



Fire-Adapted Communities in Trinity County, CA: A Case Story

In Trinity County, California, a small community-based organization is coordinating a big effort to increase the health of forests and help communities in the region become more resilient to wildfire. The Trinity Integrated Fire Management Partnership, led by the Watershed Research and Training Center in Hayfork, CA, is bringing local workers, private landowners, volunteer fire departments, regional partners, and state and federal agencies together to plan and implement strategies that take an innovative and collaborative approach to fire management on the landscapes of Trinity County. This effort, which is increasing the capacity of people in the region to proactively address forest and community health, is quickly becoming a model for other regions throughout the West, showing ways to collaboratively address and manage wildfire.

Challenge

Trinity County, CA is remote, densely forested, and mountainous. They say that if you ironed out all the peaks and valleys, the area of Trinity County would be bigger than the state of Texas.

Goals of the Partnership

- Improve public safety and protect property
- Enhance public and private land values
- Restore ecological integrity
- Protect air quality and public health by controlling when and how fires burn
- Grow inter-agency and stakeholder coordination
- Increase local qualifications and capacity for efficient and effective fuels and fire management
- Engage in public dialogue and education – increase public support
- Monitor and learn
- Grow fire-adapted communities in Trinity County



Prescribed fire is an important tool in wildfire hazard reduction, ecosystem restoration, vegetation management, and wildlife habitat enhancement.

For years, communities like the small town of Hayfork, which is tucked among steep valley walls and thick national forest land, have faced declining economic opportunities and the risk of severely destructive wildfire due to poor forest health.

WRTC is a core partner in the Dry Forest Investment Zone, a five year initiative coordinated by Sustainable Northwest and funded by the U.S. Endowment for Forests and Communities. While other communities in the Zone are addressing severe economic challenges and poor forest health by developing the infrastructure and markets necessary to utilize biomass from restoration projects, WRTC realized that this was not a currently feasible approach to address the immediate challenges in Trinity County.

Because of their distance from substantial markets, the lack of mill infrastructure, and the urgent risk that wildfire poses to the community, WRTC realized that empowering the local community to introduce prescribed fire to the landscape in a safe and strategic way presented their best opportunity to immediately address their challenges. While WRTC continues to leverage the Dry Forest Investment Zone to build local workforce and organizational capacity, infrastructure and markets, and land use strategies that will support biomass utilization, prescribed

burning addresses the immediate need to create fire resilient communities.

Prescribed fire is cheaper than hand or mechanically thinning the forest, and is better ecologically. Fire is an important natural process for the health of the diverse conifer forests in the region. By reintroducing fire safely and thoughtfully, while simultaneously increasing the capacity of people in the region to do this work, WRTC and their partners are increasing the health of the forest and the economic resiliency of communities like Hayfork.

Creating fire adapted communities, collaboratively

The Trinity Integrated Fire Management Partnership is a collaborative effort among community-based, regional, state, and federal entities. They are increasing the region's capacity to manage fire by training people in the community to perform multiple jobs. For example, individuals are being trained to manage prescribed burns, thin trees, and fight wildfires. This approach increases the collective ability of the region to proactively address wildfire, provides the opportunity for people to continue working throughout the year, and keeps more money in the community. In addition to training, the partnership plans and implements prescribed fires and educates the public about the ecological and cultural importance of fire and the opportunities that this approach presents to the region. In the coming months the Partnership aims to increase the scope, scale, and diversity of training available and make it accessible to a greater number of people. It will actively monitor the effects of fire in the region, expand the geography that the work of the Partnership impacts, and work to change the culture and understanding of what prescribed fire can do for communities and landscapes.

Trinity County, California:

Population	13,723
Land area	3,180 Square Miles
Federally owned land	76%
Persons per sq mile	4.3
Poverty rate	17.6 %
Unemployment	15.1%

Congressional District - California 2nd, Huffman (D)

Source: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/06105.html>

Successes to Date

Since the launch of the Partnership in 2012:

- 23 people in the local community have been trained to perform prescribed burns.
- 1,922 acres have been planned and are being prepped for prescribed burning.
- There is growing support from federal land management agencies and CALFIRE, evidenced by their participation, funding, and formal agreements to participate in the Partnership.

What's next for Trinity County?

While prescribed fire is an innovative and essential strategy to create fire-adapted communities and improve the resiliency of the forests the region, it is just one of multiple options that can be used to implement change. In the coming years, it is just one tool that communities can use to address their challenges. Over the coming years, WRTC will continue leveraging the investment and partnerships that have come from the Dry Forest Investment Zone initiative to increase the scope and scale of forest restoration in the region.

By building off of the success of the Partnership to increase its impact and by pursuing land management and market strategies to utilize biomass from restoration activities, WRTC and its partners are helping to create a more resilient and prosperous region.

The Trinity Integrated Fire Management Partnership was made possible through support provided by the United States Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy under the terms of Cooperative Agreement #11-CA-11132543-158. The content and opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position or the policy of the USFS, DOI or The Nature Conservancy, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

For more information on the TIFMP contact:

Nick Goulette, Executive Director
Watershed Research and Training Center
nickg@hayfork.net, (530) 628-4206

For more information on the DFIZ contact:

Dylan Kruse, Program Associate
Sustainable Northwest
dkruse@sustainablenorthwest.org, (503) 221-6911 x115

813 SW Alder Street, Ste 500
Portland, Oregon 97205
MAIN LINE (503) 221-6911
SustainableNorthwest.org

Sustainable Northwest brings people, ideas, and innovation together so that nature, local economies, and rural communities can thrive.