

# **2015 Washington Prescribed Fire Council Conference**

## **Training, Certification, and Expertise Exchange**

### **February 10-12, 2015**

#### **Tierra Learning Center, Leavenworth WA**

### **Background info and intent of gathering:**

The Washington Prescribed Fire Council (WPFC) was formed in 2011, building off of the efforts and successes of the North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council. The intent of the Council is to create a united voice for prescribed fire policy and application in Washington State. The WPFC is part of The National Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils.

The intent of this conference was to bring together prescribed fire practitioners and managers from across the state to identify training needs and create training opportunities, and to increase communication within the Council.

### **Outcomes**

#### Conference Summary

- Attendees participated in two days of discussions, presentations, breakout sessions, and panels covering the following topics:
  - 1) Recent successes and challenges with Rx fire
  - 2) Past experiences with training exchanges
  - 3) Identification of training needs across the state
  - 4) Logistics of planning a training event (timing, location, scope, etc)
  - 5) Communication challenges and future opportunities for the WPFC
  - 6) Collaboration with Northwest Fire Science Consortium on outreach materials
- Attendees received a property tour of the Tierra Learning Center, which included: a walk through forested stands where DNR cost share funding supported fuels reduction efforts, a tour of FSC Certified commercial timber harvest units, and a short presentation and tour of the Tierra Forest Products biochar facility.

#### 2014 Burn Season Highlights

- **WDFW** (North Central WA): 38 days of burning, >1000 acres
- **USFS** (NE WA): capitalized on limited burn windows, had successful resource sharing and communication b/w agencies within the region
- **Center for Natural Lands Management** (CNLM) (Western WA): 90 burn units, 70 trained firefighters, small (<100 ton) units aided smoke mgmt., conducted fire suppression training
- **BLM** (NE WA): Successful Pierre Lake 80 acre burn, working on fragmented lands, had excellent community outreach and engagement

#### Challenges Across WA

- **Burn ban:** Both eastside and westside agencies and organizations reported difficulties accomplishing burn season objectives during last season's burn ban. The burn ban shifted available times for burns, creating smoke management issues and reducing the effectiveness of burns to meet habitat objectives.
- **Funding:** Cuts and shifts to funding have resulted in overall lower capacity to meet prescribed fire objectives.

- **Messaging:** Messaging to the public remains a challenge for many agencies, especially after the summer wildfire season. Capacity for outreach to the public and media is limited as well.

### Training Needs and Opportunities

- **Needs:** Specific training needs were identified during conference discussion, including starting with smaller training exchanges and focusing on specific individual type trainings. To be most effective, it would be useful to identify what taskbook qualifications are needed or what positions are in demand. Some types of trainings that could be offered include position specific trainings (e.g. Burn boss, firing boss), weather forecasting training, smoke management, media training, or trainings to learn about the regulatory side of operations.
  - 1) Logistics – A self-sufficient model where the host doesn't worry about lodging and food may be more successful for agencies with limited capacity for logistics. Participants also suggested that successful trainings need to have a specific plan, have set expectations, be flexible, and to start small. Reliable burn windows are important.
  - 2) MOUs/Informal Agreements – Memorandums of Understanding may need to be established for trainings between different agencies and organizations.
  - 3) Timing – Differences in prescribed fire season on different sides of the state could be taken advantage of, sending fire practitioners on trainings during their offseason.
  - 4) Private Contractors – There are many private contractors that are seeking prescribed fire training and state certification, but opportunities so far have been limited for active fire prescribed burns on the private side.
  - 5) Media/Communication – Providing positive PR for prescribed fire and getting information about prescribed fire to those who aren't burn practitioners. The Council should use the website and social media for resources, information sharing, networking, and training sharing.
- **Opportunities:** In the course of discussing training needs, it came out that there were already several training opportunities available across the state. Many agencies, especially federal agencies on the eastside of the state, are already participating in informal exchanges of resources and trainings. The Council can help communicating about these opportunities.

### 2015 Priorities for WPFC (point people)

- **Specialized Training for specific skills on case-by-case basis** [Mason McKinley- CNLM; John Richardson - Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM)]
- **Enhancing Communication and Networking with online interactive calendar** [Kara Karboski – current WPFC Coordinator]
- **Burning on Private Lands-Training and Collaboration** – site demonstration? [Reese Lolley – WPFC Chair and possibly Tom Leuschen]
- **Modified Training Exchanges** in Fall 2015 (westside) and Spring 2015 (eastside) – [multiple point people]
- **Hire Coordinator** [Reese Lolley – WPFC Chair and Ryan Anderson – SCW RC&D]
- **Collate MOUs and templates and post online** [WPFC Coordinator]
- **Smoke Management and Weather Forecasting** workshop [Sean Hopkins – Ecology; Shane Robson – USFS Colville]
- **Suppression Skills Workshop** in Summer 2015 [John Richardson – JBLM; Mason McKinley – CNLM]

### Next Steps

- Point people will work with WPFC coordinator and Exec team to advance priorities
- Monthly conference calls for each priority to keep the ball rolling!