Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

Our mission is to connect and support people and communities who are striving to live more safely with wildfire. The FAC Net is a catalyst for spreading best practices and innovations in fire adaptation nationwide.

Nationally, A New Phase

Social change network experts describe a typical network evolution pattern of connection → alignment → production. The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net) has followed this trajectory. This fall we began a phase change, from our initial focus on connecting, learning and aligning, to the next stage in the network's development, expanding and working on joint projects.

When we started, the focus of the FAC Net was to encourage and facilitate core member connections and learning. Through learning exchange events, peer mentoring and staff coaching, members have deepened fire adaptation practices in their communities. As we've come to better understand where within the network's membership there is alignment—in terms of priority fire adaptation strategies and opportunities—we've begun to identify how members can support each other's local work.

Building on our foundation of strong relationships and deep understanding of one another's local work, we have created the opportunity to work at a broader scale to affect fire adaptation beyond our members' home communities. And on the network's horizon is the next stage of evolution, where we will harness the collective wisdom and practice of our membership to spread what we know works—and discover what else communities can do—in order to live more safely with fire.

In recent months we have been preparing for this phase shift by making investments in:

- **Growth**, through our website, fireadaptednetwork.org, which has facilitated an affiliate membership option for FAC practitioners, more than tripling network participation;
- **Self-assessment**, through social network analysis that examines the relationships and potential for collaboration among our core participants; and
- Initial framing of a **network-wide strategy** that will allow us to begin work across boundaries on the more confounding aspects of integrated fire management.

These efforts have been undertaken in addition to the core functions of the network—coaching and connecting members, sharing and spreading practices and approaches, and advancing on-the-ground mitigation projects in member communities.

MEMBER VOICES

Relationships with other practitioners are some of the most valuable components of a network approach. FAC Net provides "access to brilliant people working on the same challenges and provides lessons learned, guidance, moral support, and resources to collectively solve complex problems."

Connections among members offer moral support as well as "relationships that connect us to resources and experience that we would otherwise have to recreate or may or may not find for ourselves."

"The network provides a great way for us to link locally/regionally in ways that have rarely happened in the past. Whether the focus is on the diverse forests and fresh waters around us, or the neighbors next door, constructive engagement with others is incredibly beneficial."

Growth: Affiliate Membership and Interactive Website

When we launched the FAC Net in 2013, we knew we needed to gather a diverse group of highly committed and active FAC practitioners who could represent a range of contexts, approaches and opportunities. These people became our core members—helping to daylight and showcase the state of fire adaptation practice across the country. The next step was to work with that committed core to expand the network—sharing practices developed or honed by core members and revealing where we need to create new or more effective approaches.

The affiliate member initiative is helping us achieve this broader engagement and impact. Affiliate membership is a less resource-intensive way for the network to help practitioners connect around fire adaptation. It's a way for staff and core members to broaden our sphere of influence, engage with new partners and create reciprocal learning opportunities without the level of investment required of core members. And as one member noted, "it's very comforting to know that help is only a text, email, or phone call away when we need to know where to find information for how to proceed. There is always someone who's had a similar experience or will give a suggestion."

The FAC Net has grown from a small core membership—with staff and all members invested heavily in the network—to a much larger and more diverse group. This includes a larger number of core members, several state-wide sub-networks, and the less intensively invested affiliate members, all of whom are helping to spread working FAC practices and to innovate where we need new solutions.

From top: FAC Net in mid-2013, late 2014 and late 2016. Large dots represent core members, hatched areas represent state-wide sub-networks, and smaller (green) dots represent affiliate members.

As we've grown, our blog has become increasingly important for sharing learning beyond the Network's formal membership. It gives us a platform to share important approaches, like the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiative that The Nature Conservancy's Maria Estrada blogged about in November.

Science Tuesday posts are some of the most popular on the blog, delivering a powerful combination of fire and social science. These pieces help make the science accessible, and place it in context for FAC practitioners around the world, including our core and affiliate members.

