

Cultural Fire Management Council Yurok TRES

Weitchpec, California
September 29-October 5, 2019

TRES—that magical word that means fire on the ground, land restoration, hazel for weaving, and so much more. TRES—a word we use so often we sometimes forget that everybody doesn't know what it means: Prescribed Fire Training Exchange. Firefighters coming from across the nation, across the ocean, to share in an experience that reaps benefits so much bigger than ourselves, benefits that will affect generations to come.

The Cultural Fire Management Council (CFMC) hosted their fall TRES the first week of October on the upper Yurok Reservation. Nearly 35 people took part, with skill levels ranging from never-been-on-a-fire-before to burn boss trainee. They came from five states and three countries, and from tribes, government agencies and private fire companies, working side by side with college students and local land owners.

The media also came in force with their cameras, notebooks and microphones, eager to get the word out through blog posts, newspaper and magazine articles, and video about good fire. A videographer from *National Geographic* and a podcaster from *Muse Ecology* had been at the spring Yurok TRES and were so enthralled they returned with their basic firefighter courses complete so they could serve in dual roles, firefighter type 2 and media.

After getting signed in, and introductions all round, the group traveled downriver to a ceremonial dance site where an elder dance leader and president of the CFMC shared information about the purpose of the dance, and how fire is tied into the

continuance of the Yurok culture. This was followed by a walk through of one of the burn units so participants could get familiar with the topography, get a sense of how dense the fuel load was, and learn about the culturally important species that would benefit from the fire they would be putting on the ground. After a short drive back to the incident command post, participants were welcomed by the Yurok tribal chair and indulged in a delicious dinner of locally caught salmon.

After dinner, a cultural practitioner gave a basket demonstration, explaining how baskets are essential to traditional Yurok lifeways, and that the hazel used as a frame for the baskets must be burned to render it useful for weaving. Several baskets were on display, as well as the raw materials used to make them. All the materials were either fire dependent, or benefited from fire. This presentation, like others throughout the TRES, helped participants understand that the training exchange is much more than just burning brush and increasing firefighter qualifications, it is about continuance of Native culture and land restoration.

Although the week started with rain, the sun soon shone and a couple of windy days dried things out. The crew was able to burn about 50 acres of land laden with hazel, medicinal plants and wild iris used for cordage, renewing those resources and opening up the site for deer to browse. And, as always, those who came as strangers, left as family.

Read More: "The Quiet, Intentional Fires of Northern California" (Kiliii Yüyan, *Wired*)

<https://www.wired.com/story/the-quiet-intentional-fires-northern-california/>



For more about the Yurok TRES:

Margo Robbins margo@culturalfire.org

For more about the TRES model:

<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>



Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges 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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