



# Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

# Southern Blue Ridge Fire Module

## Bluff Mountain Burn

November 2015

The new Southern Blue Ridge Fire Module, led by The Nature Conservancy, got its first burn on the books in mid-November. The as-needed module includes several veteran firefighters with decades of experience as well as some currently working in local mountain fire departments and as stand-by firefighters for the North Carolina Forest Service. Together, the crew has 156 years of experience.

**Because controlled burning is weather dependent,** fire crews need to be available when the weather permits. As a result, many burns can't be conducted despite favorable weather conditions because a crew is not available. This Conservancy crew can burn when needed, removing an important barrier to prescribed burning. The crew is modeled on a successful effort on the North Carolina coast, where Conservancy crews have helped burn on public game lands, forests and parks.

**The crew's first burn** took place on 87 acres at the Conservancy's Bluff Mountain Preserve in Ashe County, North Carolina. This successful burn aided an ongoing restoration effort aimed at bringing back high elevation red oak trees at the preserve. Young oak trees haven't been growing well at Bluff Mountain and many other places in the Southern Blue Ridge. Fewer young oaks today mean fewer mature oaks in the future—which is a problem, because acorns are a valuable source of food for wildlife. This burn was designed to reduce shrubs that are preventing oak seedling growth. Removing shrubs will also encourage more flowers and other plants to grow on the forest floor.

### Partnering Organizations

- North Carolina Forest Service
- North Carolina State Parks
- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
- The Nature Conservancy
- USDA Forest Service

### Why Prescribe Fire?

Naturally occurring fire was once common across the mountains, but a focus on fire suppression in the last century has disrupted the natural balance of the ecosystem. Controlled burns are restoring that balance. Controlled burning with low-intensity fire also removes fuel that could stoke wildfires, which could endanger nearby communities.

Controlled burning, also known as prescribed fire, is a science: A burn plan is created, laying out the ecological goals for the fire, how to achieve those goals and what conditions are necessary for a successful controlled burn. Burns can't occur unless weather conditions are favorable for meeting the goals in the plan, and for limiting the impact of smoke on surrounding communities and minimizing the potential for fire to escape the planned boundaries.

### For more about the Southern Blue Ridge Fire Module, contact:

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The FLN is part of the *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together (PERFACT)* cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more on PERFACT, contact Lynn Decker at ldecker@tnc.org.



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