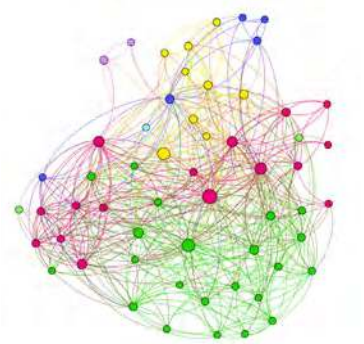
A new post appears each Tuesday and Thursday at https://fireadaptednetwork.org/blog/.

Affiliates represent a broad array of practitioners ranging from insurance industry employees to fire departments, non-profits, state agencies, individuals and more. And as intended, the affiliate initiative has grown the FAC Net, allowing us to directly reach nearly 75 additional members in communities around the country.

FAC Net partnered with the Ecosystem Workforce Program at the University of Oregon to explore workforce issues and document innovative examples of organizations navigating the maze of local, state and federal funding opportunities, programs and procurement strategies to build FAC workforces.

Assessment: Measuring the Depth and Quality of our Connections using Social Network Analysis

FAC Net implemented a social network analysis this past summer. The analysis measured aspects of relationships among network members, including the frequency of their interactions, depth of their relationships and likelihood of working collaboratively together in the future. From these relatively simple measures, the analysis produced a wealth of information that will help strengthen our bonds—and also revealed much about the network's overall health—namely that:



The Social Network Analysis software yields both numeric values for measures of connectedness, to track change over time, and ways to visualize relationships within the network. Spatial relationships, color, size and line attributes can be defined so multiple factors can be seen in one diagram. Staff are finding these helpful for seeing patterns and opportunities, and for raising questions that can guide effective growth.

- We are a tightly connected group whose staff liaising strategy has been central to network relationships —but as members are deepening their connections, reliance on staff to connect them is decreasing. This is a great outcome, since building a solid foundation of relationships has been the primary focus of the network in its initial stages. Now that those relationships are established, core members are situated for collective action.
- While there is a high degree of connectivity in the network, there are many connections still to be made, signaling the need to continue investments in netweaving.
- We have opportunities to grow our periphery. Those on the fringes of a network are key to its health—they bring in new ideas and opportunities. As we expand our affiliate program and engage new partners, this periphery will grow.
- Network members have identified great potential for co-work that staff can now direct time and resources to.

Network Strategy: Shaping New Opportunities for FAC Practice

In December, 16 leaders from our seven communities of practice (COPs) gathered. We met with the intent of the strengthening the COPs that we and the Fire Learning Networks had jointly formed a year and a half ago, by developing clearer learning agendas for each of the groups. Another objective was for participants to gain experience using various "Liberating Structures" facilitation techniques—a menu of microstructures that enhance relational coordination and trust—to support their work together.

But through a day of discussions and working sessions, the group came to realize we needed to change direction—rather than developing individual learning agendas for the existing COPs, our focus should shift to exploring current network-wide strategies and learning opportunities that would position us to have a much greater impact. So we briefly took stock of each COP and decided whether to keep them as is, disband them, or transform them into task forces or other types of groups. Then we adjusted the workshop to work on framing our broader strategies and a network-wide learning agenda.

While some of the COPs will continue, leaders were able to identify efforts that were not well suited to a COP structure, and clarified the actionable nature of many of our opportunities—making it clear that we need systems that support our working together as well as learning together. This workshop was pivotal, in that participants and staff all realized that the network is undergoing a phase shift, from primarily a connection and sharing network, to a joint-action network.

MEMBER VOICES

"I attended the CoP workshop and am excited to see the direction the network will take. Since the network is not in a 'start-up' phase any longer, it is exciting to see this kind of strategic development occurring so that the network can grow and mature..."

"It was great to take stock of what we have going on in a strategic way. I think it will help us take the next steps forward as a network to make meaningful change."

Members at Work: Making a Difference in Communities

FAC Net's investment in learning about fire adaptation approaches across the membership has yielded insight into the practices that are the most robust, deeply developed and transferable, and those that are in need of more exploration, or are uniquely suited to specific contexts. The few examples here highlight recent member projects that exemplify fire adaptation best practices, along with some that explore and test novel approaches.

