



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

CalTRES Calaveras Prescribed Fire Training Exchange

Wilseyville, CA ~ November 4-13, 2018

Is it possible to host a successful TRES without burning any acres? What if all of your well planned burn units and agenda are upended by unfavorable weather and wildfire? Can participants still have a meaningful experience?

Phil Dye, Incident Commander

The 2018 Calaveras TRES was the second session of the new CalTRES program. The first, Cal-TRES North, took place in Butte County just before the Calaveras TRES. CalTRES is modeled after the national TRES strategy, but is designed specifically to be implemented in California and to serve as a flagship initiative of a new statewide fire memorandum of understanding. Major funding comes from CAL FIRE, in addition to the traditional funding from the U.S. Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy.

The Calaveras TRES was originally scheduled for mid-October 2017. But the Tubbs Fire—which started on October 9—resulted in a statewide moratorium on all prescribed burning due to the significant resource draw-down and lack of contingency resources. Hoping to capture a more favorable burn window, the 2018 Calaveras TRES was moved into November. So on November 4, the 24 participants arrived at the Camp Lodestar base in the Sierra Nevada mountain range, near the community of Wilseyville.



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After two days of training, team building and burn unit preparation, crews were ready to ignite. Unfortunately, while local weather was favorable, regional weather called for high winds and low humidities so burning was postponed for several days. Undeterred, crews continued to engage in training sessions on initial attack, escaped fire and response



Calaveras TRES participants worked with the Plumas National Forest on mop-up of a prescribed fire (upper left). They also used the time there for training, which included learning about fuels moisture monitoring and the role it plays in prescribed fire planning and effects (upper center and right) and using tools such as a Kestrel (lower left) and wind gauge (lower center).

The crew ended the day by running a simulation of lighting a grassland unit and organizing engines to suppress a slopover (lower right). It was tricky having to imagine the fire and the grass. But the logistics were real and they learned how to configure engines and fire fighters and lighters for maximum safety.

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The TRES wrapped up with some fuels reduction and defensible space work at a residence near their base camp.

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and medical emergency scenarios, and on felling operations. However, as conditions continued to prevent burning, the command team arranged to move the TRES north, returning to burn units that were previously ignited by squads from the earlier CalTRES.

Accordingly, the base camp was moved to Oroville. For two days the Calaveras TRES crews helped the Plumas National Forest with patrol and reconnaissance of the St. Louis 211 burn unit while waiting for favorable weather.

Then, on the morning of November 8, we awoke to a large smoke column over the community of Paradise, 20 miles from our base camp. This became the Camp Fire: at this writing, the most destructive wildfire in California history. With the major resource commitment required by the Camp Fire, the TRES organization was able to ease the burden on the Plumas NF by continuing to provide patrol duties on the 211 unit, freeing their resources for response to the wildfire.

The Calaveras TRES was personally touched by the Camp Fire, with



The Calaveras TRES crew did a structure protection simulation of their Oroville headquarters—with a lookout posted to avoid alarming neighbors who might have thought the Camp Fire had gotten to town.

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a family member of one of our participants losing her home. Many longtime supporters of TRES were also directly affected by the fire.

As in 2017, statewide wildfire activity now prevented any burning. Despite this, our participants kept attitudes up and morale high. On our return to Camp Lodestar, we conducted a field simulation of a prescribed fire, which a number of participants called “the best part of the TRES!” A half-day class on burn plan preparation was also offered. With that, having accomplished all of our training objectives, the command team decided to demobilize early.

We closed this TRES by performing fuels reduction and defensible space work on the property of an elderly couple living near Camp Lodestar on our final day. The couple would otherwise have been unable to complete this work.

So, back to my opening questions. Is it possible to host a successful TRES and not burn any acres? What if all of your well planned burn units and agenda are upended by unfavorable weather and wildfire? Can participants still have a meaningful experience?

I believe the answer is a resounding YES! There was, of course, widespread disappointment in not being able to burn. However, based on surveys and interviews, our participants still felt that the TRES was a valuable experience. As the incident commander, I strongly believe that the credit for such a great experience goes to each and every one of our participants.

And as a veteran of at least ten TRES, I’ll note that this one may be my favorite yet!

Participant Organizations

British Columbia Wildfire Service
Bureau of Land Management
Calaveras Healthy Impact Products Solutions

East Bay Regional Parks District

Humboldt State University

Nevada Division of Forestry

San Jose Fire Department

Santa Clara County Parks

Save the Redwood League

Sinarmas

The Nature Conservancy

University of California Cooperative Extension

University of California—Berkeley

University of California—Blodgett

Research Station

and individual volunteers

Participants came from California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, plus Canada and Indonesia.

For more about the Calaveras TRES, contact:

Phil Dye

phil@prometheusfireconsulting.com

For more on the TRES strategy, visit:
<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>

The Fire Learning Network and Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TRES) are 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 PERFAC, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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