

RVCC
Rural Voices for
Conservation
COALITION



MARCH 2022

PATHWAYS TO PRESCRIBED FIRE

Three case studies highlighting opportunities for community-based nonprofits to build cooperative burning capacity

ABOUT THESE CASE STUDIES

Prescribed fire is a critical land management tool in the fire-adapted ecosystems of the Western U.S. Its appropriate application can improve ecosystem function and decrease the risk wildfire poses to communities. Importantly, prescribed fire is also a necessary ingredient in creating resilient forests that help address climate change by creating more durable carbon stocks in fire-adapted landscapes. Yet the pace and scale of federal investments in this work have historically fallen short of what is required by our current wildfire crisis. Community-based partners, including rural nonprofit organizations, help meet this urgent need by engaging in **cooperative burn partnerships** with federal, tribal, state and local partners. By investing in their own fire crews and equipment, bringing financial and technical resources to bear, and cultivating networks of partners to work across large landscapes, these partners fill critical capacity and workforce gaps in their communities. Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) hopes to encourage wider adoption of such partnerships by showcasing the efforts of three nonprofit organizations and the strategies and tools they used to grow their cooperative burn programs.



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ABOUT RVCC

RVCC envisions healthy landscapes and vibrant rural communities throughout the American West. We are committed to finding and promoting solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and the well-being of rural communities. By bringing rural leaders together to share their work, we serve as a vital peer learning and capacity building network that accelerates the practice of land stewardship and aligned economic development.

To learn more about our full portfolio of work,
visit: www.ruralvoicescoalition.org



Mt. Adams Resource Stewards

Washington

MARCH 2022



INTRODUCTION

The Mt. Adams landscape of southern Washington is characterized by the mix of wet western Cascade and dry eastern Cascade forest types in the Cascade Mountains. Much of the area is sparsely populated with several small, unincorporated rural communities traditionally centered around forestry and farming, and hosting limited services, schools, and businesses. Like much of the rural West, change has been an underlying theme in recent decades as federal timber programs declined, private forest ownership transitioned toward private equity firms, and a recreational economy grew. Some rural communities have found opportunity during this time while others have struggled.

In response to local concerns – including the decline of forest health, the threat of wildfire, and the loss of forest-based livelihoods on public lands– Mt. Adams Resource Stewards (MARS) formed in 2004. This community-based forestry nonprofit is driven by a mission to promote “sustainable connections between the land, local economy and rural communities of the Mt. Adams region.” Partnership and development of local workforce capacity are central themes within its mission. Its work includes the fiscal sponsorship of the South Gifford Pinchot Collaborative Group, which it helped to found, and ownership and management of the Mt. Adams Community Forest, a property of over 1,000 acres that serves to protect working forestlands and showcase exemplary forest management, including use of prescribed fire. The organization also runs multiple stewardship crew programs in partnership with federal and state agencies and local landowners, providing fuels management, restoration, invasive species control, and timber sale preparation services.

MARS has long recognized the importance of restoring “good fire” to the Mt. Adams landscape. The local and landscape-scale treatments MARS helped to plan or implement over the past 17 years utilize prescribed fire to reduce fuels, enhance community safety, restore ecological processes, and re-establish a low-severity fire regime.

The organization first implemented prescribed fire in 2016 on the Mt. Adams Community Forest and burn projects have continued every year since. MARS also partnered with multiple land management agencies to engage in prescribed burning on federally managed lands. Beginning in 2017, the organization’s prescribed fire operations included partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) at Conboy Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)—a natural partner given the adjacency of the community forest and the refuge. Two cross-boundary controlled burns were successfully implemented, treating approximately 400 acres of refuge and community forest lands. Starting in 2019, MARS also collaborated with the Mt. Adams Ranger District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (GPNF) to prepare prescribed burn units between the fire scars of recent fires and the nearby community of Trout Lake.

ENABLING CONDITIONS

'Enabling Conditions' are local and organizational factors that existed prior to the development of a cooperative burn program and were essential to its growth.

ESTABLISHED PARTNERSHIPS

A foundation of trust and constructive engagement with federal agencies played an important role in allowing MARS to develop prescribed fire capacity. One of MARS' earliest federal partnerships began in 2013 with FWS. Through a long-term Cooperative Land Management Agreement, MARS provided administrative and implementation services for a forest management plan on Conboy Lake NWR. This filled an important gap for the FWS, which had no forest management capacity on the refuge or in the area. It also laid a foundation for future cross-boundary prescribed fire work between the Mt. Adams Community Forest and the adjacent FWS lands. MARS later led site preparation efforts for prescribed burn units on both sides of the property boundary and provided staffing support for burns under FWS burn bosses, most typically participating on ignitions teams.

Working with FWS also served as an important catalyst for building relationships with fire and fuels staff on the nearby GPNF. While MARS had a more than 15-year history working with local agency staff through the South Gifford Pinchot Collaborative Group (for which MARS was the fiscal sponsor), interactions with fire staff were limited until MARS and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (the Forest Service) worked together on Conboy Lake NWR burns providing resource assistance. In part due to the success of that cooperative burning experience, other Forest Service staff and programs were eager to work with MARS when it launched its stewardship crew program in 2018. Additional projects included thinning conifers in wet meadow systems and around recreational sites and fencing a Forest Service seed orchard. Expanding work the following year to include prescribed burn unit preparation was a further extension of MARS' crew work.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The GPNF had a limited history of prescribed burning and a small fuels budget relative to other nearby national forests in Oregon and Washington. However, MARS was successful in channeling outside resources and investments, from the state of Washington in particular, to help support the GPNF's prescribed fire program. As the Washington State Legislature increased investments in federal forest health through state agencies starting in 2018, MARS and the South Gifford Pinchot Collaborative applied for and received several grants to help GPNF staff build fuels capacity and prescribed fire activities on the south slopes of Mt. Adams. Without the investment of state funds, this work likely would not have been possible.



MARS stewardship crew member, funded with state forest health dollars, prepping prescribed burn units on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest by pulling debris back from legacy ponderosa pines that the project strives to protect by reducing fuel loadings and competition.
Photo Credit: Mt. Adams Resource Stewards

FOREST COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT

MARS' long-standing engagement with the South Gifford Pinchot Collaborative and Forest Service district leadership also provided a critical foundation for its prescribed fire program. The collaborative was an effective venue in which to cultivate relationships and facilitate communication between agency staff, external stakeholders, and the public. By participating in the collaborative, MARS developed a better understanding of agency capacity needs and potential projects and was able to more effectively fundraise to meet those needs.

AGENCY BUY-IN

Several district rangers and other agency staff proved to be collaborative and visionary partners and provided significant assistance to advance MARS' partnership opportunities with the Forest Service. These leaders recognized the critical role that partners like MARS play in responding to complex and difficult land management challenges. These staff have helped to develop necessary enabling partnership agreements—even when it was not part of their job descriptions—and have helped identify opportunities for MARS to contribute to agency resource gaps and needs.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Building the organizational capacity and programmatic structure for cooperative burn work.

MARS is still relatively new to operationalizing prescribed burns. The organization's first controlled burn was implemented on 27 acres of its own land utilizing a contracted burn boss and a variety of local fire resources, including representatives from local fire departments, as well as MARS staff and board members. Subsequent successful burns on the community forest and NWR lands helped to grow the stewardship crew program, ultimately allowing for the development of a skilled, red carded workforce with advanced chainsaw skills capable of running an entire burn with its own resources.

Reaching this level of self-sufficiency required evolving strategies in four key areas.

LEVERAGING FUNDS TO INCREASE CAPACITY

MARS successfully secures funding from outside the normal budgets of land management agencies. With this funding, MARS is able to conduct stewardship work that establishes and enhances control lines, completes mitigation of fuels in sensitive ecosystems, and addresses hazards, such as standing dead trees along roadways, and establishing control lines to improve the safety of subsequent prescribed burns. Given the substantial time that MARS dedicates to these efforts, its crews develop a unique familiarity with each burn unit, which also benefits federal agencies when MARS assists on burn implementation.

AGREEMENTS

MARS utilizes several different agreements with federal partners to enable its forest health and fuels treatment work. However, implementation of prescribed burning, beyond the preparations phase, has not yet been specifically identified in any of those agreements. Rather, that participation has stemmed from MARS' engagement on burn unit preparation.

Since 2013, MARS has used a Cooperative Land Management Agreement (CLMA) with FWS that is renewed every five years. This agreement permits MARS to administer forest health treatments—including contracting out timber sales and non-commercial work to accomplish fuels removal and habitat improvements—while holding back a portion of timber sale receipts for its project management on NWR lands. Given the five-year lifespan, all parties view the CLMA as the best mechanism to enshrine the partnership over long timeframes and is modeled after agreements FWS holds with other nonprofits. As the third iteration of the agreement is developed by MARS and FWS, they plan to explicitly include prescribed burning implementation within its scope, but at this time that cooperation has not been memorialized in an agreement.

Partnership with the Forest Service on the GPNF was initially formalized through a Letter of Authorization (LOA) with MARS. The LOA allowed MARS to implement project activities including prescribed burn unit preparation. Although elements of the mechanism were later questioned by federal grants and agreements staff, and its continued use has since been discouraged, MARS found it to be an efficient and expedient tool that allowed for a broad scope of activities while minimizing administrative requirements.

