

PRESCRIBED FIRE TRAINING NEEDS SURVEY REPORT

**Northeast Regional Strategy Committee
Prescribed Fire Coordination Work Group**

October 2020



Summary: This practitioner-oriented, non-scientific survey was conducted during the last two weeks of August 2020 with the purpose of assessing the state of prescribed fire training in the 20 state Northeast-Midwest region of the Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. The survey was developed by the Prescribed Fire Coordination Work Group of the NE RSC. There were 171 responses to this survey (see pg. 4 for survey result details).

The intent of the work group is to analyze the survey findings and develop a set of recommended actions to all the partner agencies and organizations forming the NE RSC. The expectation is that those agencies and organizations that develop and sponsor prescribed fire and wildfire suppression trainings in the region, consider and adopt the relevant recommendations to help provide the needed trainings and hands-on experiences to overcome some of the identified training barriers.

Table of Contents

- Key Survey Observations..... Pg. 2
- Key Respondent Suggestions.....Pg. 2
- Work Group Recommendations..... Pg. 3
- Survey Results Summary..... Pg. 5

PRESCRIBED FIRE TRAINING NEEDS SURVEY REPORT

October 2020

KEY OBSERVATIONS FROM SURVEY RESULTS:

- There are not enough advanced courses being offered enough to meet the needs of the community. (S-200 series, Rx-301, Rx-341, Rx-310, Rx-410, L-380, S-490)
- It is difficult for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private contractors to access training opportunities because courses are typically provided by agencies and filled by agency personnel.
- It is difficult for NGOs and private contractors to access training opportunities.
- Task book requirements that require wildfire experience are a barrier to obtaining & maintaining Rx fire qualifications
- Nearly half the respondents were not familiar with the National Interagency Prescribed Fire Training Center (PFTC)
- Many states in our region do not use National Wildland Fire Coordinating Group (NWCG) to certify their burn bosses (MN, MI, MO, IN, IL, PA, MA, and others)
- Prescribed fire is often a low priority for land management agencies.
- The lack of qualified personnel limits the implementation of prescribed fire projects.
- Identified barriers to implementing prescribed fire projects:
 - Other work priorities
 - Lack of training opportunities
 - Lack of qualified personnel
 - Lack of project opportunity
 - Lack of agency/organizational funding
- The development of prescribed fire demonstration sites was highly endorsed.

KEY SUGGESTIONS FROM RESPONDENTS:

- Establish a regional prescribed fire training academy or several sub-regional academies.
- It was stated that prescribed fire needs to be a higher priority similar to wildfire suppression
- To increase the number of prescribed fire training opportunities, they must be: virtual when possible, offered different times of the year, less expensive, collaborative between agencies, and sensitive to specialized need.



- Host more prescribed fire training exchanges (TREX) in the northeast region -- collaborative burning and learning among agencies and institutions with and without formal Rx fire programs.
- Offer a widely accepted credential in fire training that is an alternate but is recognized and worthy as NWCG.
- Bring the public and private sectors together under one system. The private side of prescribed fire is woefully untrained.
- Develop a web site with list of opportunities.
- There may be opportunity for NE RSC to assist with coordination or find grant matching funds for host agencies

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the survey results and observations, the NE RSC Prescribed Fire Work Group offers the following recommendations to explore further in improving the prescribed fire training situation across all partners in the 20 Northeast-Midwest states.

- 1) **Increase the availability of virtual training courses** where feasible and applicable
- 2) **Coordinate field trainings opportunities** (TREX, Learn and Burn, etc.). Providing field trainings to meet Rx fire course requirements, maintaining qualifications, and providing public learning opportunities is critical to growing and maintaining a safe and successful regional prescribed fire training effort.
- 3) **Assess the current NE-MW prescribed fire training delivery situation.** Identify who is currently providing what trainings to improve coordination, reduce redundancy, and fill difficult-to-obtain training needs, which are mainly advanced courses
- 4) **Consider options to fund a regional prescribed fire training coordinator** position to help coordinate prescribed fire training among all agency/organization partners to:
 - a) Develop and maintain a regional training schedule (including virtual, on-site, and field trainings)
 - b) Set up a single information source for posting and finding training opportunities
 - c) Facilitate balancing course delivery both geographically to reduce travel costs and distribute the workload among key training partners (i.e. states, federal, Tribal, Compacts, NGOs, prescribed fire councils, fire science exchanges, universities, etc.).
 - d) Help recruit, maintain, and coordinate regional training cadres
 - e) Serve as the regional point-of-contact for prescribed fire training coordination nationally and with the other two Cohesive Strategy regions (West and Southeast)



- 5) **Explore opportunities to establish and maintain prescribed fire demonstration sites** for use as both public education and training opportunities. Due to the population density of the Northeast region, public education is a big hurdle to get over. Being able to demonstrate the benefits of prescribed fire and the ability to manage smoke are important lessons.
 - a) Demonstration sites across a diversity of vegetation communities and landscape settings would be most valuable. Accessibility to the public is an important consideration.
 - b) There are many existing sites across the region that could be used for this purpose including experimental forests, national parks and refuges, state forests, community conservation landscapes, etc.



SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

Q1: What agency/organization do you represent?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
State	47.95% 82
Non-governmental organization (NGO)	19.30% 33
Other (please specify) Responses	15.20% 26
Federal	12.28% 21
Local	9.94% 17
Prescribed Fire Council	4.68% 8
Tribal	2.34% 4
None	1.75% 3
Total Respondents: 171	

Q2: Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Manager/Practitioner	72.51% 124
Other (please specify) Responses	18.71% 32
Researcher/Scientist	7.02% 12
Forest Technician	2.92% 5
Forestry Consultant	2.34% 4
Landowner	1.75% 3
Student	1.17% 2
Total Respondents: 171	

Others included: technicians, forest rangers, teachers, other specialists

Q3: Are you currently working toward obtaining qualifications for:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Not applicable	66.08% 113
Burn Boss II	21.05% 36
Burn Boss I	12.87% 22
TOTAL	171



Q4: Are you NWCG qualified? (check those that apply)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Prescribed Fire crew member	71.23% 104
Firing Boss	35.62% 52
Burn Boss II	23.29% 34
Burn Boss I	5.48% 8
Prescribed fire manager II	4.79% 7
Prescribed fire manager I	4.11% 6
Total Respondents: 146	

Q5: Please check the required NWCG Wildland Fire Courses that are needed but difficult to obtain in order to attain and maintain your qualifications.

OBSERVATIONS:

- Primary difficult-to-obtain training needs are mainly advanced courses (Rx-301, Rx-341, Rx-310, Rx-410, L-380, S-490)
- Approximately 15 – 20 % of respondents note that several the S-200 series courses are difficult to obtain
- There are other courses that are not offered frequently enough or made accessible to others beyond federal and state agencies i.e. NGOs and private contractors
- Task book requirements calling for wildfire experience are a barrier to some in obtaining & maintaining Rx fire qualifications

Q6: Are you familiar with the National Interagency Prescribed Fire Training Center (PFTC)?

OBSERVATION:

- Nearly half the respondents were not familiar with the National PFTC

Q7: Does your state or organization have any prescribed fire qualification requirements that are different from the NWCG requirements?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	35.80% 58
No	64.20% 104
TOTAL	162

OBSERVATIONS:

- States noted with other/different Rx fire requirements: MN, MI, MO, IN, IL, PA, MA, and a few others not specified, some have additional, less or different training courses noted.



• **Q8: What are the barriers to maintaining your prescribed fire qualifications?**

	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	TOTAL	SCORE
Other work duty priorities	30.46% 46	20.53% 31	9.93% 15	11.92% 18	9.93% 15	17.22% 26	151	3.60
Lack of training opportunities	20.78% 32	26.62% 41	20.78% 32	12.99% 20	5.84% 9	12.99% 20	154	3.50
Lack of qualified personnel	16.34% 25	13.07% 20	24.18% 37	18.95% 29	8.50% 13	18.95% 29	153	3.12
Lack of project opportunity	13.91% 21	13.25% 20	16.56% 25	15.23% 23	19.87% 30	21.19% 32	151	2.82
Lack of agency/organization funding	9.38% 15	15.00% 24	13.75% 22	16.88% 27	24.38% 39	20.63% 33	160	2.60

OBSERVATIONS:

- Respondents observed that for many agencies, prescribed fire projects are lower priority than other natural resource management projects.
- Secondly, lack of training, in many cases, directly contributes to a lack of qualified personnel to carry out prescribed burns.
- In the training related areas, these factors represent most of the identified barriers to carrying out prescribed fire projects.

Q9: What would you like the Northeast regional wildland fire management community to do to improve training opportunities across the 20-state region?

