



Fire Learning Network

LESSONS LEARNED

Media Best Practices for Training Exchanges

Lessons from the International Training Exchange

New Mexico, September 2012

Tracey Stone

Background & Story: The Nature Conservancy, Fire Learning Network and Santa Fe National Forest hosted an International Prescribed Fire Training event in northern New Mexico. The fire training brought Spanish-speaking and bilingual forest experts together from Argentina, Puerto Rico, Mexico and the U.S. to share and learn about prescribed burns, fire management and conservation practices to take back to their home landscapes. They implemented several prescribed burns, in addition to orientations and presentations. The fire exchange programs began in 2008 to help address the nation's shortfall of qualified burners.

Placements: Media staff working with event organizers secured eight placements from local newspapers and national outlets, ranging from E&E Greenwire and NY Times online to Univision and local radio and newspapers (see box for links).

Recipe for Success

- Great story elements:
 - topical (came on the heels of one of the worst wildfire seasons)
 - great visuals (fire on ground, forests)
 - heroes
 - critical work (protecting communities, water supplies, recreation)
 - global impact (experts participating from many countries)
- Early planning
- Pitching persistence
- Great on-the-ground coordination

Timeline for Success

3 Months before the Event:

- Research the topic and develop questions for the leader
- Meet with project leader to assess media goals and logistics, identifying opportunities and challenges:
 - Opportunity: Leader Jeremy Bailey clearly stated that media was important to the event and that he would take measures to ensure journalists could get on the ground and close to the action, and that fire experts would be prepped for interviews. Jeremy also communicated the importance of 24 hours' notice being needed to ensure the best possible story and the safety of all involved.

Media Coverage of International Prescribed Fire Training Exchange, September 16-30, 2012

Rio Rancho Observer

"Fire Experts Train in Area Forests"
http://www.rroobserver.com/news/local/article_e07b0466-feb1-11e1-adf8-0019bb2963f4.html

Univision New Mexico (Jim Morrison) regional newscast (story begins at 22:21)

<http://www.kluz.tv/segmento/33/streaming/noticieros.html>

KSFR Radio, Santa Fe (Charles Maynard) / regional news cast (story begins at 12:02)
[http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/ksfr/news.newsmain/article/0/1/1946852/KSFR.Local/%3Cb%3ESept..21.At.Noon.Rabies.incidents.up.\(Listen\)%3Cb%3E](http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/ksfr/news.newsmain/article/0/1/1946852/KSFR.Local/%3Cb%3ESept..21.At.Noon.Rabies.incidents.up.(Listen)%3Cb%3E)

Los Alamos Monitor (Tris DeRoma) "Fire Network Hosts Exchange"
<http://www.lamonitor.com/content/fire-network-hosts-exchange-more-photos-added>

KOA-TV (Eric Green) "International Firefighters Train in New Mexico"
<http://www.koat.com/news/new-mexico/albuquerque/International-firefighters-train-in-New-Mexico/-/9153728/16775892/-/1wedma/-/index.html>

New York Times Green blog (Glenn Swain) "Burning a Forest to Save It"
<http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/26/burning-a-forest-to-save-it/#more->

Greenwire (April Reese) "Learning Goes Both Ways in Nature Conservancy's Fire School"
<http://www.eenews.net/gw/> (October 3, 2012)

- Challenge: The event would be taking place over the course of two weeks, an hour-and-a-half to two hours from the metro media market, and in an area with spotty cell service.
- Gather assets such as photos and video that can be shared with media. For example, I solicited head/field shots of Jeremy in case he was booked for a TV phone interview, since the Albuquerque metro area media market was two hours away.
- Contact partners early to discuss media strategy/roles/deadlines. The Conservancy took the lead on this project. We agreed I would keep Forest Service in the loop when we secured interest.

1 Month before the Event

- Write a media release and vet it through partners.
- Build a local targeted media list. Because fire experts were Spanish-speaking or bilingual we reached out to Spanish-language media.
- Meet/communicate with other media teams in the organization to discuss regional/national outreach ideas and determine roles. In this case, I was going to reach out to the NY Times and E&E while the national office contacted Univision.

1 Week before the Event

- Email pitches/release with photos. I included a note that the training leaders needed 24 hours' notice to ensure the best possible story and safety.
- Follow-up phone calls: be persistent, take notes and schedule return calls.
- As soon as I secured interest, I connected the journalist with Mary Huffman, who managed on-the-ground media coordination. I reminded the journalists that the leaders requested 24 hours to set up interviews to ensure best possible story, on the ground with fire. (Managing expectations!)
- Mary and I tracked media hits and shared stories with key team players/partners/leadership. It was exciting to share the tremendous work on the ground through the creative media stories.
- In an effort to extend our reach, some of the story links were posted on Facebook sites (e.g. FLN and NM and national Conservancy sites).

Lessons Learned

Keep calling reporters until you connect live and in person. I was determined to get Univision to cover this story. I called four times before connecting live with a reporter. If you haven't developed a relationship with a reporter inside a media shop, you may have to try a couple different ones (one at a time). One reporter may not get jazzed with your story, but his neighbor loves it. If I reach out to a second reporter in the same shop, I always mention I tried to connect with the other person but didn't have success (full disclosure). I had success with Univision and KOAT (ABC) with this tactic.

Logistics were challenging. Fire experts were working long days in the woods where there was little or no cell service. In most cases, connections with media needed to be made early in the morning or in the evening. We realized this very early in the game. Mary Huffman stepped up to be our on-the-ground media coordinator. She responded as quickly as she could. She was thorough and ensured our media partners had everything they needed. The role Mary filled was critical to our success.

The Fire Learning Network is supported by *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 about the FLN, contact Lynn Decker at ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



All participants at the training exchange were briefed and prepared to speak with the media, building their comfort with the experience, and giving the reporter a richer story than is typically available from designated spokespersons.

© Mary Huffman/TNC

Participating Organizations

Centro de Investigación y Extensión Forestal Andino Patagónico (Argentina)
 Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (Mexico)
 Ministerio de Agricultura, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente (Spain)
 National Park Service—Bandelier NM
 New Mexico Highlands University
 Servicio Provincial de Manejo de Fuego (Chubut, Argentina)
 The Nature Conservancy—Arizona, Costa Rica, Michigan, New Mexico
 USDA Forest Service—Santa Fe NF

For more information, contact:

Jeremy Bailey
 Fire Learning Network / Training
jeremy_bailey@tnc.org
 (801) 599-1394

Mary Huffman
 Fire Learning Network
mhuffman@tnc.org
 (720) 438-5811

Tracey Kiest Stone
 Senior Media Specialist
tstone@tnc.org
 (602) 322-6999



An equal opportunity provider