FIRE LEARNING NETWORK IN THE ARKANSAS BLACKLAND ECOSYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

The North American Fire Learning Network (FLN), a joint project of The Nature Conservancy's Global Fire Initiative, the USDA Forest Service, and the U.S. Department of the Interior, was created in 2002 to catalyze efforts to reduce hazardous fuels across the United States. The primary goal of the FLN is to accelerate on-the-ground fire regime restoration across landscapes by fostering innovation and transferring lessons learned via regional learning networks. During its first 2 y, the FLN has engaged more than 250 partner agencies, tribes, and private landowners to advance ecologically sound restoration on more than 60 million acres. The south-central FLN is one of seven regional FLNs across the United States focused on collaborative restoration of landscape-scale fire-adapted ecosystems. One project within the south-central FLN is the Arkansas Blackland Ecosystem Restoration. The blackland ecosystem has been identified as one of the most at-risk ecosystems in the southeastern United States, with 600+ plant species and 315 animal species. A 2002 assessment of the region identified 35,000 acres in public and private ownership as targets for restoration to native blackland prairie and woodland. Currently, 6,000 acres are in conservation ownership. Restoration of the historic fire regime is crucial to restoring and maintaining the blackland prairie–woodland ecosystem. Through the FLN, The Nature Conservancy and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission have developed restoration guidelines and management strategies for lands in various stages of degradation, current and desired future condition descriptions, and an ecological monitoring program to track restoration progress. The FLN has also helped in setting short-term and long-term priorities for the project and identifying funding sources for restoration activities. We present the products and accomplishments of the FLN in the blacklands of Arkansas. This presentation furthers the goal of the FLN by sharing successful implementation practices of a landscape-scale fire restoration project with ecologists, managers, and practitioners.

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