

October 2016

Fire as an Ecosystem Process:

The Black Lake Burn



**FIRE ADAPTED
COMMUNITIES**
LEARNING NETWORK



The Nature
Conservancy



BLACK LAKE

COLLABORATIVE CONTROLLED BURN

During the first two weeks in October, the Forest Stewards Guild and collaborative burn partners safely returned fire to 500 acres of ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forests on state trust lands managed by the New Mexico State Land Office near Black Lake New Mexico. The burn provided a training opportunity for new firefighters to work alongside highly qualified and experienced firefighters. Four young adults from Santa Fe Youthworks joined the Guild in a physical work capacity (pack) test and an introduction to wildland firefighting course and assisted with fire operations during the burn. One was certified as a wildland firefighter for the first time, giving him an opportunity to pursue a

“This burn is a continuation of work that began in 2008 in collaboration with the State Land Office and others to improve forest health, protect nearby communities from wildfire, and to protect the upper Little Coyote Creek watershed.”

career in firefighting. A Guild staff member was also certified as a wildland firefighter, building the capacity for the Guild to participate in collaborative burn efforts for social and ecological benefit and to mitigate negative effects of wildfire.

The burn unit was comprised mostly of ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forests that showed signs of frequent fire prior to the 1950s. The burn plan, written by Smoked Goose Consulting was informed by field surveys, fire and smoke modeling, and forest monitoring. The monitoring was led by the Guild and has been ongoing since 2008 when forest restoration activities were initiated.

Pockets of dense ponderosa and a thick layer of pine needles and dead and down logs created an unsafe fuel load for the surrounding communities that border the state trust land. The burn reduced the fuel load, thereby creating a safer environment for the surrounding neighborhoods. As a result of reducing fuel loads and recycling nutrients into the soil, we expect to see healthy grass and flower response in the understory this Spring, which means an increase in biologic diversity.



A squad heads back into a burn unit to dig fireline around a wildlife snag. Wildlife habitat such as snags and large trees were protected from fire where possible. Archaeological sites that were sensitive to fire were also protected.

A VITAL ECOSYSTEM PROCESS



“We have excellent collaborative restoration partners that are once again coming together to learn, burn and share resources.”

EYTAN KRASILOVSKY,
Southwest
Director, Forest
Stewards Guild

Fire is a key ecosystem process. A forest that has adapted to thrive alongside fire needs fire to be healthy. Fire is an essential ingredient in maintaining a balance and forest health in many ecological communities.

Broadcast burning promotes ecological health in frequent fire forests, reduces hazardous fuels thereby protecting nearby communities, and reduces the intensity and size of future wildfires by introducing fire back into the forest in a safe and manageable way.

The Black Lake collaborative burn demonstrated how fire can be used as an effective forest management tool for the benefit of the surrounding communities and the health of the forest. Partners committed time, personnel, and equipment, without which, the burn would not have happened. In particular, support from **The Nature Conservancy’s Fire Learning Network, NM State Land Office, NM State Forestry’s Returning Heroes Program, the Village of Angel Fire, Moreno Valley Fire Department, and the Taos Bureau of Land Management** was crucial.



Top: The City of Santa Fe Fire Department’s Wildland Division contributed to the safe return of fire.

Bottom: Unsafe fuel near the WUI was burned to help protect the community from a potential wildfire.



This effort would not have been possible without

OUR COLLABORATIVE BURN PARTNERS:



NM State Land Office, City of Santa Fe Fire Department, Moreno Valley Fire Department, Angel Fire Fire Department, Terra Fuego Resource Foundation, the Taos BLM, NM State Forestry Returning Heroes Program, Santa Fe Youth Works, the Santa Fe National Forest, Taos Ski Valley, the Forest Stewards Guild, and The Nature Conservancy's Fire Learning Network



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The Forest Stewards Guild practices and promotes ecologically, economically, and socially responsible forestry as a means of sustaining the integrity of forest ecosystems and the human communities dependent on them. The Southwest Region of the Forest Stewards Guild promotes excellence in forest stewardship by working with partners, forest workers and landowners to promote a sustainable forest-based economy and ecological forest restoration.

Top Photo: Greg Hesch from NM State Forestry protects a large ponderosa. NM State Forestry contributed an engine, UTV and firefighters from their Returning Heroes program.

Bottom Photo: Guild SW staff holding a 60 acre burn unit.

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