Prior to 2021, the Forest Service had not recognized the value of establishing a Master Participating Agreement (MPA) with MARS. That sentiment changed with new local Forest Service leadership and a draft is under development. Both parties hope that a MPA will begin to address some of the deficiencies of the LOA approach, particularly concerns over the use of MARS staff on prescribed fire.

MARS also benefits from agreements that allow for the transfer of funds to the organization. Much of the burn unit preparation that MARS performs on the GPNF is funded by a grant from the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to MARS. While this grant allows for the transfer of funding, the previously mentioned LOA is what allowed MARS to use that funding for work on federally managed lands. MARS also uses a Forest Service Challenge Cost Share Agreement to build off the investment of DNR funds, which uses those state funds to meet the agreement's twenty percent matching funds requirement.

As noted above, none of the agreements to date have recognized a specific role for MARS during the implementation of prescribed burns on federally managed lands. Discussions and planning meetings with the Forest Service led to a shared understanding that MARS would nevertheless participate on burn days and a sense that specific roles would be addressed through red card certifications (discussed in "Fireline Qualifications and Certification"). However, this approach has some shortcomings as discussed below.

Putting good fire to work on the Mt. Adams Community Forest in 2018 – a successful cross-boundary collaboration between MARS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Photo Credit: Mt. Adams Resource Stewards




ADDRESSING LIABILITY

MARS uses several common strategies to manage the risks associated with prescribed burning. Because its insurance policy only permits it to burn on MARS-owned property, MARS addresses general liability concerns by working under federal burn bosses on public land, or by hiring contracted burn bosses, in possession of their own private insurance, when conducting high complexity burns on the Mt. Adams Community Forest. MARS also provides workers' compensation to its crew members to cover personal injury when working through the organization rather than as a temporary federal Administratively Determined (AD) hire, and asks board members or other non-employees to sign liability waivers when participating as a burn volunteer.

FIRELINE QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATION

MARS will employ eleven staff dedicated to prescribed fire and forest thinning in 2022, marking the organization's fifth season of running a stewardship crew program with prescribed burning capacity. Crew leadership and members have varying experience, from a single certified "burn boss" to new seasonal employees that will have their first exposure to wildland and prescribed fire during their tenure with MARS. Employing a burn boss, specifically a Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type 3 (RXB3), allows MARS to lead low complexity burns, such as burning piles of post-thinning woody debris.



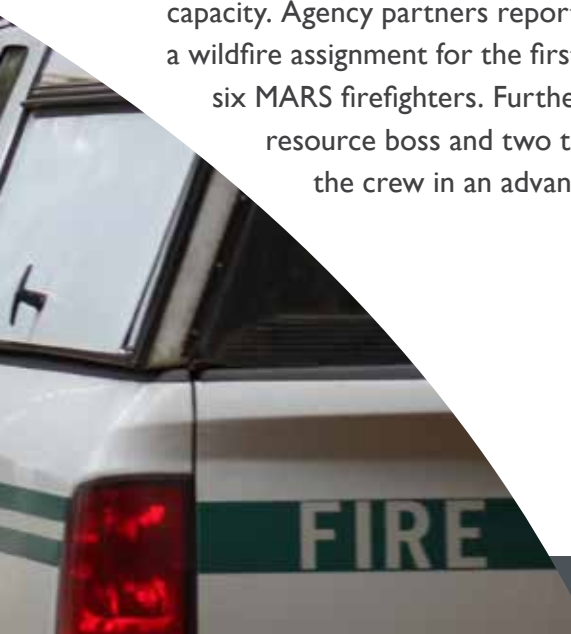
Fall 2021 burn with MARS and agency staff on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.
Photo Credit: Mt. Adams Resource Stewards

MARS uses various strategies to ensure fireline qualifications of staff comply with the National Wildfire Coordinating Group's (NWCG) standards and are tracked and certified. In 2019, MARS worked with a local fire department to host (or 'sponsor') the qualifications of MARS fire staff. The following year, Forest Service policy change allowed for AD temporary hires to operate on prescribed burns. Given these changes, agency leadership prefers using the AD pathway to bring MARS staff into their prescribed fire work. The paperwork process for AD hiring was initiated in 2020 but not completed in time for MARS staff to be utilized for the fire season. In 2021, MARS successfully navigated AD hiring and staff were used by the Forest Service in the 2021 fire season.

Utilizing the AD approach to integrating nonprofit staff on federal burns has some limitations. First, new training opportunities are not provided to MARS staff, as they would be to regular agency staff. Earning a new fireline qualification requires completing a "task book," which tracks specific necessary actions and experiences in an applied setting. While MARS staff transferred under the AD model are allowed to continue to work on any pre-existing task books through wildfire assignments or prescribed fire work, there is no opportunity for starting new training and advancing qualifications in a series. The AD approach also requires MARS to place an employee on unpaid leave during the AD assignment. This adds administrative complexity for MARS in terms of tracking the shifting employment status of employees. Furthermore, while an employee is on AD status, MARS does not collect administrative overhead associated with managing staff, thus increasing administrative complexity while also reducing the amount of funding MARS can collect to manage and administer these same employees.

Gifford Pinchot National Forest was able to send a 20-person crew off-forest on a wildfire assignment for the first time in three seasons because of the added capacity provided by six MARS firefighters.

While the primary purpose of utilizing MARS staff as ADs is to engage them on prescribed burns, staff also accept wildfire suppression assignments, significantly expanding local Forest Service suppression capacity. Agency partners report that the GPNF was able to send a 20-person crew off-forest on a wildfire assignment for the first time in three seasons because of the added capacity provided by six MARS firefighters. Furthermore, the advanced qualifications of MARS staff, including a single resource boss and two type I fallers (previously known as C fallers) may have facilitated use of the crew in an advanced role while on assignment.



SNAPSHOT OF COOPERATIVE BURN MODEL: MARS

Partners	Type	Role / Accomplishments / Contributions
Mt. Adams Resource Stewards (MARS)	Local	Planned and implemented burns on private lands and assisted in burning on federally managed lands through various federal agreements designed for fuels reduction using a MARS stewardship crew.
U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service)	Federal	Provided oversight/overall administration, technical design and lead implementation of prescribed burns on national forest lands.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)	Federal	Provided leadership and fire management resources for implementation of cross-boundary burns between a National Wildlife Refuge and adjacent private lands, in cooperation with MARS.
Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR)	State	<p>Provided funding to MARS through its forest health division to support prescribed burn unit preparation and implementation on federal land.</p> <p>Indicated interest in participating in future prescribed burns as the state strives to grow its own prescribed burning capacity.</p>



SNAPSHOT OF COOPERATIVE BURN MODEL: MARS

Agreement Instruments

MARS had various agreements with federal and state partners that transferred funds and defined parameters for working together, including a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Cooperative Land Management Agreement, Forest Service Letter of Authorization, and Forest Service Challenge Cost Share Agreement.

Staffing / Workforce Model

MARS hired a seasonal stewardship crew that conducted a full spectrum of site prep and fuels treatment work, with contracted or internal burn bosses often overseeing on burn day.

MARS staff prepared units and engaged on ignitions teams during federal burn implementation.

MARS staff were hired as Administratively Determined (AD) hires for short-term federal fire assignments and burn days (though this may not be an option in the future).

Federal partners provided their own burn bosses and organizational infrastructure (called “overhead”—upper-level fire management, planning, logistics, etc.)

Fireline Training, Credentialing, and Red Carding

Utilized two approaches—Administratively Determined (AD) Hiring Authority allowing some employees to receive federal sponsorship of their fireline qualifications, as well as qualifications hosting by a local fire department for stewardship crews.

Liability Strategies

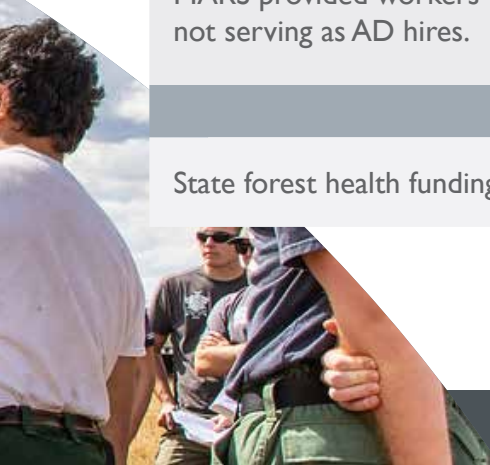
MARS crew members worked under federal burn bosses when burning on federal property or operated as AD hires that received federal liability protections.

MARS contracted with burn bosses for higher complexity burns on Mt. Adams Community Forest property.

MARS provided workers’ compensation insurance to its crew members to cover personal injury when not serving as AD hires.

Other Critical Resources

State forest health funding supported prescribed burn unit preparations.




