

Fire Networks

Impact Report 2025

Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

Fire Learning Network

Indigenous Peoples Burning Network

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges





About the Partnership

We see it on the nightly news. Communities are increasingly vulnerable to severe wildfires. Our wildland fire workforce is stretched to its limit. Areas we depend on for clean water, wildlife habitat and recreation are unhealthy. Landscapes that need beneficial fire haven't seen it, and the relationship between people and fire is broken.

We must do better, and we can.

Centering the experience and knowledge of wildland fire and community resilience practitioners, the Fire Networks partnership helps people and places find pathways to a better future with fire. We work with public and private partners to develop a wildland fire workforce for the future, restore fire-adapted ecosystems, revitalize Indigenous fire cultures, and prepare communities for wildfire.

The networks are coordinated by staff from The Nature Conservancy, Watershed Research and Training Center and University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Cooperative Extension.



Dear Friends,

We're proud to share with you this Impact Report for the Fire Networks partnership. It reflects the progress we made in 2025 and a growing movement rooted in people, place and fire.

When our partnership team met in the Carolina Sandhills last February, we were surrounded by a vibrant fire culture shaped by Tribal leaders, prescribed burn associations and land management organizations. It was a powerful reminder that fire stewardship is not just technical—it's cultural, relational and human. Fire historian Stephen Pyne describes humans as the "keystone species" for fire on Earth. Our relationship with fire is a mutual-assistance pact, and it's essential to the future we're building together.

The Fire Networks support a future where fire is not feared, but understood and embraced as a tool for healing landscapes and communities. We build capacity for integrated fire management—where fire is used intentionally to reduce risk, restore ecosystems and empower communities to steward the places they call home.

Last year we saw our vision of viable fire cultures become more clear. With support from government and philanthropic partners, we mobilized and connected hundreds of fire practitioners, supported training and burn implementation across North America, saw cultural fire programs emerge from intergenerational exchanges between Tribes, and elevated voices of community leaders shaping state and national fire systems.



Marek Smith
North America Fire Director
The Nature Conservancy

We're deeply grateful to all who made this work possible—those who support and enable it, and, most importantly, the people leading this work in their places. Their passion, dedication and vision are creating better fire futures.

We've spent decades growing capacity together, largely thanks to generous, sustained public investments. But we know getting where we need to go and making deep, lasting change to wildland fire management also requires the vision and support of private foundations and individuals who seek to work along side us and share the responsibility for our relationship with fire.

This report demonstrates what is possible when people are trusted, connected, and resourced to lead. The work ahead requires sustained partnership, shared responsibility, and long-term commitment—and we invite you to be part of it.

With gratitude,



Michelle Medley-Daniel
Co-Executive Director
The Watershed Research and Training Center

MAREK *Michelle*

1,172

fire practitioners
shared knowledge, built skills and applied prescribed fire across 29,360 acres at 16 experiential Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX)

124

on-the-ground fire management projects
moved forward with assistance from the 90 crew members on our prescribed fire modules

164 million

acres of landscapes
in the Fire Learning Network (FLN) where local partnerships worked to restore fire adapted ecosystems

23

tribal communities
supported each other in Indigenous-led fire stewardship, intergenerational learning and knowledge exchange through the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network (IPBN)

469

community leaders
were connected through the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net), learning from one another and taking collective action to strengthen community wildfire preparedness and manage post-fire recovery

3,000

subscribers
received our weekly blog, which features voices from across the Fire Networks

1,990

people interested in wildland fire
were subscribed to the Networker for news, resources & training listings that connect them to information and opportunities

109

trainings and peer-learning opportunities
were offered, covering topics ranging from best practices for Community Wildfire Protection Plans to the effects of beaver restoration on wildfire, and from working with Indigenous partners to managing federal grants

Where We Worked

In 2025, we primarily worked through people in communities and landscapes across 40 U.S. states and three Canadian provinces.

The lessons and program models also reach practitioners across North America as well as in Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, England, Germany, Portugal, South Korea and Spain.

How We Work

Build partnerships and foster collaborative approaches.

Invest in people.

Create enabling conditions.

