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FLN DISPATCH

*Emerging Lessons From
The Fire Learning Network*

U.S. FIRE LEARNING NETWORK

A cooperative project of The Nature Conservancy, agencies of the Interior Department and the USDA Forest Service, the network was created in 2002. Part of the larger joint program, **Fire, Landscapes and People: A Conservation Partnership**, which includes education and training components, the network operates at both national and local levels to overcome barriers to reducing hazardous fuels build-up and restoring fire-dependent ecosystems.

<http://tncfire.org/usfln>

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It started with an e-mail from a BLM fire training officer in Boise. She was looking for trainee opportunities on prescribed fire, and said that federal fire practitioners were willing to pay their own way to and from a site to get such training. The Nature Conservancy had already planned to improve conservation outcomes by sharing fire crews and other resources among state chapters. Fire Training and Networks Coordinator Jeremy Bailey recognized this as an opportunity to expand the scope and scale of the activity. He spoke with landscape leaders in the Great Plains FLN, who began experimenting with a solution: training exchanges that integrate training opportunities with on-the-ground restoration. In addition to the training and treatments that result from the exchanges, they are hoping to create long-term efficiencies through interagency collaboration.

Most FLN landscapes are working to increase the amount of prescribed fire and thinning for both ecological reasons and fuel reduction. Since the inception of the Fire Learning Network, various landscapes have identified a shortage of qualified prescribed fire practitioners as a barrier to realizing their restoration and fuel reduction goals. Conservancy and agency fire staffs



Todd Schmidt (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), Jeremy Bailey (TNC) and Neal Brown (Wild Mountain Fire and Forestry) discuss the effects of the test fire before making a go/no-go decision on a prescribed burn.

—Photo by Carole Bell/TNC

TRAINING EXCHANGES HOSTED BY GREAT PLAINS FLN BUILD PRESCRIBED FIRE CAPACITY

John Ortmann of The Nature Conservancy traveled to the Refugio-Goliad Prairie (TX) in February and to the Centennial Valley (MT) in late summer as a trainee and completed his Firing Boss evaluations. He also hosted exchanges at the Niobrara (NE) FLN site in April and October.

At the February exchange **Darren Turner**, a BLM Fuels Officer, became qualified as a Burn Boss. During the exchange he also mentored Firing Boss trainee John Ortmann.

Kelly Ann Gorman, a National Park Service employee, worked on her Engine Boss Position Task Book at the August exchange. During the exchange she was dispatched to a wildfire a few miles from the controlled burn she was working on, and provided initial action support to the operation, which was being managed by local municipal fire departments.

face the common barrier of accomplishing certain training taskbooks; however, they face training bottlenecks in different—and often complementary—areas. The joint training exchanges held this year at the Refugio-Goliad Prairie (TX) and Niobrara (NE) landscapes have allowed Conservancy and agency practitioners to work together, with each attendee being a student in some roles and mentor in others. After three exchanges, 22 practitioners got trainee experience, and seven task books were completed (three Burn Bosses, three Firing Bosses and one Fire Effects Monitor).

These training exchanges will also help fill another need. Resource managers across the country are trying to scale up prescribed fire efforts, but landscape-scale restoration presents staffing challenges. It sometimes requires a large team working in a brief burning window to accomplish the objectives of prescribed fire. In few cases is it practical for a project or agency to hire such a crew for such limited time periods. Building teams across traditional boundaries can help alleviate this problem. Teams made up of both Conservancy and agency practitioners also benefit from differences in background experience, home unit vegetation and organizational structure, providing a team with both a broader knowledge base during operations and more opportunities for informal learning.

The past year's training exchanges brought together practitioners from four federal agencies (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), a state park, the private sector, and numerous state chapters of The Nature Conservancy. Participants came from 15 states from across the country.

Nearly 8,000 acres in the Great Plains FLN were treated during these exchanges. More important, the exchanges contributed to the expertise needed for future treatments, and to building the teams that span organizations and agencies; such teams will be better suited to manage both prescribed and natural fires at landscape scales.

The training model itself has spread to other landscapes. Building on the success of the exchanges hosted by the Great Plains sites, similar exchanges have taken place in Missouri and Montana and others are being planned in Arkansas, Georgia, Oregon, Minnesota and Texas. Not all of the host sites for these exchanges are currently affiliated with the U.S. Fire Learning Network—but participants learn about Integrated Fire Management, and so are in a good position to consider the FLN model as a means for meeting their landscape restoration goals.

