



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field



Mare Run controlled burn, April 2013 © Chuck Almarez

Central Appalachians Fire Learning Network Recent updates from the Virginia and West Virginia landscapes

January 2014

The Central Appalachians FLN partnership continues to grow each year—a few of the 2013 accomplishments and updates from the Virginia and West Virginia landscapes give a sense of its current scope and impact:

IN THE FIELD

Controlled Burns

By all accounts, 2013 was an extremely successful year for controlled burns. Of the 17,900 acres planned, FLN partners in Virginia and West Virginia completed burns on over 13,700 acres in the Allegheny and Potomac Highlands of Virginia and West Virginia, and north of the James River in Virginia. Plans for 2014 will also include burns conducted south of the James River and into southwestern Virginia. Partners are especially proud of the increased communication and coordination on burns

Staff from seven different agencies conducted the 456-acre Big Cobbler burn in April 2013 at Hidden Valley Dispersed Recreation Area on the George Washington National Forest.

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Updates on MOUs

Agreements among agencies are critical for enabling cross-jurisdictional collaboration. New or revised cooperating agreements or memoranda of understanding (MOU) were executed between the USDA Forest Service and Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (VA DCR) and between The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the USDA Forest Service Region 8 in 2013. Efforts continue on MOUs between Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries (VA DGIF) and both TNC and the Forest Service, with the goal of having the agreements in place before the 2014 spring burn season. An additional MOU between VA DGIF and the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) is under development; it will primarily facilitate partnerships in eastern Virginia, but will benefit the FLN as well, because USFWS frequently sends crews from coastal wildlife refuges to help with controlled burns in the mountains.

this past year, with several burns having five or more agencies and organizations participating. Partners also travelled beyond their typical areas of responsibility to assist others across the two states. The on-going commitment by all involved to training and safety enabled a remarkably productive year.

Non-Native Invasive Species (NNIS) Control

With funding from Scaling-up to Promote Ecosystem Resiliency (SPER), FLN partners were able to treat 832 acres of NNIS in Highland Wildlife Management Area (VA DGIF), Cowbane Prairie Natural Area Preserve (VA DCR), South River Preserve (TNC), and





The Monitoring Working Group held a workshop on June 26 at which 23 participants from the George Washington & Jefferson National Forests, Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation, Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries and The Nature Conservancy met to refresh plant identification skills, review monitoring protocols and share updates. © TNC/Marek Smith

the George Washington National Forest. Many of these acres were treated in burn units or special biological areas where fire-adapted species are present. SPER funding helped leverage NNIS control efforts initiated by the Potomac Highlands Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area (<http://www.phcwpma.org/>) and effectively linked those activities with other management actions taken by the FLN. Additional SPER funds allocated this fall will allow continuation of this work in the Allegheny and Potomac Highlands in 2014.

Monitoring Working Group

The FLN Monitoring Working Group was very productive in 2013, with progress on a number of projects, most notably the revision of the collaboratively-developed Forest Structure and Composition (FSC) monitoring protocol and data forms. The revisions included: 1) adding a history of FLN monitoring goals and measurable objectives that can be referenced in burn plans, 2) attaching appen-

dices to aid in determining plot origin placement and protocol methodology, 3) revising and updating plant species lists, 4) reformatting to facilitate more user-friendly data entry into a FEAT and FIREMON Integrated (FFI) database, and

5) development of standardized data entry templates for FFI. Current versions of the FSC protocols and data forms can be found on the Conservation Gateway (<http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/NetworkProducts/Pages/Central-Apps-Forest-Structure-Comp-Monitoring.aspx>).

Significant progress was also made on entering a backlog of previously collected data. By year's end, 55% of pre- and/or post-burn visits to the 333 total macroplots monitored by The Nature Conservancy and the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests (GWJNF) had been entered into FFI.

The Working Group also welcomed two new fuels technicians from the GWJNF, Samantha Schinnell from the North Zone and Butch Shaw from the South Zone.

For more information about these projects, contact the working group co-leaders Nikole Swaney ((540) 839-3599, nswaney@tnc.org) or John Moncure ((540) 839-2521, johnmoncure@fs.fed.us).



Kadrin Anderson, Laurel Schablien and David Fox sample one of the monitoring plots in the Big Wilson controlled burn unit (July 2013). © TNC/Nikole Swaney

Grasslands Working Group

Ryan Klopf ((540) 580-6341, ryan.klopf@dcr.virginia.gov) and Tyler Urgo ((540) 290-0562, tyler.urgo@dgif.virginia.gov) have agreed to co-lead the new FLN Grasslands Working Group. As the partnership begins to see improvements in ground cover diversity after controlled burns and continues to expand management beyond forested communities, this Working Group will play a critical role in facilitating the understanding of restoration activities in grasslands, prairies, glades, woodlands and similar communities.

Initial plans for 2014 include developing a digital library of resources (sources, lists, etc.), sharing native seed mix lists, developing a database of good native forb collection sites in the region, and scheduling field trip(s) to several demonstration sites.