Share knowledge and spark innovation through learning networks.

While state and national policy, funding and public perception influence work on the ground, the Fire Networks know that changing fire cultures starts with people in a place. **We help people navigate their own pathways toward a better relationship with fire where they live and work.** We invest in local fire practitioners and community leaders, connecting them with each other, and with programs, training, tools and resources they can use to help their communities and landscapes live better with fire. Then, we amplify these local solutions and approaches, sharing them with policymakers and other place-based leaders so that information can flow back and forth between the people on the ground and decision-makers at state and national scales.

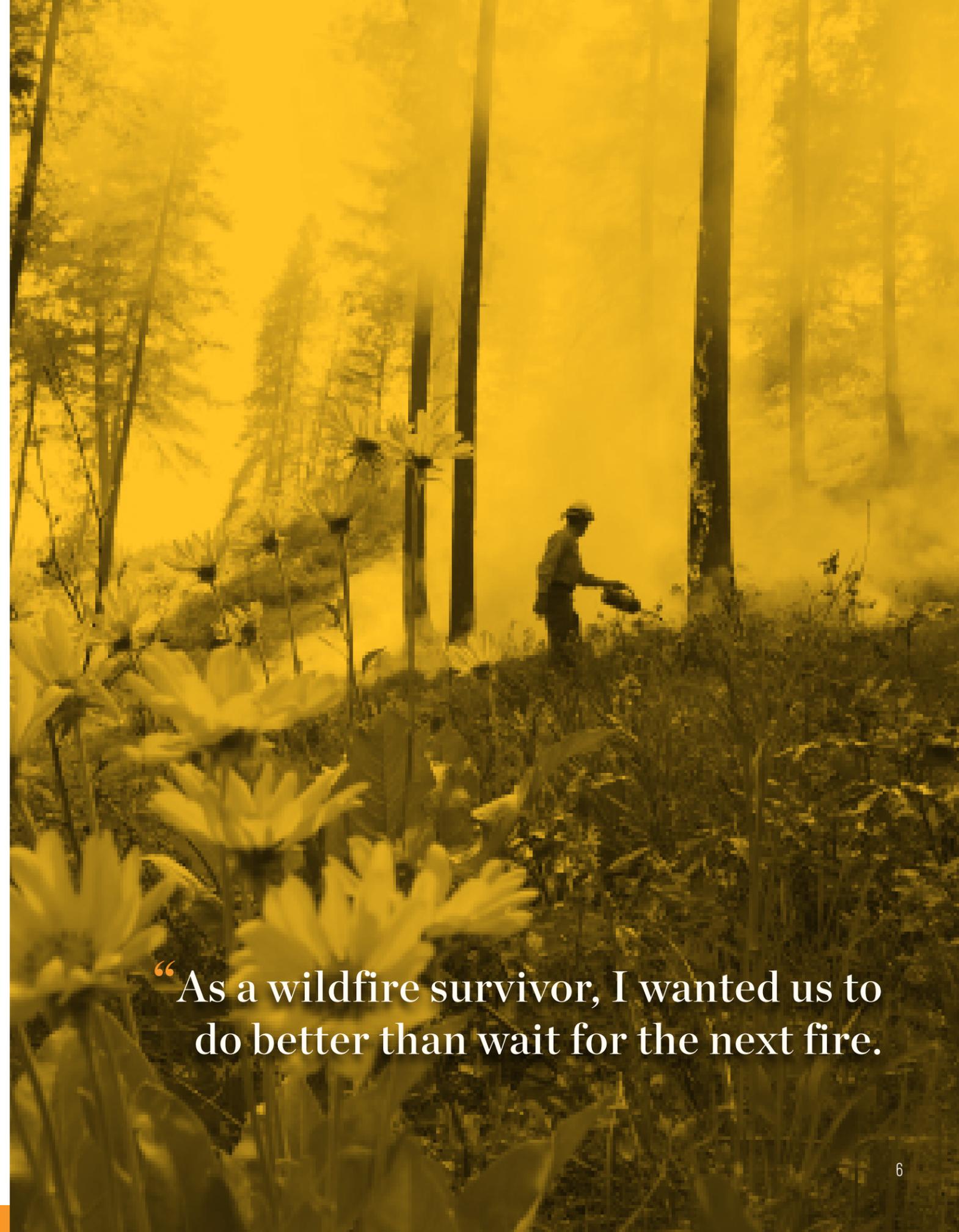
The Fire Networks create the infrastructure that supports action and provides a community for leaders working to build better fire futures. By investing in people first, we enable practice, influence policy, and scale solutions across landscapes and communities. These stories represent just a fraction of the work we help our many partners make happen, but they underscore a critical truth: **Sustained investment and shared responsibility are essential for transforming fire cultures.**

