

Plumas Cal-TREX

Plumas County, California

Spring 2023

By Logan Krahenbuhl

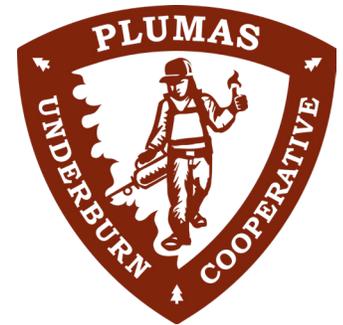
This spring saw the fourth annual iteration of the Plumas Cal-TREX. This Cal-TREX focuses on local capacity building, and is organized in an “on-call” style rather than the traditional two-week TREX format. Participants sign up for two core weekends of fundamental prescribed fire training, and are then placed on an on-call list. The on-call list is notified when our partners are burning, whether private or public land, but no one has any obligation to commit to attending any burn. This model is rounded out with optional supplementary fire trainings like RT-130, an arduous work capacity test, S-290, and wilderness first aid.

Accessibility is very important to us so we charge only a nominal fee (\$25) to take part. This covers a t-shirt and a fun barbecue on one of the core training days. Other than that, participants must be self-sufficient regarding food and water for the days at the TREX. When participants come from out of the area, free camping or a couch to sleep on can always be provided by partners based in Plumas County.

Plumas Cal-TREX is managed as a Type 3 incident and has a small incident management team (IMT). The IMT has been working together since fall 2020, largely retaining the same key players and organizations. Strong relationships—more like friendships—between these people and organizations mean that we are able to get projects completed efficiently, effectively and safely with open communications. The team is flexible and responsive to critiques



Mitch Bamford, Dallas Koller, and Hannah Hepner hold the line during a burn at Bidwell Park in Chico, CA. © Rich Carvalho/DSS Wildfire



from both inside and outside of the organization. Partners involved are never afraid to ask questions or favors; each organization contains experts in many facets of fire, forestry, and natural resource management. The ability to have cadre that can expertly cover topics such as fire operations, ecology, medical scenarios, and risk management has been indispensable.

This year our first training weekend, scheduled for February, had to be cancelled because of poor weather conditions. So the curriculum originally scheduled for four days was modified and presented to the group over two days in March. Participants engaged in rotating learning stations that included medical scenarios, pump operations, fire ecology talks, inclusive language, and a spot fire scenario. Although planned, conditions did not allow for live fire to occur on the training weekend.

There were 72 participants from 33 different organizations at this initial training weekend. They came from organizations based in California, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington and Spain. Nine people were attending with the intention of starting their own prescribed burn association. Throughout the spring, TREX participants from our on-call list participated in 11 days of burning on 23 burn units, burning upwards of 375 acres. Burning occurred on land managed by five private landowners, two local governments, and two ranger districts. In addition, 33 people participated in a fireline refresher and pack test, allowing them to keep their

fireline qualifications current in order to participate in prescribed burns on the Plumas National Forest.

As we complete our fourth year of operations, we are able to see growth in everyone involved in the events. Students have grown into squad leaders; squad leaders have grown into instructors. During the first few years of operation, cadre and IMT members often had to serve multiple roles: leading a squad, teaching stations and doing other tasks concurrently. As our organization gains complexity and experience we have been able to fill more roles with others and ease stress on individual people. We are excited to continue offering this TRES in future years to build local capacity by training and networking with new and seasoned fire practitioners.



Above: Participants firing during a prescribed burn on private lands in Quincy, CA Right: Ryan Tompkins, UC Extension Forester, talks to the group about historic fire exclusion and fire ecology at Feather River College.

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Coordinating Organizations

Butte County Resource Conservation District
Butte Prescribed Burn Association
California State University—Chico Ecological Reserves
DSS Wildfire Response
Feather River College
Feather River Resource Conservation District
Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District
Plumas County Fire Safe Council
Plumas Underburn Cooperative
University of California Cooperative Extension
USDA Forest Service—Plumas NF
Watershed Research and Training Center
Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center

“I’ll admit that it did not seem super critical at the time to be practicing ignition at TRES with no actual fire—but it did allow me to jump right in when offered the opportunity at the Big Hill burn. I’m sure it could have been really intimidating and easy to decline or stay on the sidelines if I hadn’t had at least some prior exposure to drip torches and firing patterns. It didn’t occur to me until afterwards that instead of being Too Much Fun, it could have easily ended up being an overwhelming/embarrassing experience—but thanks to the Plumas Underburn Cooperative and TRES, I felt comfortable enough with all the basics of a variety of tasks to be able to jump in and actually contribute. Very empowering to directly put good fire back on the ground, and be part of the larger wildland-urban interface protection work.”



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Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges are part of the *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together* (PERFACT) cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more about PERFACT, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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