

Southern Blue Ridge Fire Fair

Warren Wilson College — Swannanoa, NC
September 10, 2022

By Juniper Odell

Juniper Odell is the Southern Blue Ridge Burn Crew Leader for The Nature Conservancy in North Carolina. The crew supports numerous burns of SBR Fire Learning Network partners

If you work in wildland fire, you are asked lots of questions about how and why. How do you conduct a prescribed fire? How do you put out wildfires? Why do you do controlled burns? So in the Southern Blue Ridge region, several FLN partners are hosting workshops to help the public better understand wildland fire. The new Southern Blue Ridge Prescribed Burn Association recently worked closely with the Forest Stewards Guild to hold one such event on the campus of Warren Wilson College, just outside Asheville.

The goal of the event was to let the public learn about the how and why of fire, and to provide time for people to network and ask questions. For participating organizations, it also was a time for outreach, for promoting Learn-and-Burn opportunities, and for job recruitment. Every agency or organization had something different to offer participants, covering a wide range of interests—including wildlife (NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Ruffed Grouse Society),



"What is a Learn-and-Burn?" was among the questions answered for the 75 or so participants in the SBR Fire Fair.

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jobs (NC Forest Service, TNC, USFS), wildfire mitigation (RC&D councils, NC Forest Service), Learn-and-Burn events (RC&D councils, SBR PBA), and more.

This event attracted 16 agencies and organizations, and about 75 community participants; people came from as far as eastern Tennessee and from Duke University, halfway across the state. In addition to the general public, there was a strong outreach effort to engage Warren Wilson students and people on the SBR PBA call list. This resulted in a diverse group of people attending.

The day began with a few talks. Tara Keyser, a USFS research forester, gave an outstanding one on fire ecology and history in the Southern Blue Ridge that was done in such a way that people new to fire lingo were not left in the dark, but the more experienced fire managers were still engaged. Smokey Bear also made a quick appearance and admitted that not all fire was bad.

The presentation portion also gave time for announcements about the four upcoming Learn-and-Burn events being held in our region. These are great events that allow people to attend a controlled burn and see firsthand how they are conducted. Many of the fire fair participants are landowners who are joining the PBA and want to start burning their own property. The hands-on time at a Learn-and-Burn is critical to learning how to safely and effectively do a burn. The NC

FALL 2022 SBR LEARN-AND-BURNS

Bailey Mountain Learn-and-Burn ([sign up](#))

Madison County

Burn Window: November 1-19, 2022

Sandy Mush Learn-and-Burn ([sign up](#))

Buncombe County

Burn Window: November 1-30, 2022

DuPont Learn-and-Burn ([sign up](#))

Transylvania County

Burn Window: November 15-December 15, 2022

Oak Hill Community Learn-and-Burn ([sign up](#))

Burke County

Burn Date: December 3, 2022

Backup Date: December 10, 2022



Toward the end of the day we realized many of the people hosting tables (including me, far right) were Warren Wilson College graduates—seven alumni were at the event, which made me proud of my alma mater. We are all passionate about what we do and that we do it well. I started thinking of more colleagues in the area that were not at the meeting that were also alumni or had at least attended WWC for part of their education, and there are many. My first burn was on the campus in 1999. The school's burning slowly dropped off over the years but the new Forestry Crew Supervisor (another alum) has plans to bring fire back to the campus woodlands this fall, and I hope to be there.

Prescribed Fire Council was there to answer questions and share information about upcoming North Carolina Certified Burner Courses as well.

The final portion of the day had participants “speed dating” the various agencies and organizations, which each had a table with hand-outs, poster presentations or maps explaining their area of work and how it relates to fire. Every five minutes people would rotate to a different table to chat about their specific interest. The room got loud—and stationed at the table for the TNC Southern Blue Ridge Burn Crew, I repeated myself about 20 times (and shared a hand-out about the crew). Despite the chaos it was lots of fun, and the time limit kept folks moving about the room.

A field portion had been scheduled, but heavy rain prevented us from driving through a muddy field. But it wasn't too much

rain to keep us from gathering at the local brewery later that day to continue our networking.

I believe that this event was such a success because we were able to get people together again in person. There is a special something about gathering face to face. For the young people still in college who don't know what they want to do when they graduate, it is vital that they see and meet others in their potential field of work, that they see the diversity in natural resources management, that they meet the people and connect. And homeowners concerned about their homes or wildlife getting harmed in burning got to hear firsthand from the fire managers how what we were doing is actually helping reduce harmful fuel build up and how burning is critical to creating a diverse ecosystem that wildlife need to thrive.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Blue Ridge RC&D Council
Carolina Land and Lakes RC&D Council
Conservation Corps of North Carolina
Consortium of Appalachian Fire Scientists and Managers
Foothills Land Conservancy
Forest Stewards Guild
Ivy River Partners
Mountain Valley RC&D Council
North Carolina Forest Service
North Carolina Prescribed Fire Council
North Carolina State Extension
North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society
Southern Blue Ridge Prescribed Burn Association
The Nature Conservancy
USDA Forest Service

For more about the SBR Burn Crew, contact:

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The Fire Learning Network 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 about PERFACT, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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