No one can address fire alone—the risks and solutions are collective, and so is the path forward.

What This Looks Like

The following pages share five stories that illustrate the Fire Networks' interconnected strategies that build trust-based relationships and better fire futures.

Woven into each story, you'll see partnerships and collaborative approaches advancing wildfire resilience. You'll hear about community action, experiential training, the spread and adaptation of ideas and innovations, and mentoring and leadership development.



“As a wildfire survivor, I wanted us to do better than wait for the next fire.”

More than
300 people
have taken part in a Loup River TRES since 2010, taking their experiences home to 21 states as well as Canada, Ecuador, South Africa and Spain.

Applauding the Loup River TRES: A 15-Year Success Story

The first Loup River Prescribed Fire Training Exchange was held in Nebraska in 2010. The first iPad had just been introduced, and Apolo Ohno won eight medals at the Vancouver Olympics.

After 15 years, Pheasants Forever **will host the last Loup TRES in March 2026**. That ending is cause for celebration, not mourning.

Over those 15 years, the Loup TRES hosted fire practitioners from across the U.S. and around the world. Hundreds of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and affiliations have received hands-on training and in turn helped apply prescribed fire to over 30,000 acres of grassland across central Nebraska.

Perhaps even more importantly, the Loup TRES has been a **critical tool in partners' overall strategy to restore prescribed fire** to private lands across the region. It is never held

in the same place twice, and those who own the land where the TRES burns have taken place are expected to continue that burning in the future through Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) or other mechanisms, outside the TRES framework.

The end of the Loup TRES is evidence **this model has worked**. Areas with enough private land to host a TRES have done so, and have seen results as PBAs flourished and landowners continued to burn.

The Fire Networks, particularly the Fire Learning Network (FLN), have been a key partner in this success. Our team has provided consistent funding and support for the Loup TRES since it began. Lead organizer Ben Wheeler is a long-time member of the FLN, and in that capacity has brought his expertise in supporting PBAs and hosting TRES events to help spur progress in places including New Mexico and California.

A Vision in Action: All Hands Burning in the Klamath Mountains

On Six Rivers National Forest in California, wildfire is familiar. What happened on July 8, 2025, as the Butler Fire climbed a ridge near Tribal and other private inholdings there, was **something new**. As the USDA Forest Service worked to manage the blaze in this ancestral territory of the Karuk Tribe, the community didn't flee.

Instead, **relying on deep relationships with fire and with each other**, the Karuk Tribe, Mid Klamath Watershed Council and partners worked with the Butler Fire federal Incident Management Team to light concurrent cultural and prescribed burns.

On one side of Butler Creek, Indigenous cultural fire practitioners ignited rows of flames in the flashy dry grasses. Across the water, prescribed fire practitioners lit more burns.

Partnerships in this landscape inspired the creation of the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network (IPBN).

