



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Yurok TRES

Cultural Fire Management Council-
Yurok Cultural Burn Training Exchange

Weitchpec, CA ~ March 16-19, 2019

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Cultural Fire Management Council

Amidst the rain, the sleet and the snow, a small burn window opened up in mid-March in far northern California, and Cultural Fire Management Council (CFMC) pulled the trigger on TRES. Participants had been waiting since the beginning of February for the call to mobilize. They signed up for the CFMC-Yurok cultural burn training exchange in December with the understanding that the TRES target date of February 3-9 was flexible, dependent on the weather. On Tuesday, March 12, notice went out that it looked like a burn window was opening, and to be ready to mobilize. Final notice was given on Thursday, March 14 for all participants to arrive at the incident command post (ICP) on Saturday at 10:00 a.m. We planned to put fire on the ground on Sunday.

Despite the need for many participants and planners (and the caterer) to reshuffle their schedules, a full cadre showed up ready for action. After check-in and lunch, participants went out into the field to learn about the landscape and the local culture. The first stop was a traditional village site where the Yurok World Renewal Ceremony takes place. People gathered around the ceremonial dance house and a local elder spoke of putting the world back in balance. The blue sky above, the river flowing behind us, and a gentle breeze on our skin brought us back in time, put us in touch with a purpose greater than ourselves.

Leaving the dance site, we headed upriver to scout the units that we would be burning over the next few days. As participants walked the fire lines, cultural practitioners pointed out

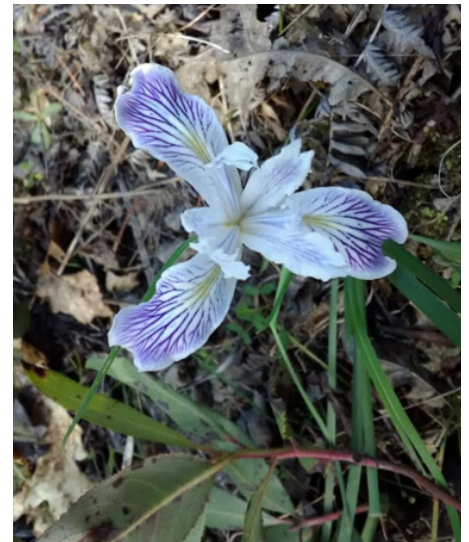
culturally significant plant species. Of particular interest were the hazel bushes that needed to be burned in order to produce new shoots for basket weaving. Local fire practitioners, familiar with the land, discussed wind patterns, firing techniques, the dense fuel load, potential hazards and safety. On the way back to the ICP, and dinner, the pack test was administered for those who needed it.

Following dinner, a local basket weaver displayed many of the different kinds of baskets used locally, as well as the materials used to make them. Two of the materials are fire dependent, while the others benefit from fire. This was the first of several cultural presentations during the course of the event.

Sunday dawned with clear skies overhead and temperatures expected to be around 70 degrees, a perfect day for burning. The fire and fuels manager from the Karuk Tribe filled the role of burn boss (RXB2), and the Yurok burn boss trainee took the lead in three successful days of burning. Over those days, the crew of 28 people burned 45 acres in some of the steepest, most fuel loaded land imaginable. In some places the fire lighters had to literally crawl under the brush to get to a place they could safely light from. The firing boss implemented an ignition pattern that both kept people safe and achieved the desired results. The people holding the line used almost no water, as the fire, and most of the smoke was sucked into the middle of the unit. The land was burned clean without killing the soil. Basket weavers will have 45 acres of hazel next year, deer and other animals will have a place to browse, and native plant species will once again thrive in their natural habitat.



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Wild iris, used for cordage © Elizabeth Azzuz

For more on the Yurok TRES, contact:

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For more on the TRES strategy, visit:

<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>

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 PERFACT, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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