



Success Stories from the Western Region

Northern California Prescribed Fire Council

In some landscapes prescribed fire is a necessary restoration tool. Treating a landscape with fire to improve its resilience, however, presents challenges that require collaboration like that of the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council. While there are many impediments to the use of prescribed burning, an organization with a participatory professional culture can pave the way for reviving fire use in land management. In the wake of the 2008 wildfire complexes in northern CA, Will Harling, Coordinator of the Orleans/Somes Bar Fire Safe Council, and Dr. J. Morgan Varner, then Director of the Wildland Fire Laboratory at Humboldt State University, decided that a regional forum was needed for exploring issues related to the use of prescribed fire. They reached out to Nick Goulette, lead of the California Klamath-Siskiyou Fire Learning Network, and the Northwestern California Prescribed Fire Council was formed. They then set out to build a diverse steering committee that would help guide the council's work.

In the fall of 2009 fifty people gathered at Humboldt State University. They had come to launch a new network of prescribed fire advocates and professionals. Since that initial meeting, the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council has grown considerably in geographic scope and in numbers. Originally conceived as a Northwestern California group, interest from agencies and community groups in the San Francisco Bay Area, Central Valley and Northern Sierra led the council to expand its reach. Now serving all of Northern California, the council includes people working in urban, suburban and rural contexts.

The Council works across jurisdictions and land ownerships to address the Cohesive Strategy goal of increasing landscape resilience by promoting prescribed fire use, while broadening people's understanding of fire's role in ecosystems. The Council's work also addresses elements of the other two Cohesive Strategy goals: creating fire adapted communities, and improving wildland firefighting response.



Northern California Prescribed Fire Council

Mission: The Northern California Prescribed Fire Council is a venue for practitioners, state and federal agencies, academic institutions, tribes, coalitions, and interested individuals to work collaboratively to promote, protect, conserve, and expand the responsible use of prescribed fire in Northern California's fire-adapted landscapes.

Visit the Council's website at:

<http://www.norcalrxfirecouncil.org/>

view their by-laws at:

http://www.norcalrxfirecouncil.org/uploads/NCPFC_By-Laws.pdf

With bi-annual meetings where attendance continues to rise, the council delivers a range of prescribed fire related content. Field tours showcasing burns in a range of landscapes, presentations by fire scientists, sessions on planning and communications, and opportunities to network are delivered to the council's diverse participants. When asked about the value of the council, participants cited the informal, relationship-oriented atmosphere coupled with high-quality professional content. The council has developed a culture of discourse that encourages participation and sharing throughout the network.



Nationally, prescribed fire councils originally sprang up in the Southeast where a culture of prescribed burning persisted despite a fire suppression-focused era. With the launch of the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council this model made its foray to the west coast. Since then fledgling councils in Washington State and California's Sierra Nevada regions have emerged.

While to-date the council has been operating on a very modest budget supported by the California Klamath-Siskiyou Fire Learning Network (one of The Nature Conservancy's Fire Learning Networks) the enthusiasm and energy of council participants and steering committee members has been overwhelming. Upcoming council actions include convening a two-week prescribed fire training exchange, and the initiation of a communications work-group. For people in other areas interested in forming a council, the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council offers this advice, "Identify your community and bring them together. Don't try to immediately change policy. Focus on building your council's culture and give it time. Once you have a community, you'll be positioned to affect real change."



Northern California
Prescribed Fire Council

HEALTHY FORESTS



PRESCRIBED FIRE

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