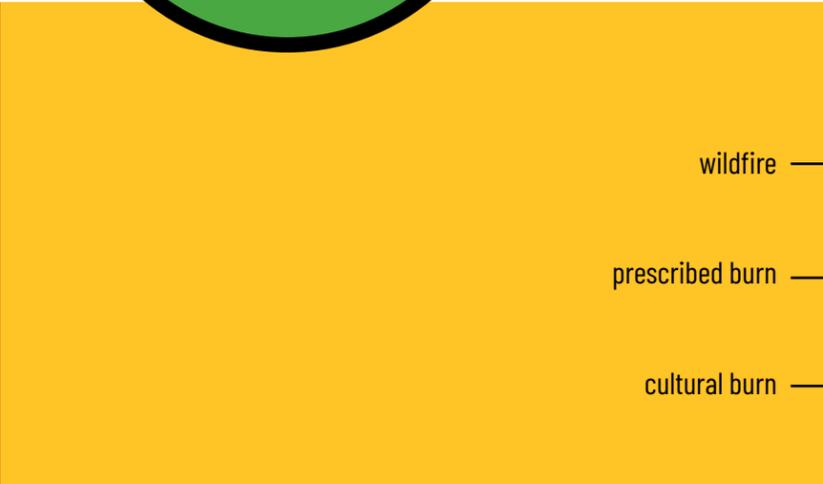
The real-time neighborhood protection lowered the risk for wind-

driven spot fires and created a safety zone for residents and firefighters when the wildfire arrived at adjacent containment lines two days later. The fire ultimately burned 21,058 acres but no homes.

This was the first time in recent history, or possibly ever, Tribal and local groups were able to **implement prescribed and cultural burns** while directly coordinating with the federal Incident Management Team working an **active wildfire**.

It wasn't the first time the Karuk Tribe and local partners had ignited concurrent prescribed and cultural burns, though. With trust built over 24 years of collaborative burning, and the implementation of over 400 prescribed and cultural burns on private and Tribal lands, these partners have built a robust "All Hands, All Lands" team that is burning year-round except during cultural limited periods in the spring.

"We don't own land," says Butler resident Will Harling, quoting Karuk ceremonial leader, Leaf Hillman. "We own a responsibility to the land."



Across the United States, Being Prepared for Smoke is a Smart Investment

“Your eyes run. Your nose drips. You can’t breathe. You don’t want to go outside.”

This is how Liz Davy, project coordinator for the Greater Yellowstone Fire Action Network (GYFAN) describes the typical impact of wildfire smoke.

Smoke is part of day-to-day life in places—like Greater Yellowstone’s high-elevation ecosystem—where fire plays an important natural role.

Extreme wildfire and extended wildfire seasons are exacerbating smoke impacts, too, and being proactive about mitigating those impacts is integral to wellbeing in communities across the United States.

That’s why the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network—FAC Net—invests to **support smoke readiness efforts and offers peer-to-peer learning** for communities preparing for smoke across the West, with hopes of expanding eastward.

“We invested in four communities in the Greater Yellowstone region to support their ongoing smoke ready communities work,” says FAC Net Director Emily Troisi.

One example: In Sublette County, Wyoming, with support from FAC Net, the Office of Emergency Management purchased high-efficiency particulate air filters for a filter loan program during smoke events. With these filters, the office created clean air spaces of refuge: During one heavy smoke day, use of one of these filters at a public health office helped give 15-20 residents access to a clean air space.

More communities have followed suit. As part of its ongoing support for clean-air work, GYFAN has loaned filters and air-quality monitoring equipment to many of these communities.

For GYFAN’s Davy, being more smoke ready is part of the fabric of life in the region.

“People in the Greater Yellowstone Area work and play outdoors,” she says. “Getting information out about air quality benefits those who depend on being outside. **Being reasonably prepared is achievable**, and support from the Fire Networks is helping make that happen.”

Growing Careers, Growing a Workforce

Grace McLeod was just out of college when she fell in love with prescribed fire. An intern doing fire-effects data analysis, McLeod said yes when her supervisor at The Nature Conservancy in North Carolina asked if she wanted to learn to burn.

The answer has been yes ever since, and today, McLeod is part of TNC’s North America Fire Prescribed Fire Modules program.

Administered with backing from the Fire Networks, the USDA Forest Service-supported program focuses on **expanding the prescribed fire workforce** and improving community safety and landscape health through proactive work with fire. In part, it bolsters Forest Service capacity to seize opportunities for prescribed fire on priority public lands.

Acres burned is a measure of success, and through the end of 2025, the modules had helped with 105,000 acres of prescribed fire nationwide.

The program is also very much about investing in people, says Miranda Flora, its prescribed fire project manager.