CHALLENGES

Despite the benefits of AD hiring in the Mt. Adams landscape, the Forest Service recently conveyed liability concerns associated with this hiring mechanism. It is unclear at this time whether it will be an avenue accessible to MARS staff in the future. MARS operates under the belief that if an employee takes leave to work as an AD and is compensated by the agency, then liability would be addressed as it would for any federal employee. If, however, the AD relationship merely provides a mechanism by which MARS staff can be requested by the Forest Service, but they are in effect continuing to operate as MARS employees, liability is covered by the MARS workers' compensation program. Overall, the AD approach to integrating MARS staff into federal fire efforts is an imperfect solution for cooperative burning.

In addition, Forest Service staff turnover has presented ample challenges. In three years of advancing plans for prescribed burns on a priority landscape on Mt. Adams, MARS has worked with three different Fire Management Officers (FMOs). The silviculturist that designed many of the vegetation treatments for the area also retired and direction and specifications for preparation of units for burning has changed from year to year.

Despite a strong partnership with various Forest Service programs and recognition by many agency staff of the mutual benefit of cooperatively burning with MARS, the parties have not developed a mechanism well suited to formalizing and enabling the partnership. While partnership agreements and AD hiring have provided two partial pathways to partnership, challenges remain, particularly regarding resource ordering, development of qualifications, and liability.



After years of planning and preparation involving MARS and the Forest Service, an initial prescribed burn entry on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest was finally realized in the fall of 2021. MARS is hopeful that this success is the beginning of an increasingly productive partnership and collaboration around fuels management and prescribed fire for the Mt. Adams landscape of southern Washington.

Photo Credit: Mt. Adams Resource Stewards

*Photo Credit: Colby K. Neall
Bureau of Land Management*

TAKEAWAYS

Despite these challenges, creativity and flexibility allow MARS to achieve successes in partnering with federal agencies to conduct prescribed fire. Strong district level agency leadership and their commitments to partnership keep the collaboration moving in the right direction and a shared commitment to the vision and goals of the partnership has helped it prevail despite challenges.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of the partnership between MARS and federal agencies is that MARS, as a community-based group, contributes to increased local understanding and a sense of ownership of the challenges and solutions associated with federal land management. Many MARS staff grew up or have lived in Mt. Adams communities for years. They have long recognized the need for the kind of work that this cooperative approach aspires to achieve, and they celebrate the fact that good work is now happening. These early efforts to create cooperative burning partnerships are an important step towards a comprehensive “all lands” approach that natural resource managers have long recognized as essential to addressing the complex challenges of forest health and wildfire.





The Watershed Research and Training Center

California

MARCH 2022

Photo Credit: Watershed Research and Training Center

INTRODUCTION

The Watershed Research and Training Center (the Watershed Center) is a community-based nonprofit organization chartered to promote healthy forests and healthy communities through research, education, training, and community development. For nearly 30 years, the organization developed and continues to operate robust local programs spanning every facet of land stewardship and ecological restoration. This local work also drives the Watershed Center's engagement in broader initiatives and partnerships working on fire resilience at the regional, statewide, and national scales.

The Watershed Center operates out of rural Trinity County in northwestern California. Situated in the Klamath Mountains bioregion, the local landscape is among the most active fire regimes on earth, driven by a seasonally hot and dry mediterranean climate, steep and rugged mountains, and productive forests and grasslands. The area is subject to annual lightning storms that produce abundant dry lightning across remote terrain leading to many fire starts. Nearly 75% of Trinity County's landscape is publicly managed—primarily within the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service) Shasta-Trinity and Six Rivers National Forests, and to a lesser extent the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Redding District. These federally managed lands are mostly comprised of uplands, while private land is concentrated in the valley bottoms.

As the impacts of climate change accelerate, the area faces longer, hotter, and drier fire seasons, with fire weather beginning earlier in spring and ending later in fall, compounded by unprecedented droughts. Along with wide-ranging implications for natural resources and carbon stores, longer fire seasons impact local communities through extended periods of exposure to smoke from wildfires, as well as the direct threat of wildfire.

As the Watershed Center considered strategies to mitigate the impacts of future wildland fires on the landscape and communities, it understood that focusing only on forest thinning and manual fuels reduction techniques without also applying prescribed fire would be insufficient to restore fire-adapted ecosystems. Prescribed fire is the most cost effective and ecologically appropriate tool for maintaining prior restoration treatments, as well as for managing broad swaths of the oak woodland savanna that make up much of the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) where public and private lands meet.

In 2011, the Watershed Center began working with local cooperators including federal land managers, the Trinity County Resource Conservation District (Trinity County RCD), and the Trinity County Fire Safe Council to launch a cooperative initiative to plan and implement prescribed fire across public and private lands in and around the WUI. Together, the partners launched the Trinity Integrated Fire Management Partnership (IFMP) as a platform to organize this work.

ENABLING CONDITIONS

'Enabling Conditions' are local and organizational factors that existed prior to the development of a cooperative burn program and were essential to its growth.

ESTABLISHED PARTNERSHIPS

The Watershed Center's prescribed fire work built on a long history of cooperative work with federal agencies and local partners on fire hazard reduction. The Watershed Center had already developed various cooperative agreements and contracting structures to permit partnership with federal agencies. These past agreements provided an organic working relationship between staff at the Watershed Center and federal agencies, as well as a legal framework to work in partnership.




TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The Watershed Center received technical and financial support, as well as inspiration, from participation in the Fire Learning Network (FLN), started by The Nature Conservancy (The Conservancy) in 2008. FLN provided the Watershed Center with access to the nation's leading fire restoration planners and practitioners, and to Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TRES) events. The training exchanges offered a focused and nurturing environment in which Watershed Center staff gained field experience and built their fireline qualifications. The Watershed Center, along with other regional partners, also utilized FLN support to establish the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council. This initiative served as a platform to host regional TRES events and seeded the development of the Trinity IFMP.

ORGANIZING CAPACITY

The Trinity IFMP was able to launch, in large part, due to the existing organizational capacity at the Watershed Center, its long-standing collaborative relationships with the partners in diverse fuel management projects, and its willingness and ability to take a leading role in developing and operating the new partnership. Without the Watershed Center's commitment of staff capacity and funding support, the partnership would likely have failed to gain traction.



Oak woodland burning
on private lands in the
Weaver Basin.

*Photo Credit: Erin Banwell/
The Watershed Research
and Training Center*

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Building the organizational capacity and programmatic structure for cooperative burn work.

LEVERAGING FUNDS TO INCREASE CAPACITY

Federal funding for prescribed fire is limited and does not match the scale of the need. However, because of its status as a nonprofit, the Watershed Center plays a critical role in aggregating diverse funding sources to accomplish much needed burning. In addition to federal funding, the Watershed Center is successful in attracting state resources and philanthropic funding, as well as developing fee-for-service models to help supplement the costs of the work. Non-federal funding is particularly important to accomplishing projects with private landowners.

ADDRESSING LIABILITY

The Watershed Center plays a critical role within the Trinity IFMP by managing the legal requirements and agreements language related to risk and liability. Burns on private land require negotiation of liability waivers and risk-sharing agreements with landowners. The Watershed Center has also twice held its own insurance policy for prescribed fire, although this has proven a challenge to maintain as insurance markets have moved away from covering this practice. Personal injury is always assumed to be the responsibility of the participating employers for their respective staff under workers' compensation insurance, and the Watershed Center extends their workers' compensation policy to participating volunteers. The Watershed Center also works to secure contracted qualified and insured burn bosses when in-house liability coverage or qualifications are lacking.

Non-federal funding is particularly important to accomplishing projects with private landowners.

FIRELINE QUALIFICATIONS

At present, there is no national fireline qualifications management system tailored to nonprofits. Seeing a need for better tracking and integration of qualifications for nonprofit partners, the Watershed Center conferred with the Forest Service in developing a verification system to meet this need. The organization now maintains a self-certification program for its staff and members of the Trinity IFMP through a modified version of the Incident Qualification System (IQS) used by the state. This marks a significant accomplishment for the Watershed Center and requires considerable investment of time and energy including substantial unfunded work tracking the qualifications of individuals within their system.





Wrapping up a cooperative burn in the Weaver Basin.
*Photo Credit: Erin Banwell/
The Watershed Research
and Training Center*

ASSEMBLING FIRE RESOURCES

The Watershed Center employs diverse crews of ecosystem management technicians who conduct various aspects of projects, including planning and implementation. Employees also come from diverse disciplines including silviculture, fisheries, botany, wildlife, archeology, hydrology and more. Crews are further supported by active on-the-job cross-training between specialists. While prescribed fire is not the primary focus for many of the staff, the Watershed Center often utilizes all available staff for conducting burns. Having a large workforce provides a foundational and flexible pool of labor for implementing prescribed fire projects.


The Watershed Center also trains and nurtures a network of local cooperators to participate in the Trinity IFMP, including staff and volunteers from local fire departments, resource conservation districts, and other participants in the partnership. Trinity IFMP is able to field a prescribed fire militia of 30-50 qualified personnel, two Type 6 fire engines, multiple utility task vehicles—commonly known as UTVs—and the necessary hand tools and personal protective equipment needed to work safely. This prescribed fire workforce is an additional resource that serves to bolster the professional staff from federal and state agencies.

