceed as planned. These included mitigating fuels along a community’s primary evacuation road, a defensible space demonstration project conducted at the home of an elderly low-income resident, a revegetation and invasive plant control project in a neighborhood recovering from the Camp Fire, and a virtual engagement process for evacuation modeling. Together they completed 8.5 acres of treatments that improved the evacuation safety for 281 homes and engaged volunteers who provided 92 hours of service to their communities.

Resilience in a Changing World

We believe that the kind of capacity-building we support—in leadership development; skill-, knowledge- and power-building and by fostering connections and strengthening the organizations and institutions where those leaders’ work is housed—will help us shift from a centralized fire management system to decentralized approaches that allow for more local leadership, responsibility and adaptability in our fire relationships.

Together, we are working to create tighter and more responsive connections between people, place and fire. We are supporting people to take responsibility, not just for their own homes, families and property, but for the resilience of their communities and landscapes.

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