“Training is a big part of our strategy,” Flora says. “This means training our own workforce and sending our folks out as training instructors.”

Our team includes a roster of **90 fire practitioners** and 40 fire staff from partner organizations who are building skills & filling operational needs coast to coast.

Modules members participated in hundreds of courses and through their work assignments have earned more than 195 evaluations indicating demonstrated expertise with professional prescribed fire skills. They’ve also provided instruction for 40 partner courses.

In this way, the program is part of an array of **Fire Networks-connected training and professional-development opportunities** for fire practitioners like McLeod.

In November 2025, McLeod was one of about 60 practitioners at the Southern Blue Ridge Prescribed Fire Training Exchange, or TREX, which has its roots in the Southern Blue Ridge Fire Learning Network.

At TREX, practitioners of varied agency affiliations and backgrounds learn and burn collaboratively, and for McLeod, that’s right on point.

“Absolutely,” she says. “The training that we’re getting to do here will directly translate back to my work with North America Fire.”

Projects in **10 communities** in Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington were supported this year.



Over the last decade, through first-person accounts, Lenya Quinn-Davidson, with the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, documented how a handful of passionate advocates and courageous leaders helped spark a movement for community-led beneficial fire in one of the most suppression-oriented regions of the country. Here, we excerpt her writings to show how initially isolated efforts have grown into a broad and powerful movement—one driven by action and a new generation of people ready to carry it forward.

This evolution was led by inspired individuals whose contributions—and connections—deserve celebration. While vision and leadership have been critical, connectivity has multiplied the movement's impact. Together, these leaders have found peers, models, mentors and new ways of thinking about fire. As networks of people learning together, supporting one another, and reshaping their own relationship with fire, they have transformed what's possible.



The Path of a Movement: Community-Led Burning

Change unfolds over years, shaped by people learning, leading and lighting the way for one another.

It starts with people sharing how they relate to fire

September 2016: "My colleagues and I hosted six guests from the Great Plains for a week-long prescribed fire 'road show' in northern California and southern Oregon. The goal of the trip, which was supported by the Fire Learning Network, was to bring private lands burners to the West to inspire and inform some of our nascent private lands burning efforts here."

March 2017: "I flew out to Nebraska with my fellow cooperative extension advisor Jeff Stackhouse, my Natural Resources Conservation Service colleague Matt Cocking, and Dean Hunt, a rancher here in Humboldt County. Our goal was to see Nebraskan innovation in action, bring home some new ideas and inspiration, and (of course!) to burn some stuff."



Different places, similar lessons: California and Nebraska teach each other

March 2017: "In both places, conifer encroachment drastically reduces herbaceous plant diversity and productivity ... much to the detriment of wildlife and range values. Just like here in California, grasslands in Nebraska are teeming with life, and they will not persist without fire."

In Nebraska, the prescribed fire community appears to be born of the ranching community, and prescribed fire has burgeoned as a tool because of the existing capacities of local ranchers and farmers.

This model of cooperative burning, which is based locally and driven by the landowners themselves, is one of the most promising models for landscape-level restoration and maintenance of grasslands and rangelands, and it's something we need to adopt here in California.

That is why the best part of our trip last week was seeing Dean dragging a drip torch ... surrounded by his Nebraskan counterparts. It wasn't his first time burning, but this was his first time seeing a rancher-led prescribed burn association (PBA) in action."



It's all about the people

August 2021: "How many prescribed fire acres do we need to save California? Is California's million-acre fuels treatment target enough? Short answer: no. Better answer: focus on people, not acres. People are where all the problems are, and as the anthropophile that I am, I think people are where the solutions are, too."

Instead of acres, let's focus on jobs, training, innovative fire planning and bold projects, and let's lift up all the people who are in love with and leading this work. If we focus on the people and the capacity, the acres will follow."

The Fire Networks spread ideas by hosting learning exchanges—like the one between Nebraska and California—where people **learn by doing, share real-world innovations**, and bring home ideas they can immediately put into practice. **These exchanges turn inspiration into action.**

The Fire Networks invest in people. We support leadership development and people-centered fire solutions.



