



Success Stories from the Western Region

Orleans/Somes Bar Fire Safe Council: Changing Public Perceptions of Prescribed Fire

Orleans and Somes Bar are extremely remote rural communities situated along the Klamath River and surrounded by the Six Rivers and Klamath National Forests in far northwestern California. This fire-adapted setting and a local penchant toward prescribed burning (underpinned by the rich tradition of tribal cultural burning) has allowed the Orleans/Somes Bar Fire Safe Council (OSB FSC) to create an integrated approach to fire management that features prescribed burning, fire-shed mapping and fire planning in addition to run-of-the-mill fuel reduction. By pushing the boundaries of work typical of a California Fire Safe Council, their integrated approach has led them to become a regional champion and model for the use of prescribed burning. It has also expanded their base of support, attracting funding from wildlife groups like the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation for their “Western Marble Winter Elk Forage Enhancement Project.”

Like many Fire Safe Councils, the OSB FSC has developed a Community Wildfire Protection Plan and implements hazardous fuel reduction around homes, but they have also developed local capacity to implement prescribed burns to reduce their community’s risk to wildfire. By implementing prescribed burns, they’ve observed the following benefits: more effective fuelbreaks and effectively maintained fuelbreaks; increased plant diversity; increased use by Roosevelt Elk for forage and cover; low intensity fire selects for oak woodland/grassland species and increased encroaching fir mortality; increased acorn production/quality; and more abundant and higher quality basketry materials.

It’s not only their integrated strategies that are sophisticated; the OSB FSC is utilizing YouTube to spread the word about their work far beyond the Klamath-Siskiyou. With the help of the Klamath-Salmon Media Collaborative, the OSB FSC has developed several videos that feature their work including a three part series titled “Lifestyles of the Rural and Fire Safe.” Another video, called “Sparking a Change: Burning for a Fire Safe Community and Environment” describes the efforts of the OSB FSC and Karuk Tribe to restore the historic fire regimes in the Western Klamath Mountains. Most recently, the OSB FSC and Klamath Media Collaborative developed a 52-minute documentary titled, “Prescribed Fire in Northern California: Perceptions and Applications.” This work explores the historic and current role of fire in the mountains of Northern California, and will be released on DVD soon; for a copy, contact Will Harling, at (530) 627-3202.

Even in the early days, the OSB FSC had a big vision. Their mission statement, adopted in 2001, states: “The purpose of the Orleans/Somes Bar FSC is to help plan, implement, and monitor the reinstatement of historic fire regimes primarily through the use of strategic fuels reduction in a manner that protects life and property, improves forest health, and enhances the resources valued by its stakeholders.”

The methods they’ve developed to carry out their mission have been built on the local knowledge and needs of their community, and deliver a fire management program that respects and supports the role of fire in their local landscape. Follow their progress on **YouTube** at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/osbfiresafe> as they continue to create innovative strategies and build support for solutions that provide multiple long-term benefits for their community and the landscape.

For more information please contact Will Harling, OSB FSC Co-Coordinator, at mail@mkwc.org or (530) 627-3202.