AGREEMENTS

Formal cooperative agreements and contracts are critical to the Watershed Center's work with local partners and the Forest Service. Agreements address issues that range from training and qualifications, planning projects, and sharing human and equipment resources. The Watershed Center already had experience developing various agreements with the Forest Service, including Participating Agreements and other cooperative agreement instruments. However, adding prescribed burning as a permissible activity through those mechanisms proved challenging. Parties to the agreements needed to resolve complex issues before moving forward. These included verification of fireline qualifications, integration of organizational structures, the details of how to work across management and ownership boundaries, and accounting for liability in the event of an adverse outcome from a prescribed fire.

The Watershed Center was fortunate to have the support of key local Forest Service personnel including fuels planners, operations staff, fire managers and line officers. However, with very few nonprofits partnering with the agency on prescribed fire planning and cross-boundary implementation at that time, the agreements were considered novel and required approval from the regional office and legal counsel before local units could sign them. To streamline the process, the Watershed Center used language from agreements that the agency had already approved with The Conservancy as the foundation for early Participating Agreements.

The Watershed Center is in the second set of 5-year Participating Agreements with the Forest Service. In this time, the Watershed Center has regularly engaged in the annual work planning conducted by each local Forest Service unit covered under an agreement. Participating in this process allows for identification and prioritization of resource-sharing and periodically results in development of project-specific Supplemental Project Agreements and associated modifications, allocating funds to specific projects.



Firing off of a recreational trail, Weaver Basin.
Photo Credit: Erin Banwell/The Watershed Research and Training Center

SNAPSHOT OF COOPERATIVE BURN MODEL: WATERSHED CENTER

Partners	Type	Role / Accomplishments / Contributions
Watershed Research and Training Center (Watershed Center)	Local	Coordinated the credentialing and certification of multiple local partners in the Trinity IFMP; planned and implemented burns on private lands and assisted in burning on federally managed lands.
U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service - Shasta-Trinity and Six Rivers National Forests	Federal	Entered into Participating Agreements with partners; managed NEPA processes; provided qualified staffing, burn bosses and oversight of burns on federal land; and provided personnel and equipment for burns on private land under the Wyden Authority.
Bureau of Land Management	Federal	Entered into contracts and agreements with the Watershed Center and partners. Provided a qualified burn boss, staffing and oversight on BLM-managed lands.
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Federal	Provided pre-treatment funding support through Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) program with anticipation of eventual EQIP funding for burn planning and implementation.
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)	State	Provided permits, worked with burn bosses to mitigate any items identified, led burn planning and implementation through their Vegetation Management Program. Provided personnel to assist in preparing burn units. Provided standby fire protection assistance (personnel and engines for holding during implementation of Watershed Center-led burns).
Trinity County Resource Conservation District	Local	Worked through the Watershed Center-led National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) trainings to qualify their fuels crews for prescribed fire. Worked as a contractor to the Watershed Center to provide personnel assistance in burn implementation. Worked through Participating Agreements with the Forest Service from prescribed fire support on federal lands.

(continued on next page)

SNAPSHOT OF COOPERATIVE BURN MODEL: WATERSHED CENTER

Partners	Type	Role / Accomplishments / Contributions
Trinity Fire Safe Council	Local	Facilitated strategic planning and provided a platform for coordinating resources. Incorporated prescribed fire project priorities into Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) updates.
North Coast Unified Air Quality Management District	Local	Reviewed and issued permits for smoke management plans and burn permits.
Local fire departments	Local	Provided engines and personnel for burn implementation. Participated in Watershed Center-led NWCG trainings for attainment and maintenance of qualifications.
Private contractors	Local	Provided a Type 2 Burn Boss and liability insurance for Watershed Center-planned burns on private land. Intermittently provided additional resources including personnel and engines, as needed.
Private landowners	Local	Provided land and in-kind support (site prep, personnel, primary and contingency holding equipment) for implementation of prescribed burns.



Landowners and Hayfork Volunteer Fire Department personnel working together, Hayfork CA.
Photo Credit: Piper McDaniel

SNAPSHOT OF COOPERATIVE BURN MODEL: WATERSHED CENTER

Agreement Instruments

U.S. Forest Service Participating Agreements allowed for training, cooperative project planning and identification, and resource sharing on burn incidents.

Staffing / Workforce Model

Watershed Center staff conducted various aspects of fuels and prescribed fire projects including burn planning and implementation.

The Trinity County IFMP utilized the individual staff capacity of its partner entities, as well as a network of local cooperators including staff and volunteers from local fire departments, resource conservation districts, and other participants.

Contracted and insured burn bosses were hired when in-house liability coverage or qualifications were lacking.

Fireline Training, Credentialing, and Red Carding

The Watershed Center has tried various strategies for managing fireline qualifications and verifying credentials / red carding. It currently manages qualifications for staff and partners using a manual version of the state-based Incident Qualification System (IQS) that was provided by partners at CAL FIRE.

Liability Strategies

With the scarcity of prescribed fire insurance policies, other strategies used included negotiating waivers and risk-sharing agreements with private landowners and securing qualified and insured burn bosses from private parties when Watershed Center insurance was not adequate.

Other Critical Resources

Technical and financial support was provided by The Nature Conservancy and several programs that it supports, including the Fire Learning Network, Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TRES), and the TRES Coaches Network.

CHALLENGES

Cooperative burning remains an uncommon practice for the Forest Service and other federal agencies and challenges persist and abound. Agency-to-agency partnerships are simpler to execute, although lack the same benefits. Maintenance of fireline qualifications for Watershed Center staff has also remained a persistent problem. Finally, loss of a prescribed fire insurance market threatens to disrupt operations and partnership.

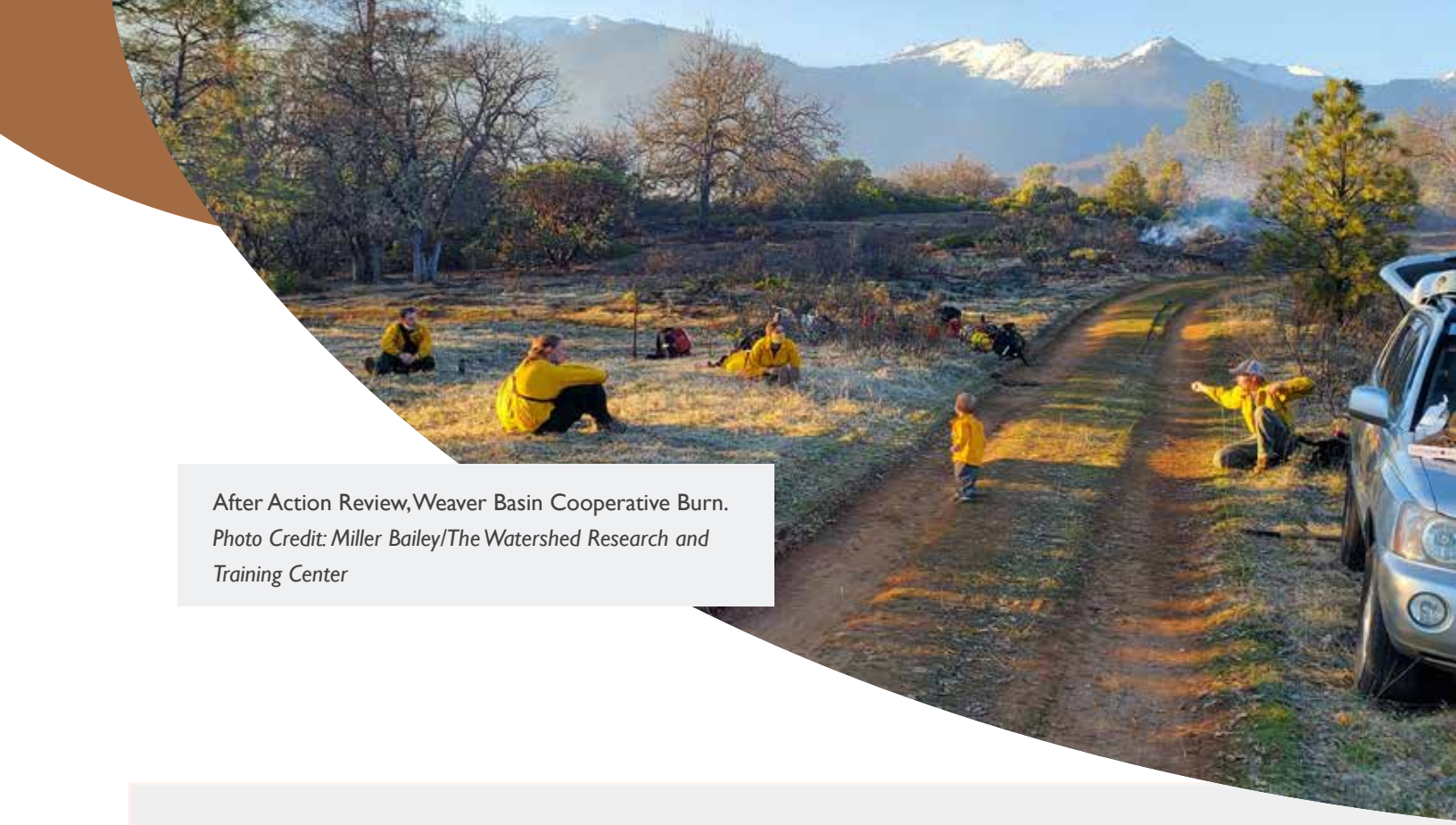
This work continues to represent a novel way of doing business for the Forest Service. Even with inspired and motivated local fuel and fire leadership, the agency has simpler, trusted means of ordering fire-related resources, securing funding, and making payment for prescribed fire personnel and equipment, especially where the projects are entirely on federal lands. Ordering personnel and equipment from other national forests within the region is typically the first choice of Forest Service staff. Transferring funding within the agency is a simple process and provides for a responsive and flexible path for a Forest Service unit to bolster capacity.

