

April 2006



DISPATCH

*Emerging Lessons From
The Fire Learning Network*

FIRE LEARNING NETWORK A cooperative project of The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service, and the Dept. of the Interior, the network was created in 2002 to catalyze efforts to reduce hazardous fuels across the country. Part of the larger joint program *Restoring Fire-Adapted Ecosystems* that includes fire education and training components, the network operates at both local and national levels to overcome barriers to implementing ecologically appropriate fuels reduction and restoration projects.

<http://tncfire.org/usfln>

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY FIRE INITIATIVE This 19-person team is working to assess, abate and prevent fire-related threats to biodiversity conservation around the world. In the U.S., the Initiative is working with a variety of partners to promote ecologically appropriate fire management, develop and implement science-based planning tools and monitoring techniques, and further fire education and training efforts.

<http://nature.org/fire>



The Nature Conservancy
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

The “Restoration Café” opened its doors for business March 30 at the 2006 national FLN meeting. Modeled after World Café principles and process (see www.theworldcafe.com), the “Restoration Café” was designed to stimulate meaningful conversations, learning and new ideas about the nexus of fire regime restoration, collaboration and science.

The Café comprised 12 tables, each offering a different menu item: a carefully crafted question focusing on a different dimension of landscape-scale fire regime restoration and fuels reduction. Participants rotated from table to table in 30-minute intervals. Each table had a host who documented the conversation and helped promote lively dialogue. Key ideas were written on table cloths and notepads and posted on the wall throughout the two-hour session.

Café patrons took full advantage of this opportunity, generating new ideas and



The Restoration Café allowed meeting participants to engage in focused, small-group discussions on a variety of fire restoration topics.

—Photo by Jen Schimmenti

SAMPLE RESTORATION CAFÉ QUESTIONS

- **What are the really tough challenges that continue to get in the way of restoring fire adapted ecosystems?**
- **What skills, abilities and tools are needed for people to succeed at leading collaborative restoration projects?**
- **How can learning networks contribute to effecting larger conservation impacts nationally and internationally?**

enthusiasm for tackling persistent challenges such as the need for simple and effective monitoring schemes, lack of public support for fire projects, and skills to improve collaboration. Participants also reported that they made important new connections after discovering peers who shared their interests. “I found it very valuable” said Dick Bahr, fire specialist with the National Park Service. “I thought the best thing was seeing, hearing and even feeling, other perspectives.”

Common themes emerging from the Café conversations included various suggestions to expand the FLN and connect it to other groups, the need to create better incentives and institutional support for collaboration, and the importance of personal relationships to building trust and making collaboration work. Participants gave the Café high marks and said they would welcome future opportunities to engage in Café-style discussions.

The 2006 national FLN meeting was held in Portland, Oregon, in conjunction with a larger fuels-focused meeting sponsored by the Conservancy, the International

Association of Wildland Fire and the U.S. Interagency Fuels Coordination Group. Sixty-four participants from at least 17 states and a variety of state and federal agencies and NGOs attended the FLN portion of the conference.

In addition to the Café, the agenda featured presentations on: collaboration, ecological monitoring, a new fire education DVD developed by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, national-level policy considerations and principles of learning networks. Newly retired Department of the Interior FLN point-of-contact Anne Jeffery was thanked for her contributions to the FLN and given an award at the luncheon.

GET INVOLVED!

If you're interested in participating in a regional or national level meeting, or just learning more:

- **Browse the FLN Web site**
<http://tncfire.org/usfln>
- **Join and contribute to the FLN listserv**
http://tncfire.org/training_listservs
- **Contact TNC or agency leads:**
Lynn Decker, The Nature Conservancy Fire Initiative ldecker@tnc.org; 801-320-0524
Roy Johnson, Dept. of the Interior roy_johnson@nifc.blm.gov; 208-387-5163
Sarah Robertson, US Forest Service sarahrobertson@fs.fed.us; 208-387-5222