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FLN DISPATCH

*Emerging Lessons From
The Fire Learning Network*

FIRE LEARNING NETWORK A cooperative project of The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service, and the Dept. of the Interior, the network was created in 2002 to catalyze efforts to reduce hazardous fuels across the country. Part of the larger joint program *Restoring Fire-Adapted Ecosystems* that includes fire education and training components, the network operates at both local and national levels to overcome barriers to implementing ecologically appropriate fuels reduction and restoration projects.

<http://tnc-ecomanagement.org/fire>

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY FIRE INITIATIVE This 15-person team is working to assess, abate and prevent fire-related threats to biodiversity conservation around the world. In the U.S., the Initiative is working with a variety of partners to promote ecologically appropriate fire management, develop and implement science-based planning tools and monitoring techniques, and further fire education and training efforts.

<http://nature.org/fire>



The Nature Conservancy
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

In the summer of 2000, an intense wildfire struck Fort Chaffee, a National Guard post in western Arkansas. The stand-replacing blaze, which jumped highways and swept across some 16,000 acres, was not something staff at the 65,000-acre base wanted to see again. So they overcame their skepticism about prescribed fire, and some institutional entropy, and asked The Nature Conservancy to do some burning for them.

The main objective of the burn program was to reduce hazardous fuel levels. Between 2002 and 2004, the Conservancy burned almost 13,000 acres at Fort Chaffee, most carrying hazardous fuel loads. During that time, a coalition of partners working on fire issues at Fort Chaffee was enrolled in the national **Fire Learning Network**, and through the network developed landscape-scale “desired future conditions” that helped shape this work. The burning was a success, and



Oak woodlands at Fort Chaffee look open and healthy after a burn.

—Photo by McRee Anderson

FORT CHAFFEE PRESCRIBED BURNING PARTNERS

- Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission
- Area volunteer fire departments
- Fort Chaffee Maneuver Training Center
- The Nature Conservancy
- Arkansas Game & Fish Commission

For more information, contact McRee Anderson at 501-804-3250

fuel loads were greatly reduced. But as time went on, monitoring revealed to post staff other benefits of burning, chipping away at the mindset that it was too technical, time-consuming, and hazardous to bother with.

At it turned out, the burns opened up the oak savannas, oak woodlands and prairies of Fort Chaffee, the largest intact landscape with conservation objectives in the Arkansas River Valley, making the land more useful as a military base. “They can’t use a lot of their training areas because they’re too dense,” explained McRee Anderson, Fire Restoration Project Manager for The Nature Conservancy in Arkansas.

The fires also helped control invasives such as kudzu and Japanese honeysuckle. And the restored landscapes will likely benefit endangered species such as the American burying beetle and prairie chicken. Birders have spied the chicken in recently burned areas, the first sightings there in many years.

Excitement over these effects have trickled up from land management staff to senior decision makers, translating into greater resources and commitment,

including a new engine and ATV. The post’s environmental program manager is taking prescribed fire classes. And last year, for the first time, base staff began coming out on burns. Confidence is to the point that the team is taking on harder burn units along the post perimeter. Anderson looks forward to the day he can step out of the picture and hand the reins over to post personnel.

“Everybody was at first leery of prescribed fire and what it could accomplish for the base as a whole,” said Anderson. “But now they understand that fire is an integral tool for their training areas, and matches with their military objectives, too.”

GET INVOLVED!

If you’re interested in participating in a regional or national level meeting, or just learning more:

- Browse the FLN Web site
<http://tnc-ecomanagement.org/fire>
- Join and contribute to the FLN listserv
<http://tnc-ecomanagement.org/fire/resources/#listserv>
- Contact TNC or agency leads:
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