Dreams come true

September 2019: "... I was chosen to serve on a curriculum development committee for a California state-certified prescribed fire burn boss program. This effort is a huge milestone for California—something that we in the prescribed fire community have talked about for years, but never saw as an imminent reality. We've coveted other states' certified burner programs, drooled over their gross negligence liability laws, envied their millions of acres of private lands burning, and still we've subscribed to the notion that those things could never happen here—it's California; it's just too different.'

Then came the 2017 fire season ... and with it, a surge of political interest in fire that propelled things in unprecedented ways. California Senate Bill 1260 ... was signed into law in fall 2018 and focused explicitly on prescribed fire, including development of a state-led training and certification program for private prescribed fire burn bosses. I never thought I'd see that day, or that I'd have the opportunity to help shape the program."

There are over 140 PBAs across the U.S. that collectively treated 84,000 acres in 2025. And more PBAs are forming.

Power and scrutiny: when progress stalls

January 2022: "In some ways, the program felt revolutionary—it would be the first time the state had ever validated and certified experienced private burners, including retired and disenchanted fire professionals, cultural practitioners, landowners and community leaders.

After more than a year of state review, the program was finalized and approved in early 2021, and I proudly hosted the first course in May 2021. Meanwhile, I and others were working on other cutting-edge legislation, which we tied in various ways to the new certification program. Amazingly, we changed California's liability standard, and we set aside \$20 million for a prescribed fire claims fund to help fill the gaping hole in prescribed fire insurance.

It's now mid-January, 2022, and not a single person who took the burn boss course eight months ago has been certified by the state. The program ... has instead faced further internal scrutiny from CAL FIRE, whose staff have questioned the credentials and experience of the people who participated in the class."

The Fire Networks inspired the initial connections in this story, but it is important to recognize the many California-based leaders who made this dream a reality. The University of California Cooperative Extension, PBAs, tribes, legislators, community organizers and many others have been the driving force in California's beneficial fire movement.

From the ashes: reviving our Certified Burner program

January 2022: "... if we don't start making space for outside perspectives and expertise, we're not going to make it. If we keep squandering people's passion and interest, they will find something else to focus on, likely somewhere else. We've built a fire culture that doesn't recognize—and often undermines—other forms of knowledge, to the great detriment of our landscapes and communities. So if the existing rules and standards don't facilitate the right things, let's change the rules. Let's re-write the standards. Let's honor the innovative work that people have been doing, and let's choose leaders who think outside the box. We can't afford to waste any more time."

Soon after the publication of this blog, CAL FIRE issued course certificates and task books to almost everyone who took the course last May They also made important changes that will help streamline the approval and certification process.



Where shared fire brings shared agency

June 2025: "In California, the resurgence of cultural and prescribed fire is not simply the renewal of a land management tool, it represents a renewal of community agency and cultural and ecological stewardship The number of PBAs in California has grown rapidly since the inspiration was brought to California in 2016—with over 27 now active across the state. ... By pooling resources, exchanging knowledge, and fostering inclusive participation, cultural burn practitioners and PBAs are reshaping the landscape of fire management in California."