Selected comments to represent ideas and suggestions and reduce redundancy):

- Some respondents suggested establishing a regional prescribed fire training academy
- Alternatively, invest in 4-5 sub-regional training academies
- It was stated that prescribed fire needs to be a higher priority similar to wildfire suppression
- Increase the number of virtual training opportunities where feasible
- Explore ways to reduce the cost of trainings
- Increase the number of collaboratively sponsored trainings
- Host more prescribed fire training exchanges (TRES) in the northeast region -- collaborative burning and learning among agencies and institutions with and without formal Rx fire programs.
- Increase partnerships between agencies. Planned RX burn projects located throughout NE area to minimize travel for partner agencies. Planned RX burn projects identified one year in advance to allow for travel prep. Include task book sign-off and mentoring.



- Work to ease state restrictions imposed on employees to travel out of state to attend training events such as Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges to work on position task books.
- Promote Rx burning for multiple resource benefits (wildlife, forestry, pest mgmt., risk reduction, etc.)
- Offer a widely accepted credential in fire training that is an alternate but is recognized and worthy as NWCG.
- Work with regional fire academies and RXB Councils to hold specialized training on a regular basis
- Bring the public and private sectors together under one system. The private side of prescribed fire is woefully untrained.
- Offer higher-(400) level courses, communicate with State Fire Supervisors about holding people back, lack of support for NWCG qualifications and advancing individual agendas/agency qualifications that are politically motivated.
- Provide more training for volunteers, AD's, etc.
- It is a struggle for anyone in non-traditional organizations to gain and retain NWCG qualifications (land trusts, universities, etc.) but staff in those organizations can assist and partner where more help is needed.
- Host more training events at different times of the year.
- Develop a web site with list of opportunities.
- There may be opportunity for NE RSC to assist with coordination or find grant matching funds for host agencies
- Need to work on changing the qualification for Rx fire, not everyone needs or wants to go on wildfire.
- Continue with the outreach identifying barriers offer mitigation to address obstacles.

Q10: Do you see a need for the development of prescribed fire demonstration sites in the Northeast region (for training and public education purposes)?

OBSERVATIONS:

- Over 80% of respondents thought the development of prescribed fire demonstration sites is a good idea

(selected comments to represent ideas and suggestions and reduce redundancy):

- Bring the structural FF's into the conversation. In the Urban Interface they dictate the rules for prescribed fire but often time know nothing about it.



- Due to the population density of the Northeast public education is a big hurdle to get over. Mostly smoke mgt.
- To make things easier and in the spirit of cooperation and collaboration, the NE RSC could partner with organizations such as the Lake States Fire Science Consortium or TNC in developing this.
- The more we tell our stories the more people will understand the reasoning behind the management.
- As managing our landscapes with fire in the Northeast become more prevalent it seems as the need for prescribed fire demonstration sites will exponentially grow.
- This is a fantastic idea! Would be great to connect the public to this land-management tool in a more tangible way.
- I think at this point in time, educating the public and non-fire personnel involved in the decision making process is key to promoting fire management and opening up more opportunities.
- We probably already have these on sites with a long fire history but no staff available or time to develop these types of sites
- Educating landowners to the benefits of prescribed fire could allay fears and increase interest in using it to help control invasive species.
- Fire training too often presumes the NWCG is the only way to achieve training. But often their training does not reflect the needs and habitat of the midwest. I wish there were an alternate track equally acceptable and less costly.
- Invite journalists who, initially, are not against fire by looking at their past comments or reports, if there any available. Give them and some landowners some basic training before allowing them on the fire line.
- Not just the Northeast, the western Midwest as well
- Existing [Rx fire] units can serve as training sites.
- Yes, we are in desperate need of demonstration sites for both resource managers to visit, explore, and understand planned fire as well as to educate the general public. This is a great idea and should be explored further. Demonstration sites across a diversity of vegetation communities and landscape settings would be most valuable.
- We need to make prescribed fire as normal as it is in the south
- Especially oak habitat management, where wildlife/ecology is the focus. We have a new oak restoration project area on the Green Mountain National Forest where we've conducted the 1st entry of fire in Spring 2019. This is a ~200 acre unit with an adjacent ~200 acre control unit. We plan to conduct prescribed fire entries on a 2-4 year rotation over the next 15-20 years and would like to offer this up as a new prescribed fire demonstration site for Oak & Red Pine



community restoration. Please reach out to both martel.knipe@usda.gov (Forest FMO) and lindsay.r.silvia@usda.gov (Fuels tech)

- I think plenty of opportunities exist without the need to develop specific sites. How about creating something similar to PFTC in the NE? It's challenging to get approval to go to FL.
- Fire training too often presumes the NWCG is the only way to achieve training. But often their training does not reflect the needs and habitat of the midwest. I wish there were an alternate track equally acceptable and less costly.