

PRESS RELEASE **For Immediate Release**

Mid Klamath Watershed Council • Orleans Somes Bar Fire Safe Council
Happy Camp Fire Safe Council • Salmon River Restoration Council
The Nature Conservancy- US Fire Learning Network • Karuk Tribe
Northern California Prescribed Fire Council • Cultural Fire Management Council
Six Rivers National Forest • Klamath National Forest

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For More Information:

Will Harling, Mid Klamath Watershed Council, (530) 627-3202 will@mkwc.org, nancy@mkwc.org

Erica Terence, Mid Klamath Watershed Council, (530)925-9710, erica@mkwc.org

Bill Tripp, Karuk Department of Natural Resources, (530) 598-7927, btripp@karuk.us

Nolan Colegrove, Six Rivers National Forest, (530)627-3291, nolegrove@fs.fed.us

Clint Isbell, Klamath National Forest, (530) 598-4097

Controlled Burning Can Make All The Difference – Klamath Training Exchange Shows Us How

Orleans, CA – The Klamath Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (Klamath TREX), an annual two-week training in the use of controlled burning in the Western Klamath Mountains to reduce the future danger of wildfires, runs October 2-15 this year. Combined funding and resources from tribal, local, and federal partners are helping bring in more participants to deliver good fire to a larger landscape.

Every year, the Klamath TREX advances the training of skilled firefighters and newbies alike, creating a well-trained labor force to enable controlled burns in the Fall when fuels buildups left by a century of fire suppression and other activities can be safely treated. This training event blends traditional native burning with western science to restore fire processes directly around communities where it is needed most. This year agreements are in place for the Type III Incident Management Team implementing TREX to work with the Klamath and Six Rivers National Forest on adjacent burns on public lands.

Nancy Bailey is co-director of the Fire and Fuels Program at the Mid Klamath Watershed Council (MKWC), a key sponsor of this TREX event. She explained that the potential for cross-boundary burning is key in an area where much private land abuts US Forest Service managed public land. “Private property lines don’t follow ridges or other natural fuelbreaks,” she said. “Burning with our federal partners allows us to implement controlled burns from strategic features on the landscape. Fire doesn’t stop at property lines and now we don’t have to either!”

Future large scale cross boundary burns are currently being planned in a 5,500-acre pilot project in the Somes Bar area. The Somes Bar Integrated Fire Management Project is the first of a series of large scale projects

through the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership that reduce fuels along fuelbreaks with mechanical and manual treatments, followed by prescribed burns on the edges of fire season. Additional pilot project areas around Happy Camp and Forks of Salmon proposed this strategy to get ahead of the next wildfire on over 50,000 acres. This year each of these pilot project areas were touched by wildfires, a clear message we are working in the right places.

As local partners move toward increasing the use of prescribed fire, another agreement between the Six Rivers National Forest and the Karuk Tribe to burn together on public lands within Karuk ancestral territory is also being utilized to compliment WKRK and TREX efforts. Nolan Colegrove, the Forest Service district ranger in Orleans, said, "Certainly the interagency agreement that we have with the Karuk Tribe has tremendous benefits. We've already been using that agreement to work across boundaries, this is a key to building community capacity."

Bob Bale has worked with the Nature Conservancy, another key sponsor of TREX projects around the world. He notes that the Klamath TREX stands out because of its collaboration with the Karuk Tribe and the Tribe's efforts to return to pre-suppression burning practices as part of its watershed restoration efforts.

David Medford, head of the Tribe's Integrated Fire and Fuels Management Program, said a 20-person crew has been funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the 14-day training for the purposes of upgrading prescribed fire qualifications. He said the Mid Klamath Watershed Council received permits from CAL FIRE the last few years even though the ignitions needed to happen just before the first fall rains. This reflects the agency's commitment to a return to prescribed fire in principal and in practice.

This training exchange model was pioneered by the Nature Conservancy and the US Fire Learning Network, sponsoring dozens of events across the country each year. The Klamath TREX is the largest and most complex of these events, training around 100 people here in little Orleans, CA each year. This TREX enables citizens to take part in and learn about prescribed fires from the initial planning to mop-up and patrol stage, and helps fire professionals get needed certifications to handle planned and unplanned fires. The event builds local capacity, while providing high quality training opportunities for local, state, private and federal fire professionals, students, and managers from around the country and from other countries.

Orleans landowner Phil Sanders praised the effort: "Our Downs Ranch has been the beneficiary of multiple controlled burning projects planned and completed by MKWC and TREX personnel. Large forested portions of the ranch have been made less vulnerable to wildfire. Also, our several immediate neighbors in their semi-urban settings are safer from catastrophic fire because of the work done on our ranch."

"In my 31 years working in the beautiful Klamath Mountains it seems every year is a fire year. With that reality, we always go into Klamath TREX acutely aware of the opportunities to get people tooled up to do good work on the ground balanced with our responsibilities to burn in a smart, responsible way. We only burn when conditions support it," said Thomas Fielden, Incident Commander for the Klamath TREX. This year conditions appear to be shaping up for one of the most successful TREX events yet, with just the right amount of rain followed by a drying trend to moderate fire behavior.

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