A Better Future With Fire, Together

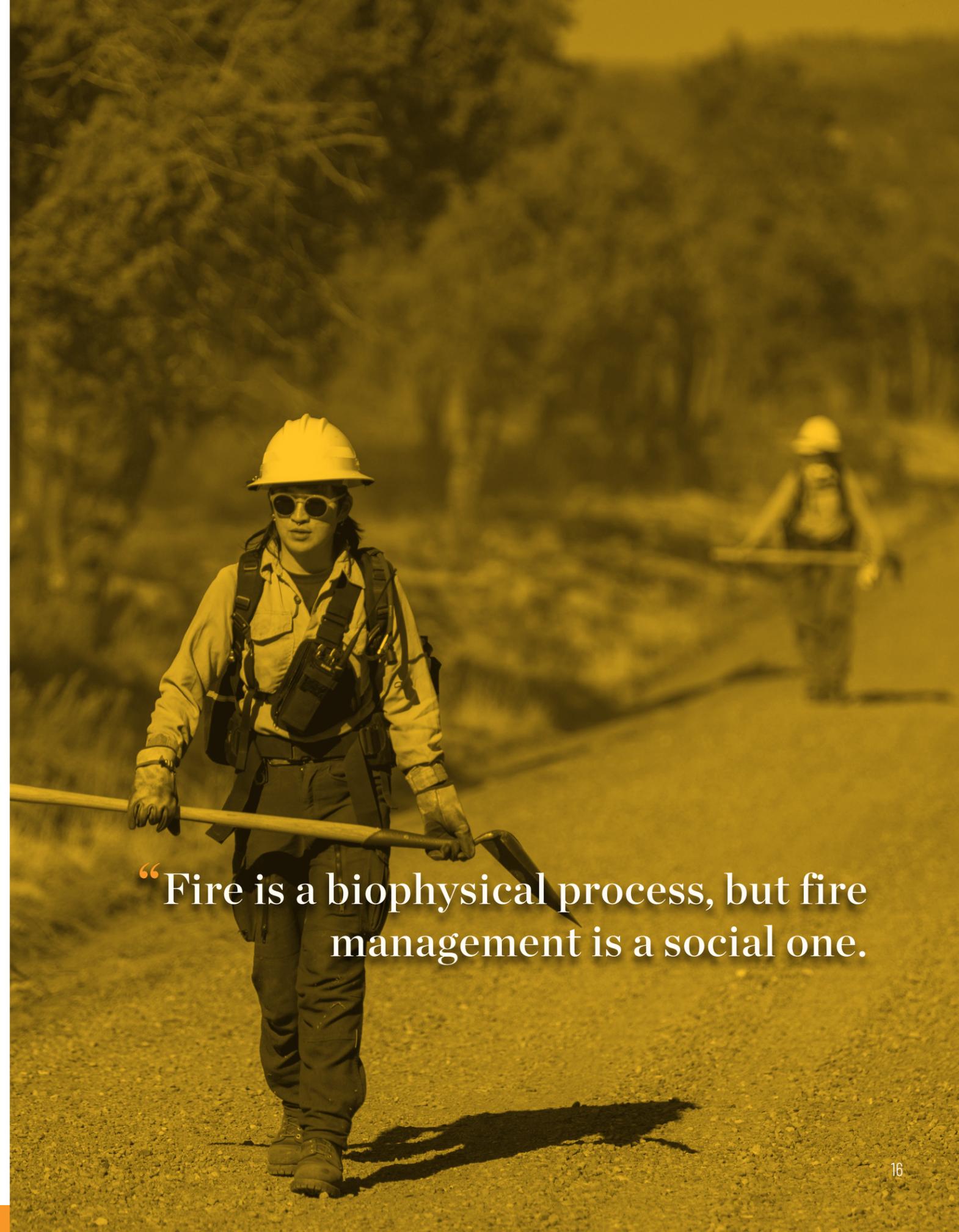
Can you imagine a future where fire is more commonly seen as a partner in renewal than part of a headline about a disaster?

When we **work with fire**—rather than always against it—**ecosystems thrive** and **communities become safer**. Wildfire resilience begins when people reclaim their responsibility for creating a positive fire future. In part, this means individuals have the knowledge, skills and resources to use fire intentionally to **reduce wildfire risk and restore ecosystems** so that communities and homes are better prepared and better protected from wildfire's most negative impacts, and fire is healing landscapes across the country.

In a time characterized by uncertain funding environments and shifting state and federal priorities, the Fire Networks are dedicated to creating a future in balance with fire by **focusing on the people**. For over 20 years, the Fire Networks have united partners across North America—government agencies, private landowners, businesses, universities, local fire departments, Tribal governments and members, engaged residents and other nonprofit organizations.

Together we've shown that fire can heal, renew, and protect. We want you to be by our side as we build our fire futures. Whether you are a neighbor living in a fire adapted landscape, a fire practitioner doing the work daily, or a changemaker inspired to create a fire resilient future, your role matters. Join us as we walk the path to a better future with fire. **Together, we can build viable fire cultures across North America.**

Click to ...



“Fire is a biophysical process, but fire management is a social one.”



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