Working with state resources, including the California Department of Corrections and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) crews to support functions like holding, patrol, and mop-up represents another normal practice with simple and tested administrative pathways among mutual aid agencies.

Working with nonprofit partners like the Watershed Center requires the Forest Service to plan and communicate more than when working with federal and state agencies. Participating Agreements

Partnering with nonprofit community groups offers significant advantages that agency-to-agency partnerships do not.

require that funding be secured before the start of the project and that match is already identified. Furthermore, modification of agreements and addition of Supplemental Project Agreements requires federal grants and agreements staff to approve of changes—a step not required when agencies work within the structure of mutual aid agreements with other agencies. However, partnering with nonprofit community groups offers significant advantages that agency-to-agency partnerships do not. These include expansion of the prescribed fire workforce beyond the relatively fixed capacity of agencies, the ability to coordinate cross-boundary burns, and increased local community support. In light of these advantages, Watershed Center and Forest Service staff continue to invest the necessary time and energy into building and maintaining the partnership.



After Action Review, Weaver Basin Cooperative Burn.
Photo Credit: Miller Bailey/The Watershed Research and Training Center

The Watershed Center also struggles to maintain formal fireline qualifications for its personnel. Access to training and certification is limited for nonprofits and maintaining the qualifications of staff is critical. Normal turnover of trainees and core staff positions exacerbates this underlying difficulty. Furthermore, the periodic and unpredictable nature of prescribed burning opportunities, which are highly dependent on weather windows, sometimes mean that entire burn seasons pass with no implementation. Maintenance of qualifications has also been a challenge when the Forest Service chooses to use the simpler option of agency partnerships, as described previously. At times, this has denied Watershed Center staff the opportunity to maintain qualifications and complete task books for new qualifications.

The Watershed Center has also been caught in the sector-wide struggle to secure private liability insurance for prescribed fire. While less pertinent to cooperative burning on federal lands—where the Forest Service assumes primary liability—insurance is critical to burning on private lands. The Watershed Center has been through two cycles of being insured and uninsured, leading to variable ability to lead its own private land burns. One solution to overcoming this barrier has been to hire private contractors to lead burns that carry the needed liability insurance. While this has at times been necessary to proceed with projects and meet funding commitments, hiring private contractors cuts into the Watershed Center’s ability to use its own personnel and equipment, undermining its ability to grow and sustain in-house capacity. To overcome this challenge, the Watershed Center has invested in the development of a California state insurance pool for private parties conducting burns that serve the public good.

TAKEAWAYS

Over the course of eight years of agreements, the Watershed Center has implemented about a dozen cooperative burns of varying types across four federal management units, spanning approximately 1,500 acres. This included four burns that spanned public and private lands within single burn periods. In the past decade of work through the Trinity IFMP, the Watershed Center and its cooperators have learned many hard lessons. Challenging though the process has been, navigating it positioned the Watershed Center as a regional and national leader in prescribed fire. The organization continues to give back through leadership of statewide prescribed fire training and capacity building efforts, as well as through continued participation in the The Conservancy's Fire Learning Network.

One of the most important lessons the Watershed Center learned regarding prescribed fire partnerships with the Forest Service is that nonprofits must build trusting relationships with inspired local fire and fuel managers. It is necessary to work with these agency leaders to establish a shared vision for prescribed fire use across the landscape and to define the value proposition of the proposed partnership. This may require demonstrating unique value, such as investing in landowner engagement and project implementation on private lands adjacent to federally managed lands.

Obtaining and managing NWCG qualifications is difficult for nonprofits. Seeing this gap, the Watershed Center developed and administered a parallel system for managing qualifications that met the needs of the organization and other local partners in the Trinity IFMP. While there remains no single solution to managing nonprofit credentials and qualifications, various organizations, including the Watershed Center, continue to problem solve with agency partners.



Groups seeking to develop prescribed fire programs similar to what the Watershed Center has built should recognize that no single cooperative agreement yet exists that can streamline all the necessary legal elements of such a partnership. The Watershed Center had to use a patchwork of agreements and contracts to develop a full body of work and this complexity proved administratively burdensome. While development of a single prescribed fire agreement template would be welcome, until such time as the Forest Service does so, interested nonprofits must be willing to tolerate the complexity of a patchwork of agreements.

Finally, it cannot be overstated how significant The Conservancy's Fire Learning Network, Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TRES) events, and the TRES Coaches Network were in the development of the Watershed Center's prescribed burn program. Their mentorship, technical assistance, and support for training and capacity building were critical. These resources can offer interested organizations more rapid capacity and qualifications development; build trust among partners; deliver planning, risk management and legal tools; and serve as a catalyst for establishing a local initiative.

Opposite page: Staging for a cooperative burn, Weaver Basin.

This page: Firing on private lands, Weaver Basin.

Photo Credit: Erin Banwell/The Watershed Research and Training Center



A photograph of two firefighters in yellow gear and helmets standing in a forest with smoke rising from the ground. The scene is backlit by the sun, creating a hazy, golden atmosphere. The firefighters are positioned in the middle ground, with a line of trees in the background and a rocky, charred ground in the foreground.

Forest Stewards Guild

New Mexico

MARCH 2022

INTRODUCTION

The Forest Stewards Guild (the Guild) is a nonprofit organization with more than 30 years of history in northern New Mexico, where its work began. The Guild partners with traditional land grant, tribal, rural, and forest-dependent communities to sustain their working relationships with the land and promotes ecological forestry practices that are socially and economically responsible.

Wildfire and community resilience are critical priorities in the fire-adapted landscapes of northern New Mexico. Ponderosa pine-dominated forests adapted to frequent low-intensity fire suffer from

over 120 years of fire exclusion, leading to more extreme fire events when they do occur. These events can also cause long lasting post-fire loss of forests and watershed function that negatively impact drinking water and forest-based economies.

The Guild's work expanded over time to address the unique challenges posed by climate change and wildfire. In its early years, the Guild worked to ensure community access to fuelwood and small timber products by writing community-focused forest and fire management plans and employing field crews to support forest-based career pathways. As the Guild's work evolved, its efforts expanded to include writing the organization's first community wildfire protection plan in 2006, starting and running forest restoration thinning crews, supporting those crews as they spun off into stand-alone businesses, supporting collaboration and multi-party monitoring efforts, and conducting research on fire-adapted communities and ecosystems.

The Guild's interest in implementing and supporting prescribed fire began in the late 2000s when it co-authored a series of reports on a then-nascent U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service) Region 3 program called the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP). It found that prescribed fire—a critical ecosystem process—was missing from many project treatments. The Guild was determined to address the problem and identify the barriers and solutions required to expand the use of prescribed fire in the state.

Between 2008 and 2014, the Guild received funding through CFRP to work with partners, including the New Mexico State Land Office and The Nature Conservancy (The Conservancy), to develop burn plans and convene Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TRES) burns on lands slated for restoration thinning treatments. Over time, the Guild expanded this work and began to coordinate an increasing number of cooperative prescribed burns and TRES events throughout central and northern New Mexico. In 2018, the Guild, the Santa Fe National Forest, and other partners received funding from the New Mexico chapter of The Conservancy's Rio Grande Water Fund to formally develop a multi-partner cooperative burning team known as the All Hands All Lands (AHAL) Burn Team. That team has been operational ever since. Also in 2018, the Guild began to develop a comprehensive fire management program in its organization. The program grew in Colorado as well, and in early 2021 was launched into The Ember Alliance, a stand-alone nonprofit solely focused on good fire. The Guild continues to practice and promote prescribed fire in the Southwest and increasingly plays a role in the fire adapted forested ecosystems in the Southeast, Lake States, and Northeast.



*Photo Credit: USDA Forest Service,
Southwestern Region, Kaibab National Forest*

ENABLING CONDITIONS

'Enabling Conditions' are local and organizational factors that existed prior to the development of a cooperative burn program and were essential to its growth.

ESTABLISHED PARTNERSHIPS

The Guild had a long history of engagement with the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), New Mexico State Land Office, The Conservancy, and private landowners from prior restoration, resiliency, and wood utilization projects. As it established its prescribed fire program, it worked within these well-established partnerships and as a result received critical funding, mentorship, specialized fire training, and implementation opportunities.

AGENCY COMMITMENT TO PRESCRIBED FIRE

The Carson, Santa Fe, and Cibola National Forests in northern New Mexico meaningfully expanded their use of prescribed fire in the last ten years, particularly after two devastating wildfires in 2011 (the Las Conchas and Whitewater-Baldy Fires). They saw partners like the Guild as important providers of shoulder-season capacity ('shoulder season' is the period of time outside of peak fire season and when prescribed fire burn windows are still open) to help staff their prescribed burns and meet ambitious burn targets. The agency's openness to partnerships contributed significantly to the Guild's decision to expand its programs and invest in its fire capacity.



