Amidst a mixed bag of weather—snow, excessive heat, snow again, high winds, rain—the Loup TREX team was able to complete about 3,000 acres of prescribed fire while working and training together over a two-week period in late March. The 51 firefighters came from seven states and five countries, and descended upon central Nebraska to deliver healthy, needed fire to Great Plains grasslands, share their experience and build upon their fireline skills.

Blacklining activities early on in the TREX—when conditions weren’t suitable for broadcast burning—paid dividends later in the event. After a few days, the team was able to anchor into this blackline and take advantage of a brief evening weather window to burn the eastern half of the Bull Mountain unit, about 800 acres. (This was made possible, in part, by the Sandstone Grill in Burwell, which provided a catered field meal for 50 firefighters on a busy Friday night—on two hours’ notice.) The following day was spent securing and patrolling lines.

With hot, dry weather forecast on Sunday—a high of 80, with 21 percent humidity—ignitions on the 150-acre Sioux Creek unit began early in the morning so the burn could be completed before the weather became critical. With that done, the entire Loup TREX prescribed fire complex had a deep, black, burned area clear from the north to the south. This set the team up for later burns—in the eastern part of complex with an easterly wind, or the western part of the complex with a westerly wind.

This TREX was conducted entirely on private land, with nine landowners involved. One of those landowners suited up and joined the TREX crew on the fireline the next day, where she learned about ignitions, holding techniques, and how to obtain fire weather. TREX participants greatly valued the eagerness, initiative, energy and local knowledge she added to the crew. The unit she assisted with did not include any of her own property—another beautiful example of cross-boundary cooperation and seeing the larger vision of the Loup TREX program.

Task Force Bravo rules! I have known that terrain my whole life and I still get goose bumps that you lit it up at night and rocked it!! Ben Wheeler and Burn Boss Dan Kelleher amaze me!

local landowner
via Facebook comments
During the Loup TREX, 17 local ranchers and neighbors joined the TREX crew to complete the 1,585-acre Cedar unit. Many of them were members of the local Custer Prescribed Burn Association, a cooperative group of landowners who help deliver safe and healthy fire to each other’s land. This group added valuable personnel and engine resources to the group, and integrated well into the fire learning environment.

A local landowner is welcomed into the TREX crew with a friendly toss led by participants from Spain. all photos © Pheasants Forever (Ben Wheeler)

At the end of the TREX, the crews and landowners alike were pleased to see healthy fire returned to so many acres of the central Nebraska landscape, most of which had not seen fire since settlement. On the last evening, landowners held an appreciation dinner to thank the TREX participants for all of their hard work. In turn, the participants were grateful to the landowners, as well as the towns of Burwell and Ord, for being such gracious hosts of the 2017 Loup TREX.

The next Loup TREX has been set for March 12-24, 2018!

I am a firm believer that the success of Loup TREX prescribed program has little to do with the raw acres our crew completes, but is rather measured by the actions that occur once our crews leave. I have been delighted to hear several reports that our landowners have accepted the responsibility to continue where we left off. A few days after the TREX, the remaining 500 acres were safely and effectively burned under local direction and cooperation with neighbors. Four separate prescribed fires have also been completed adjacent to 2017 Loup TREX units, further compounding the impact of the TREX. These landowners that have picked up the ball truly represent the Loup TREX vision and the future of fire in central Nebraska.

Participant Organizations
Bay Mills Indian Community
BRIF
Bureau of Land Management
Castilla la Mancha
Conafor
Firestorm Wildland Fire Suppression, Inc.
Forex
Franktown Fire and Rescue
INFOCA
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Northern Arizona University
Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever
Prometheus Fire Consulting
Sinarms
Spray Creek Ranch
Sugarloaf Fire Protection District
University a Pachingo
University of Washington
USDA Forest Service
Utah Department of Natural Resources
Watershed Research & Training Center

For more on the Loup River TREX:
Ben Wheeler
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For more on other TREX:
http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges

The Fire Learning Network is part of Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information about PERFECT, contact Lynn Decker: ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.

An equal opportunity provider

v. 25 Apr 17 / Ben Wheeler