

ME Prescribed Fire Council 15 January 2025

Introductions

- * Tim Bickford, Chair
- * Aliesha Black, MFS
- * Andrew Deci, MCHT
- * John Veale, MDIFW
- * Jon Janelle, USFS
- * Parker Schuerman, NPS
- * John Leavitt, consultant
- * Connor White, MDIFW
- * Jon Bailey, TNC
- * Bryan Daigle, NPS
- * Kevin Ostrowski, MDEP Meteorologist
- * Wes Hatch, MFS
- * Chris Guiterman, NOAA fire history
- * Art Canterbury, USFWS
- * Karl Stromayer, USFWS
- * Polly Weigand, NAFSE/FSG
- * Stacy Knapp, MDEP
- * Mike Richard, MFS District Forester
- * Amanda Mahaffey, USFWS
- * Katie Glover, UMaine external affiliate

- Review previous meeting notes

- * (see attachment)

- ME TREX 2025

- * 2022 TREX was very successful; hope to repeat in 2025
- * Secured same location for lodging, catering nearly secured, 2 biggest items done
- * Still looking to add funding; at line where we're good to go, but need a little more to feel secure about things we'll offer including scholarships
- * IMT filled out; some same faces, some new folks
- * Partnerships with New Brunswick, Tall Timbers. We'll help them with how we've done a TREX and they can take back to their home units.
- * A few on leadership team getting TREX going. A lot of calls from folks happy to help.
- * If folks haven't gotten the notification, we can make sure that gets out.
- * TNC Northern Apps fire director also joining.
- * We're trying to keep the ball rolling off our past success and build off of it to benefit the region.
- * Addressing cross-boundary MOUs, iron out details as we put this one on to set others up for success.
- * Get good local burning done, and training.
- * Application period opens 2/1. Up through ME RxB Council website. Will run through 5/1. \$500 registration fee will cover lodging and meals for whole 12-day period. Great deal for the amount of training and experience folks will get.
- * We'll send out another notice once the website is live.
- * Scholarships - still trying to work out so that there aren't barriers for students etc.
- * We're volunteer-based with a lot of our burning, so don't want barriers for training opportunities. If an agency or org is paying, normally it's not an issue. Also hoping to engage Indigenous partners.

- * Any possibility of shorter part of training? We may have day folks. Logistical challenges to consider. Preference is folks come for whole time, but we're working on it.
- * Have to balance team camaraderie with engaging volunteers. And lodging and meal counts. moving parts. We'll do what we can.
- * Looking at 25 participants but can increase if there's a lot of interest. Trying to remain somewhat fluid, see where we're at on May 1.
- * Art: Since we'll have at least a single staff member at Rachel Carson NWR, do you have needs for specific equipment or PPE or cache to support this?
- * Tim: Yes, having some additional PPE would be fantastic. Engine available with an operator would be awesome. People bring their own, but especially if we have Canadian folks who don't wear shelters, could be helpful.
- * Art: Let us know specifics; we can provide additional materials as needed.
- * We try to set up into modules so that folks have what folks need from the beginning.

- RX Fire Council MOU

- * Still in a stalled position.
- * Still waiting on info from some agencies and orgs that desired language change to MOU.
- * If you are a signatory to MOU, take a look at it, take it to your legal teams, and please ASAP get that info to Tim so we can update it and get it out for signature.
- * One of the most important aspects of the Council is to get that MOU in place so we can have the partners share resources and get finalized so we can be a strong council.
- * Questions, email Tim. He'll send out the MOU as it exists now.
- * NH updated and got theirs signed. Good for us because there was a new threshold for NGOs carrying a certain amount of insurance. When fed or state agencies, have tort law, but in NGO or contractor world, they go for whoever has the biggest pockets, so now a baseline level of fire insurance is required to even out liability. NH was successful in signing.
- * We can take a look at that and see how it applies to us.
- * No recent updates to MOU.
- * Supposed to be some verbiage from USFS this winter.
- * With more private citizen burner groups, folks are getting more wary of signing these. Will be interesting navigating this.
- * In non-fire agencies, can raise flags higher up.