Photo Credit: Neal Herbert/U.S.
Department of the Interior

INTERNAL FIRE EXPERTISE

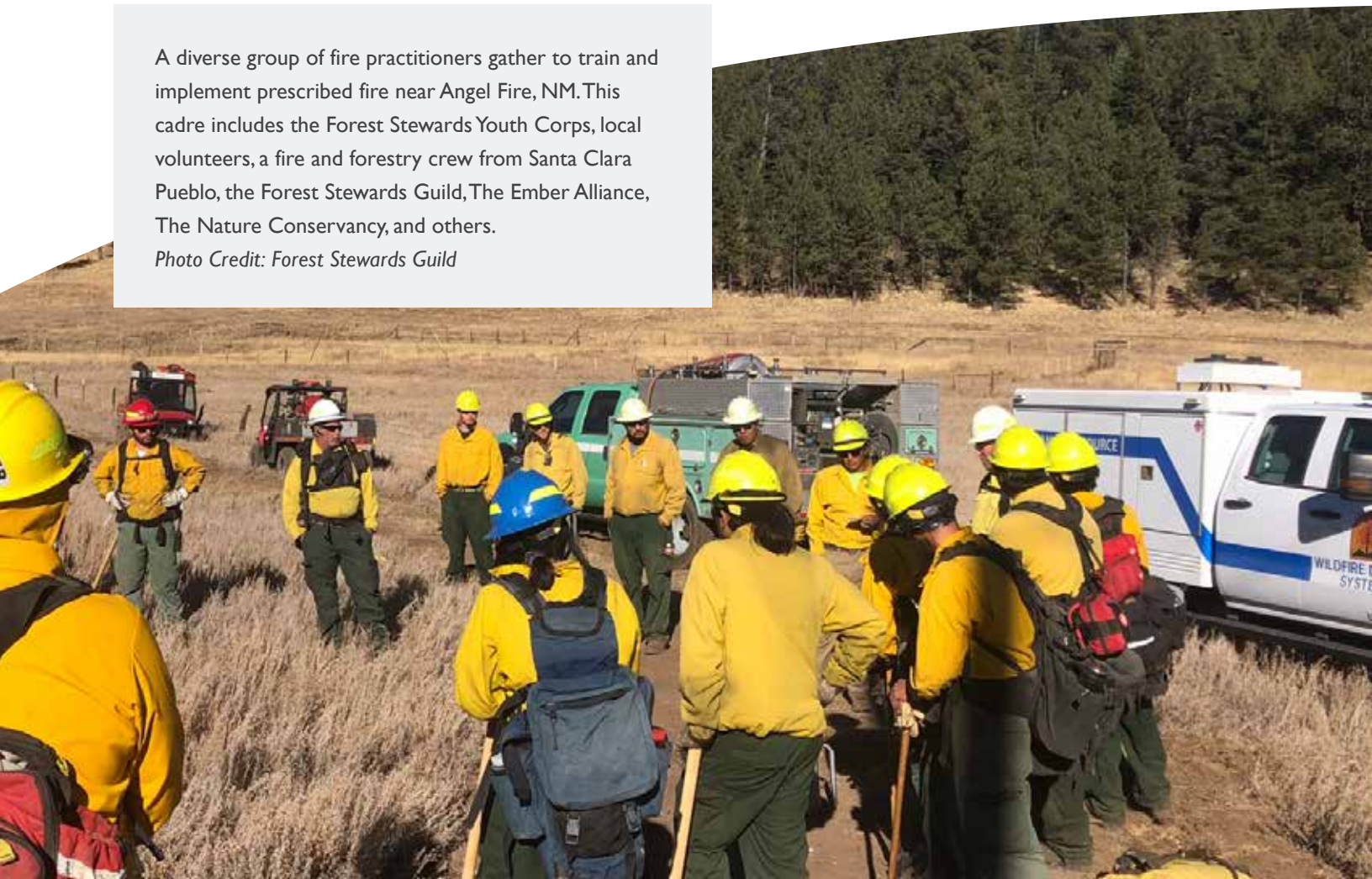
Several Guild staff brought prior work experiences as federal fire employees to the organization. Their expertise and confidence were essential as the organization stepped into new prescribed fire opportunities and partnerships, and helped establish the Guild's credibility in the eyes of federal partners.

FUNDING SUPPORT

Several funding opportunities in the state were supportive of prescribed fire implementation at the time that the Guild chose to develop a prescribed fire program. These included Forest Service Region 3's CFRP program, funding from the State Land Office, and funding from the Rio Grande Water Fund. These opportunities helped support nonprofits, Tribes, and small businesses and invested in workforce capacity, prescribed fire planning, and prescribed fire supplies and equipment. This proved instrumental in building the Guild's momentum.

A diverse group of fire practitioners gather to train and implement prescribed fire near Angel Fire, NM. This cadre includes the Forest Stewards Youth Corps, local volunteers, a fire and forestry crew from Santa Clara Pueblo, the Forest Stewards Guild, The Ember Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, and others.

Photo Credit: Forest Stewards Guild



MAKING IT HAPPEN

Building the organizational capacity and programmatic structure for cooperative burn work.

INCREMENTAL GROWTH

Several pieces fell into place between 2016 and 2018 that enabled the Guild to play a larger role in prescribed fire in central and northern New Mexico. First, the organization developed more experience, more connections, and stronger relationships between those years. With each cooperative burn all three of those important factors deepened and led to an understanding at the Guild that it could increase its impact on prescribed fire. This also resulted in greater demand for the Guild's fire capacity from other partners.

It took five years of conversations, meetings, and building trust with the Forest Service, starting from the organization's first prescribed fire in 2013 on state trust lands, before the Guild conducted its first burn with the Forest Service in 2018. Through patient and deliberate relationship-building, the Guild increased its engagement with agency fuels staff, and ultimately received encouragement to expand several of its programs to work in tandem with Forest Service fuels treatment efforts. These expansions included a larger Forest Stewards Youth Corps summer program for high school students, and a new Youth Corps Fire and Fuels program for youth and young adults that provided sawyer training and fire qualifications during the prescribed fire season.

The Guild also expanded and deepened its prescribed fire work through additional investments in its fire staff. In 2017 and 2018 it hired two extremely qualified individuals with wildfire suppression experience, one of whom was a qualified burn boss. It was useful to have seasoned professionals with advanced fire credentials to mentor and train the Guild's youth crews and volunteers, fill overhead gaps in prescribed fire operations, and lead burns.

COMPLEMENTARY FUNDING

To grow its prescribed fire work, the Guild designed interconnected projects and pursued complementary funding opportunities that supported a larger vision. Stacking funds allowed the Guild to meet match requirements, address funding and seasonal workforce gaps, pay for fireline training—a cost not normally covered under a single project budget—and cover the costs of its new prescribed fire insurance policy.

As one example of stacking funds, in 2017 the Guild sought funding from the Rio Grande Water Fund for the AHAL Burn Team; applied for state and federal funding to develop its Fire and Fuels Forest

Stewards Youth Corps crews that would work in a Rio Grande Water Fund landscape; and applied for CFRP funding to provide additive capacity to implement prescribed fire in the Zuni Mountains landscape in and around the Cibola National Forest.

AGREEMENTS

The Guild's cooperative burn work relies on the use of agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), contracts, and purchase orders with multiple partners. These tools establish partnership parameters and roles, and transfer funds for planning or project implementation. Over time, the nature of these tools changed to reflect the growth of the Guild's expertise and fire work. They can be described in two phases—the Guild's early development phase (2011-2016), and its subsequent programmatic phase (2017-present).

2011 - 2016

To enable the early prescribed fire work of the Guild—which was conducted largely on state and private lands through TREX burns and a federally funded project on New Mexico state trust lands—the Guild utilized a combination of federal, state, and partner agreements. It used a direct grant agreement to utilize CFRP funds from Forest Service Region 3 for planning, logistics, operations, patrol, and monitoring; it used purchase orders under the state price agreement with the New Mexico State Land Office to cover burn logistics and operational costs; and it used contract agreements to cover burn logistics, operations, and patrolling costs. In these five years the Guild coordinated fires on state and private lands across roughly 1,200 acres, all in close coordination with The Conservancy.