Fuels Management

FAC practitioners demonstrate how vegetation management—from lot-level chipping programs to prescribed burning to harvesting methods—are foundational to most fire adaptation efforts. A comprehensive fire adaptation approach goes beyond fuels treatments, but most effective FAC approaches include them. In most places, for people to live more safely with fire, fire behavior—and therefore fuel arrangements—must be managed to promote citizen and firefighter safety, restore fire resilient ecosystems and to avoid structure loss.

FAC Net practitioners use a variety of approaches to get mitigation work done on the ground in their communities. Pile and broadcast burns took place this fall and winter in Rapid City, Ely and Island Park. In Flagstaff, FAC Net members spearheaded an education effort about harvesting methods to increase support for thinning; the effort has been met with enthusiasm. And throughout the network, members and their communities are investing heavily in fuels programs—like chipping and defensible space projects—that target residents directly. For example, in Ely they chipped material from a record 254 properties this fall, and in Oregon, Project Wildfire broke their previous record, collecting more than 11,000 cubic yards of vegetation at their FireFree event.

Prescribed burning on a municipal property in the center of Rapid City, SD. *© Rapid City Fire Dept.*

MEMBER VOICES

"Recent news coverage of a large prescribed burn in the area has started to shift language in the community to focus on positive descriptors like "good fire" and "fire resiliency in our forest." Help from the resources that our FAC Net staff liaison provided made this effort easier by giving us good ideas about the points to focus our efforts on and how to most effectively promote the message we want to convey."

In North Salt Lake, an Eagle Scout implemented a wildfire risk reduction project with help from local residents and staff from South Davis Metro Fire; Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands and the city's open space program.
© UT DFFSL (Brianna Binnebose)

In Washington, state legislation (House Bill 2928) designed to capitalize on the momentum created by several devastating wildfire seasons is an opportunity for forest collaboratives to increase the pace and scale of their prescribed burning efforts in pilot areas. To increase the amount of prescribed fire in the pilot communities, groups like the Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition hosted field learning events (*above*), held meetings with fire managers and citizens and conducted extensive outreach this fall. The Washington FAC Learning Network along with the Washington Prescribed Fire Council and The Nature Conservancy were also among those who played leading roles in this important step forward for the state.
© Chumstick Coalition (Hilary Lundgren)

Collaborative Planning

While fuels projects help create new fire futures in communities, they can't happen without a foundation of collaborative planning, partnerships and enabling policy. FAC Net members are helping bring holistic perspectives to their communities—coordinating Community Wildfire Protection Plans, facilitating use of the FAC Self Assessment Tool, leading and participating in forest and watershed management collaboratives, and helping craft smoke management policies that will give communities and land managers the latitude they need to be more proactive.

Increasing Diversity in Fire Management

Communities can work for decades planning and implementing projects, writing CWPPs, and developing the relationships that are the foundation of their fire resilience, but we're still working behind the curve. How a fire is managed in a community's backyard can write the future of its relationship with its place (and with future fires) for a generation or more. If we really want to change our relationship to fire, we need better ways to interface with fire managers, and more diverse approaches in the firefighting ranks.

FAC Net members continue to host a variety of events that bring people together to learn and plan.

Top: This fall FireWise of Southwest Colorado hosted a field discussion for the Dolores Watershed and Resilient Forest (DWaRF) Collaborative. (This group's work was featured in the June blog post https://fireadaptednetwork.org/becoming-dwarf/.) *© FireWise of Southwest Colorado*

Bottom: The Forest Guild shared collaboratively-drafted project design plans with their community at an outdoor meeting; they also use their website and other media to keep the community abreast and engaged. *© Forest Stewards Guild*

Elsewhere, network members in Boise made progress on a Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan that will serve as a CWPP as well as a plan for other hazards. A cross-walk document developed by the Idaho Department. of Emergency Management helped the team include all of the necessary components.