SHARING SCIENCE

Wildland Fire in the Appalachians Conference

The organizers extend thanks to those who were able to attend the Wildland Fire in the Appalachians Conference sponsored by the Association for Fire Ecology and the Consortium of Appalachian Fire Managers and Scientists (CAFMS) in October, and express regret that so many federal agency partners were unable to attend due to the government furlough. Despite that unfortunate situation, over 150 people from throughout the Appalachians region did attend, taking part in more than 30 sessions and an outstanding field trip to the Fenwick Mines and Mill Creek areas of the Jefferson National Forest. There was also excellent attendance at the gathering of the Central Appalachians and Southern Blue Ridge FLNs on the second night of the conference, with its opportunity for catching up with so

JFSP Consortia

The Consortium of Appalachian Fire Managers and Scientists (CAFMS) announced its next fire management and bat foraging habitat workshop in the latest issue of its newsletter (<http://www.cafms.org/newsletter/CAFMSnewslettervol3no4.pdf>). The workshop will be held April 30 – May 1, 2014 at Mammoth Cave National Park, Kentucky. For more information or to get on the CAFMS mailing list, contact Helen Mohr (helen@cafms.org).

The neighboring Oak Woodlands and Forests Fire Consortium recently hosted a webinar by Greg Nowacki (USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station) on Oak, Fire and Mesophication: Past, Current and Future Trends of Oak in the Eastern United States; the recording of the presentation can be found on their webinar archive site (<http://www.oakfirescience.com/webinars/>).

many colleagues, networking and sharing good stories and learning.

Proceedings from this conference—including papers and abstracts intended for presentation by those who were unable to attend—are being compiled.

Recent Literature

Among the peer-reviewed articles published in 2013 relevant to fire history and management in eastern forests were several by FLN authors, including Lauren Howard, Melissa Thomas-Van Gundy, Tom Schuler, Mark Ford and Karen

Powers. The FLN assembled a fire literature bibliography and PDF copies of over 115 papers that was distributed on a USB drive at the Wildland Fire in the Appalachians Conference; for a copy of this, contact Nikole Swaney ((540) 839-3599, nswaney@tnc.org).

Ecological Zones Completed for Southwestern Virginia

In November, Steve Simon of Ecological Modeling and Fire Ecology Inc. completed mapping of ecological zones for 5.6 million acres in southwestern Virginia. This FLN-



supported project includes mapping of potential natural vegetation on the Jefferson National Forest and adjacent conservation lands, and together with Ecological Zones on the George Washington National Forest: First Approximation Mapping (2011), completes mapping of over 10 million acres in the Ridge and Valley and Blue Ridge provinces of western Virginia and eastern West Virginia. Both reports are available on the Conservation Gateway (<http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/NetworkProducts/Pages/Simon-MappingEcoZones.aspx>) and GIS data layers are available on request.

A workshop for GWJNF staff on January 28, 2014 will review the map products and examples of how the maps have already been used for determining current conditions in the GWNF revised management plan, modeling ecological prioritization of burn units, and conducting an ecological departure analysis for Lower Cowpasture Restoration Project.

For more information or GIS data layers, contact Marek Smith ((540) 839-3599, marek_smith@tnc.org).

OUTREACH

Education and Outreach Working Group

The brochure *Controlled Burning for Healthy Forest Management in the Appalachians* was revised, with photos and fire history specific to Virginia and West Virginia. An electronic version is at <http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/NetworkProducts/Pages/ControlledBurn-Brochure.aspx>, and print copies for distribution will be available soon—contact Marek Smith.

Work continues on the development of five 24"x36" interpretive panels that will be installed at Douthat State Park (VA DCR), Warm Springs Mountain Preserve (TNC), Hidden Valley Dispersed Recreation Area (GWNF), and a VA DGIF Wildlife Management Area. These signs are expected to be completed in time for spring 2014 burns at several locations.

Lastly, planning is underway for a "Wildland Fire and the Media" workshop for the spring. The workshop, which was postponed from 2013, will introduce members of the media to fire ecology and management topics.

COMING NEXT

Prescribed Fire Training Exchange

The Central Appalachians FLN will host a prescribed fire training exchange (TRES) in the mountains and coastal plain of Virginia, March 31-April 11, 2014. Trainees in RXB2, FIRB, ENGB, FFT1, FEMO and other positions as needed will be working with experienced firefighters from federal, state, county, private and non-government organizations and agencies to conduct a number of moderate complexity burns in pine savannah, grasslands and Appalachian hardwood forests. Participant nominations closed on December 31, but more details can be found on the Conservation Gateway (http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/Pages/2014_trex_announce.aspx) or by contacting Sam Lindblom ((434) 951-0580, slindblom@tnc.org) or Sami Schinnell ((540) 432-8262 slschinnell@fs.fed.us).

For more information on the Central Appalachians FLN:

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Staff from the USFWS were among those that conducted the multi-partner Mare Run controlled burn. A professional photographer was hired to document this burn, and the resulting photos are being used for signs, brochures and other outreach. © Chuck Almaraz

The Fire Learning Network (FLN), Scaling-up to Promote Ecosystem Resiliency (SPER) and prescribed fire training exchanges (TRES) are part of the *Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency through Collaboration: Landscapes, Learning and Restoration*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information, contact Lynn Decker at ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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