2017 - Present

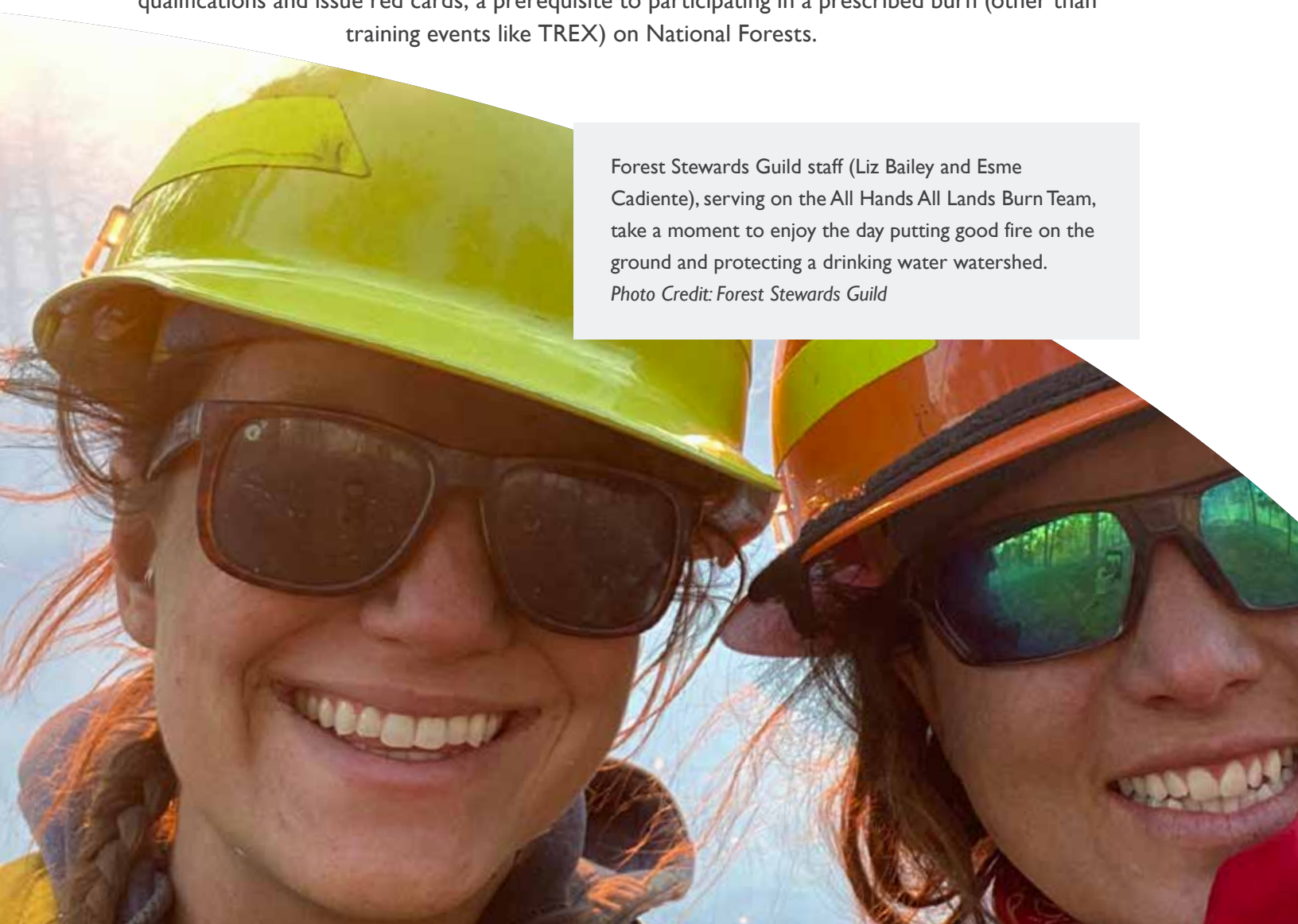
During this period, the Guild's prescribed fire partnerships and agreements evolved and expanded, due in large part to the Guild proving itself as a reliable implementation partner. It established new and modified existing long-term cooperative burn agreements with federal partners including a 5-year statewide MOU with BLM for TREX burns, a new agreement with the National Park Service, and a modification to a Forest Service Region 3 Master Participating Agreement expanding its scope of work and including its Youth Corps program. The Guild also solidified working relationships with the New Mexico State Land Office through an MOU and worked within other partners' existing agreements including the New Mexico Prescribed Fire Council's direct grant CFRP agreement.

From 2018 to 2020, the Guild also dramatically increased its network of prescribed fire agreements to enable the AHAL Burn Team to grow. New agreements between the Guild and The Conservancy's Rio Grande Water Fund allowed federal pass-through dollars from Forest Service Region 3 to be used to pay AHAL resources for their support on federal burns. Complementary agreements (often

MOUs or contractual purchase of service agreements) between the Guild and AHAL partners like Tribes, nonprofits, and municipalities established their role as AHAL burn partners, outlined basic partnership parameters, and confirmed that each party had adequate insurance coverage. Together, these federal agreements and partner agreements positioned the Guild and The Conservancy to mobilize AHAL resources with federal funding. They also established cooperative burn opportunities across multiple jurisdictions, increasing the AHAL Team's ability to change where they worked to meet the needs of different fire managers, take advantage of shifting burn windows, and fill capacity gaps when seasonal positions ended.

FIRELINE QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATION

When the Guild began building its fire management program in 2018, it hired a Burn Boss Type 2 (RXB2) and began developing its own organizational capacity to train its crews and manage fireline qualifications. With assistance from a local fire department, the Guild gained access to an online qualifications management system designed for states and other mutual aid entities called the Incident Qualification System (IQS). This provides a pathway for the Guild to manage its employees' fireline qualifications and issue red cards, a prerequisite to participating in a prescribed burn (other than training events like TREX) on National Forests.

A close-up photograph of two women wearing fire safety gear. The woman on the left is wearing a yellow helmet and dark sunglasses, smiling broadly. The woman on the right is wearing an orange helmet and reflective sunglasses, also smiling. They appear to be outdoors in a natural setting, possibly a forest or burn site.

Forest Stewards Guild staff (Liz Bailey and Esme Cadiente), serving on the All Hands All Lands Burn Team, take a moment to enjoy the day putting good fire on the ground and protecting a drinking water watershed.

Photo Credit: Forest Stewards Guild

ADDRESSING LIABILITY

The Guild addresses its prescribed fire liability using multiple simultaneous strategies.

During its earliest TREX and cooperative burn projects, the Guild did not have a prescribed fire insurance policy. It worked with contracted burn bosses between 2013 and 2016 and ensured those businesses carried workers' compensation insurance, general liability coverage, and coverage for hostile fire or smoke or a loggers long-form policy (depending on the complexity of the burn). The Guild required contractors to carry \$1 million of liability insurance at a minimum and requested that it be listed as an "additional insured" on the contractor's certificate of liability insurance.

In 2018, as the Guild's prescribed fire program was in development, the organization pursued its own prescribed fire and smoke insurance policy and sought to increase its general liability coverage amounts. After a number of tries, the Guild was able to secure a policy with an aggregate liability of \$3 million. The policy also includes hostile fire and smoke production. The Guild continues to hold this coverage despite the increasing scarcity of prescribed fire insurance.

To address the potential for personal injury, participants such as volunteers are required to sign liability waivers to participate on a burn. Guild staff members, which includes youth corps crews, are covered by the organization's workers' compensation coverage. However, as the Guild added firefighters to its staff, the Guild lost its original policy when it sought coverage for its more expansive fire team. It then had to secure workers' compensation insurance through the insurer of last resort in each state where it had staff classified as firefighters. The Guild is a national organization and has at different times had fire staff in multiple states, leading to multiple insurance policies. This is logistically challenging because each state has separate billing, claims processes, audits, and annual cycles. It also means that there is a significant administrative hurdle to hiring the first new employee in a state.

Liability and risk are also included in the AHAL agreements and MOUs that allow the Guild to work in partnership with other entities. These documents typically require that each partner disclose their insurance coverages to ensure adequate protection and include basic guidelines for how disputes or damage to equipment will be resolved.