Morning briefing at the Women in Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (WTREX). Organizers of the groundbreaking WTREX event articulated the need for diversity in fire management: "Today's fire problems are so complex that we need to elevate diversity in talent, intellect and perspective in order to solve them." The diversity we need requires not only women, but people who can bring more diverse cultural perspectives to fire management. As more diverse people and organizations become more deeply involved in adapting their communities to fire, a more diverse and representative contingent of fire managers will be required to get better fire outcomes. *© UC Extension (Lenya Quinn-Davidson)*

This fall, while others in the PERFACT partnership led the Women in Fire TREX, which focused on women in fire leadership, FAC Net members took on other areas of diversity. For example, a workshop in Austin focused on getting non-traditional personnel into Resource Advisor roles. In New Mexico, the Wildfire Network is a new organization aimed at providing job training in wildfire mitigation and management for disadvantaged youth, thus addressing two community needs simultaneously.

Ignition Squad on the Pierson Unit for the 2016 Klamath River TREX. In communities along the Klamath River in northwest California, local tribes are partnering with non-profit organizations to re-invigorate cultural fire management. Diverse cultural perspectives, and institutional and organizational representation enriches their fire management approach. *© Stormy Staats*

Resident Engagement

Among the most deeply developed FAC practices of network members are programs aimed at residents. This fall the Landowner/Homeowner community of practice held several webinars where members explored tools and shared models for resident engagement. For example, the Neighborhood Ambassador program led by FireWise of Southwest Colorado has been particularly successful, and

was discussed at one of the webinars; afterwards, at least five other core members expressed interest in starting a similar program in their areas. A learning exchange hosted by FireWise of Southwest Colorado and Fire Adapted Colorado also focused on the Neighborhood Ambassador program. In other parts of the country, network members worked on other resident engagement efforts, including leading the multi-partner Think First Tahoe campaign near Lake Tahoe and conducting post-fire outreach in parts of the Southeast affected by wildfires this fall.

State-Wide Sub-Networks: Putting "All-Hands, All-Lands" into Practice

A recent addition to the FAC Net's growth strategy is an increased focus on the formation of state-level sub-networks to meet the demand of FAC practitioners regionally. The first state network—the Washington State Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (WAFAC)—launched the year after the first community-based core member in the state joined the FAC Net, and is operating using the same model as the national network. Through the WAFAC, 10 member communities in Washington are now connected, and state-level investments from the departments of Natural Resources and Commerce and others have been leveraged with funding from the regional BLM to support their network. The existence of WAFAC has greatly accelerated fire adaptation across the state, and lessons from launching and running that sub-network are benefiting other emerging state sub-networks.

Far left: Moving beyond webinars, the Four Corners Exchange brought together fire adaptation practitioners from Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico focused on resident engagement. *© WRTC (Michelle Medley-Daniel)*

Left: Project Wildfire is using 4-Star Firewise Community assessments to help current Firewise Communities evaluate their risk and inform their action plans. These are quick home-to-home assessments that look at a variety of items, from roofing to surface and ladder fuels and overall adequacy of defensible space. National leadership of the Firewise Program is looking at the 4-Star program for insights on assessing participation rate in Firewise Communities nationwide. *© Gary Marshall*

Fire Adapted Colorado (FACO) is now well on its way to serving communities in Colorado. At a state wildfire conference last year, the concept for FACO was vetted with communities. Since then, a non-profit organization, board and network strategy have been formed, and a number of learning exchanges have been held. FACO will launch its membership drive after the Colorado Wildfire Conference this April.

In Nevada, leaders of the Living with Fire program, currently hosted by the local extension office, have been managing their own network for several years. Finding the right institution to host the network, and to act as a pass-through organization for mitigation funding, has been the focus of experimentation over the past few years, and the Nevada Division of Forestry is now poised to take over the Nevada network this coming summer. Meanwhile, the educational and convening functions of this continue to prove valuable to communities throughout the state.

Arizona is the latest state to show interest in launching a sub-network. This fall, leaders scoped the idea with communities and partners—and in doing so garnered the enthusiastic support of the State Forester and of steering committee members needed to help take their effort to the next level.

This level of organization promises to be important to the growth of the impact for the FAC Net, as we continue to integrate work at multiple levels—individual, community, state and national—to develop and spread fire adapted communities concepts, practices and actions.

http://fireadaptednetwork.org/

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCw0iVlThjzZbd5A4bf3tGkw

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