- Training Committee update

- * Jon Janelle: We did a CWPP at Massabesic Experimental Forest. As part of that, held York County Wildfire Academy. Successful enough that we'll do it again this year, but much smaller due to TREX.
- * This year, looking at June 12-15. A little during week and weekend to capture more of the call-when-needed folks.
- * 130/190, S211, UTV/ATV, First Aid/CPR.
- * Last year, lack of IMT for Academy, so we'll be meeting in February to put together a small group for planning.
- * Will charge a small fee. Last year, folks too advantage of the free tuition and didn't show up.
- * Looking for funding for future; a CWDG grant is out.
- * Looking for a place to save funds for later.
- * York County EMA really helpful. York County Community College will help again, TNC in Wells. In the future, trying to move everything to the new York County Fire Academy that's being constructed.
- * Next year, will do a bigger academy. Years we're not doing TREX.

- * TNC took our annual 130/190 hybrid in ME/NH and wrapped it into the fire academy. Last year, we did UTV/ATV, 211, S131, G131, and CPR/bloodborne pathogens. Was a success, able to use some of our training funds to supplement.
- * Roger Hooper was huge help. Rather than us all doing by our selves, made sense to team up.
- * MFS doing S212, 211, 131, outdoor exercise together in northern region. 211 also helicopter Safety, 212 central region, June 21-22.
- * This academy goal to SRB and below to not interfere with Compact classes. Provide opportunity for entry-level courses.
- * Anybody looking to facilitate or lead a course, we're open to that.
- * UTV/ATV will be taught by the fire chief in North Yarmouth, certified through IFW, special fire course. We went round on that, and that was the easiest option.
- * He did a whole unit on trailering, straps, good challenges that weren't part of the safety institute course.

- Outreach Committee update

- * John, Aliesha, Jon B. tasked to cast a wider net on who might be potential customers of ours who might benefit from RxB. Phone convo on 7/18.
- * Some ideas, private foresters. Reached out to Paul Larrivee. USDA SWCD. Emailed UMaine Coop Ext. Sean Horan, Gerry Barnes (no reply). Katie Hall at CMP might be a contact; they have limited interest for vegetation mgmt. Might reach out to SAF and Maine Woodland Owners.
- * We can add folks to email list, keep people informed.
- * Emails out to land trust folks, Andrew popped in. Ideas on people that have fire quals, a little interest and knowledge.
- * Andrew: I have peer groups of people in land trusts, some have quals with an interest in this work. Some came to York County last year. Also a general interest within land trust in this. In particular, MLTN has annual gathering of all stewardship staff in latter half of March. I got an email from that coordinator yesterday looking for someone to talk about RxB. What's going on, also what's the path forward for different skill levels, and how to organize and implement as an organization. Last 2 weeks of March.
- * April annual conference, various course tracks. In the future, could be specific tracks related to fire, partnerships, application.
- * MCHT Amanda Devine very supportive and excited.
- * Aliesha and Polly working on connecting with foresters within the state, BPL, MFS. They're the folks getting the contact for walk-and-talk. Get them an introduction to it, let them guide conversation about what would be useful to them. March.
- * Include Joe Roy, MDIFW.
- * Lily Calderwood, Extension blueberry specialist. Site visit to Appleton blueberry barrens. Great resource and ally for blueberries and burning. Want to keep in commercial rotation with Wabanaki partners. Soil health. Website and booklets specific to blueberries.
- * NRCS NH individual in charge of promoting RxB use to landowners around New England, at least NH. He has no quals, but is interested in TREX. Pushing him towards getting S130/190.
- * Funding for RxB in ME, TSPs, practice 338 has not been implemented under NRCS in ME. But if significant interest, attend a future technical subcommittee. Almost like reinventing the wheel, no TSPs in ME.
- * NRCS just needs to have somebody ask in order to offer the funding. They need a TSP to ask for the funding. Parker had been pursuing doing that for them previously. NRCS can provide funding for RxB plans nationally. Need to figure out who can roll that ball up the hill.
- * Need an internal NRCS champion to roll that ball uphill. Parker will ID potential partners in NH.