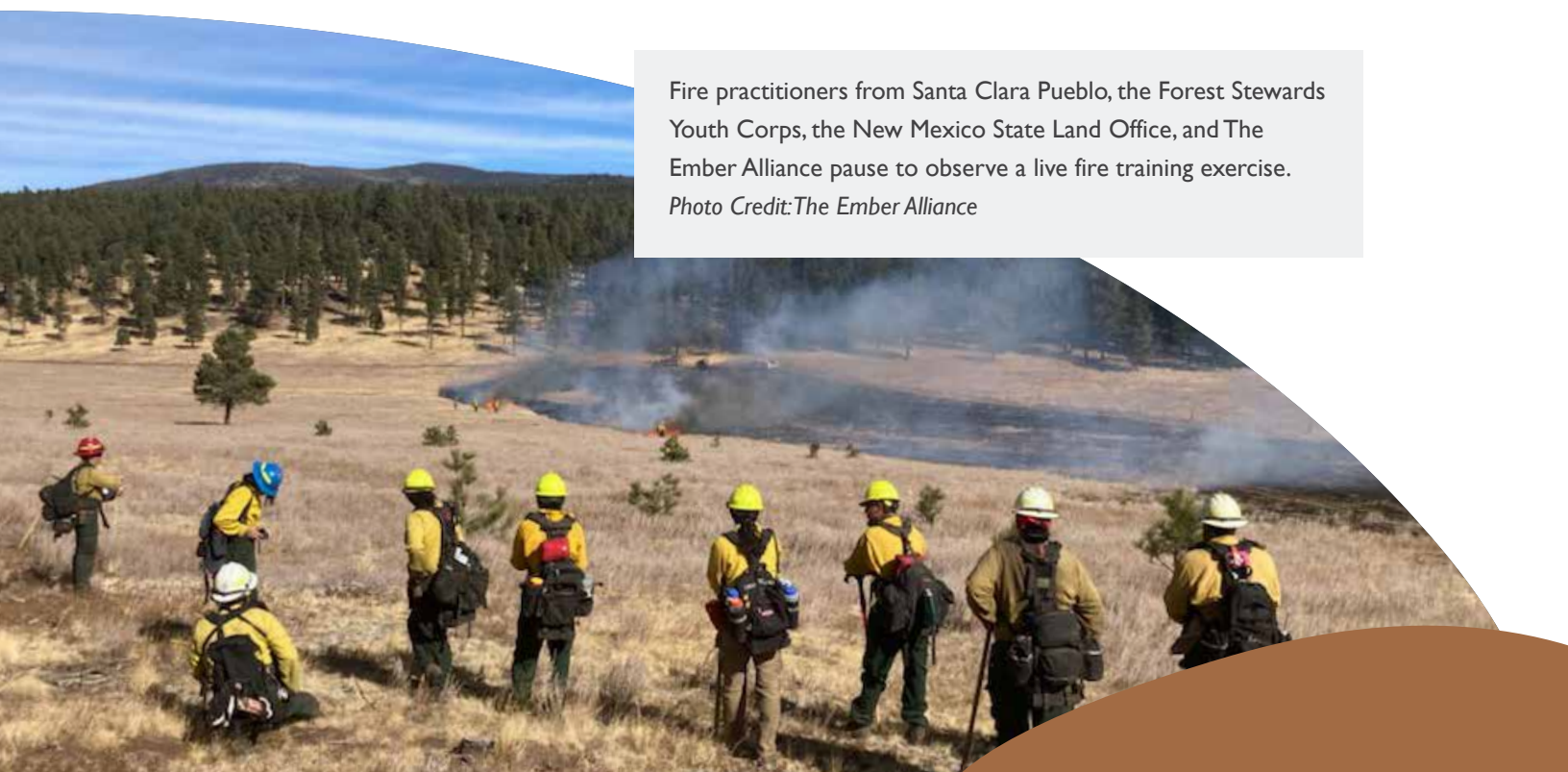
SNAPSHOT OF COOPERATIVE BURN MODEL: THE GUILD

Partners	Type	Role / Accomplishments / Contributions
Forest Stewards Guild (The Guild)	Local	<p>Maintained internal prescribed fire capacity through year-round Guild staff, call-when-needed employees, and Forest Stewards Youth Corps crews.</p> <p>Provided leadership of All Hands All Lands (AHAL) Burn Team with The Conservancy by providing planning, coordination, training, outfitting (lending gear), and administration services to partners.</p>
U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service)	Federal	<p>Worked with local nonprofit and AHAL Burn Team partners to identify cooperative burn opportunities and confirm partnership details through agreements.</p> <p>Provided burn bosses, equipment, vehicles including helicopters, and significant staffing support on federal burns.</p>
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)	Federal	<p>Worked with local nonprofit and AHAL Burn Team partners to identify cooperative burn opportunities and confirm partnership details through agreements.</p> <p>Provided a BLM-staffed fire engine for support on burn days.</p>
Private contractors	Local	The Guild contracted insured burn bosses to fill capacity gaps on non-federal burns when needed.
Private landowners	Local	Private landowners gave permission to the Guild and the AHAL Burn Team to conduct controlled burns on their property by signing paperwork and approving burn plans.

(continued on next page)

SNAPSHOT OF COOPERATIVE BURN MODEL: THE GUILD

Partners	Type	Role / Accomplishments / Contributions
*The following partners worked with the Guild under the AHAL Burn Team partnership framework.		
The Nature Conservancy (The Conservancy)	Local	The Conservancy was a close collaborator since the inception of the Guild's prescribed fire program - providing meaningful financial support, help with planning and training, burn plan review, risk analysis support, and providing highly qualified support on AHAL burns.
Tribes (Pueblos of Jemez, Santa Clara, and Tesuque)	Tribal Nations	Tribes partnered on the AHAL Burn Team and often had MOU agreements with the Guild to cover liability and move funds.
New Mexico State Land Office, NM Game and Fish Department	State	Provided funding to the Guild to treat state lands and other public lands with priority wildlife habitats.
Local forestry departments and fire/forestry crews (e.g. City of Santa Fe, Bernalillo County)	Municipal	Municipal firefighter squads supported partner burns under the banner of AHAL and independently under their own municipal agreements with federal partners.



Fire practitioners from Santa Clara Pueblo, the Forest Stewards Youth Corps, the New Mexico State Land Office, and The Ember Alliance pause to observe a live fire training exercise.
Photo Credit: The Ember Alliance

SNAPSHOT OF COOPERATIVE BURN MODEL: THE GUILD

Agreement Instruments

The Guild had various agreements with federal and state partners that shared funds, defined parameters for burning together, authorized the Guild and its partners to burn on federal land, and sometimes also allowed for two-directional support so federal agencies could support the Guild and its partners on non-federal burns.

The Guild had agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with most non-federal partners that identified them as burn partners, allowed funding to move to those partners, and covered fireline credentialing and liability.

In addition to agreements through the Guild, the AHAL Burn Team regularly operated under The Nature Conservancy's federal agreements with certain National Forests.

Municipal partners burned under an MOU with the Guild or burned under their own agreements with National Forests.

Staffing / Workforce Model

The Guild hired year-round and seasonal fire staff and seasonal Forest Stewards Youth Corps crews to implement its prescribed fire and fuels work.

When working as the All Hands All Lands (AHAL) Burn Team, partners included a mixture of Guild staff, Forest Stewards Youth Corps crews (also staff), seasonal staff crews, call-when-needed resources, municipalities, Tribes, and some volunteers.

Fireline Training, Credentialing, and Red Carding

The Guild provided some National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) training opportunities for staff and partners.

The Guild accessed the Incident Qualification System (IQS)—a qualification management system used primarily by states and their mutual aid partners like local fire services—and managed red cards for some year-round Guild staff and Youth Corps crew members.

Some Youth Corps crew members arranged for red card sponsorship through a National Forest or the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

Tribal partners' red cards were sponsored through BIA.

Other partners' burn practitioners (referred to as call-when-needed, or CWN) were responsible for finding an agency to host their red cards.

SNAPSHOT OF COOPERATIVE BURN MODEL: THE GUILD

Liability Strategies

The Guild addressed the risk of personal injury or damage to federal property on a burn through workers' compensation coverage, using liability waivers, and holding a general automobile insurance policy. Memoranda of Understanding and agreements with other partners ensured each party had similar coverage.

Liability for negligent acts was also mitigated by meeting NWCG qualification standards and through experienced supervision and oversight.

Guild staff and call-when-needed partner resources operated under the Guild's prescribed fire insurance coverages.

Contracted resources / burn bosses were required to carry both workers' compensation insurance and general liability coverage for hostile fire or smoke, or a loggers long-form policy, and a minimum \$1 million coverage limit.

When AHAL supported a federal burn, team members were in a subordinate role following agency instruction, leading to a lower assessment of risk exposure.

When AHAL or the Guild burned on state trust or private lands, they mitigated risk through prescribed fire insurance, planning, and having experienced people on site.

Other Critical Resources

Project implementation funding was provided by Forest Service Region 3's Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) and the State Land Office.

Region 3 funding provided through the Rio Grande Water Fund supported creation of the AHAL Burn Team.

CHALLENGES

The Guild's challenges are primarily associated with fireline qualifications management and red carding. Although the Guild uses IQS for its year-round and Youth Corps employees, it is not able to do so for call-when-needed employees or partners that serve as additional resources on burns, including the AHAL Burn Team. For those individuals, it is necessary that they secure their own sponsorship through their employer, a partner, or other red card host agency. Because this is not always possible, and the administrative burden of red card management is high, many who are interested in becoming or staying fireline qualified are prevented from doing so.

The Guild could more easily grow its reserve of prescribed fire practitioners if tools for red card management were more accessible to nonprofits and for multi-party workforce models. The AHAL team is functional at the current scale and scope, but needs more capacity, more qualified practitioners, more training and better solutions to red carding to meet demands for increased fuels treatments in the region.

TAKEAWAYS

The Forest Stewards Guild has practiced prescribed fire for the past 10 years. While it has been hard work, it has yielded important results. Most importantly, others can learn from this and create their own paths to cooperative burning and wildfire resilience.

Seeing federal and non-federal burns through planning, implementation and subsequent monitoring is an incredibly meaningful experience since it is often the culmination of years of collective action, investment, and hard work. It can mean helping to protect a summer camp ahead of wildfire season, protecting a culturally important landscape or place, providing training critical to advancing young people's careers, or protecting water supplies in the arid Southwest. The Guild's prescribed fire program has helped state and federal agencies scale up the impact of their restoration work and diversify the capacity of prescribed fire practitioners in new organizations and sectors.

The Guild learned many lessons as it built its prescribed fire capacity and partnerships, and it continues to face ongoing challenges. Unfortunately, it seems that some of these challenges must be addressed again and again. Increasing the pace and scale of prescribed fire in a sustainable and equitable fashion and changing the social paradigm around wildfire are likely to be the greatest of those challenges.



Photo Credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



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COALITION

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