- Individual partner updates/Grants/2025 RX projects

- * MFS will have 3-4 RT130s. Dates TBD. Will do RSVP to see if really booked. May add a fourth to not inundate Jon Bailey.
- * Perkins just sent out a list of opportunities on Friday.
- * RxB - Swan Island on a good burn day. Prepped and ready for next season. Hope to do 3 blocks in a day.
- * Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust.
- * MFS-Guard pieces.
- * UMaine, oak stand burn, 8 ac. On university forestland in Old Town, College Extension Road.
- * IFW will catch up with Jon about Kennebunk Plains. Ideas for other grassland units. Talking with Eric about doing a harvest, wrap in some control lines. Verne Walker WMA.
- * K-plains, 4 units in rotation for next year. Big mastication project completed under BIL funding. Almost 500 ac. Big deal. Almost \$1M.
- * Guard had a wildfire that almost jumpstarted RxB on MDIFW, but was caught.
- * Swan Island tried to burn in September, but weather didn't align. Primed for spring burn provided resident eagles don't nest in local sites; hadn't for 3 years, then decided the year we had the burn prepped.
- * TNC - BIL funding partnership with USFWS to implement for Wells and Kennebunk Plains, training. Did plots post-treatment and pre-treatment. At 75 ac to treat, tied up. Final report. Thank you to USFWS partners.
- * RT-130 coming up end of March, early April. Will coordinate.
- * Last year, finally got back into Waterboro Barrens. Treated over 100 ac in pretreated SPB thinning, and urban interface areas along edges of homes. Amazing fire effects and fire ecology. Some pushback from a couple neighbors, navigating that. Learned that long-standing relationship with local fire departments are precious.
- * Some burning at Wells Barrens and Kennebunk Plains. Successes as well.
- * November 7, Appleton burn, first partnership cultural burn. Amazing day. Very unique in building those relationships with Tribal partners in their homeland. Having ignition team being all Indigenous members was awesome. Getting fire back in their homelands and enabling them to do it their way. Looking at internal funding to try to support that on Penobscot Nation lands.
- * Working and building trust with Tribal nations in small steps. Different Tribes have different resources and staffing; smaller Tribes don't have as much staff. In the future, would be awesome to have a cultural burn council. Challenge in making sure Tribes have a voice at the table on whether and how to get fire back in these systems. Trying to do an example project through CWDG.
- * Art: I have to jump to another meeting at 10 and will be back after 10:30. FWS update is Chris McCandless is the New England Zone FMO. He will start at Rachel Carson late January. We are building a new Fire Cache at Rachel Carson this spring/summer. The Zone now has a masticator and also has a new type 6 engine coming this spring. Karl can update on anything else in addition to the BIL projects starting at Rachel Carson. Thanks folks. I will be back shortly.
- * Karl: This is going to be a big year for the Refuge and New England fire zone. Chris currently works at Tahoe NF in CA. Will be coming across the country and joining us shortly. We're pretty jazzed about that. Also hiring 2 other permanent full-time fire, ad GS-9 RxB and a GS-7 fuels specialist. Will be brought on just as soon as Chris gets established.
- * BIL project was always a partnership, landscape project between TNC and Refuge. Refuge part is grinding forward towards implementation. If all goes well, will be treating first 120 ac of 500 we hope to work on and reestablish fire regimes in larger units of the Refuge. John

- Leavitt helping. BIL project huge opportunity we've been waiting for.
- * Did a couple small RxBs last year, a couple in the works this coming year as well.
 - * NPS - 2 RT130s in spring, not dates yet, but usually one in April, one in June. One RxB this spring at Baker Island, 10 ac field.
 - * Had 3 small burns this past spring, total 13 ac. All reoccurring burns, no new entries.
 - * RT130s are open. Our refreshers, we can't host the pack test for non-federal folks. If there's an agency rep from their agency, they can test.
 - * We always like to have extra hands on our fires. Baker Island a little tricky because of boat logistics.
 - * FMO hire, making good progress, extended offer, had to rescind it, not sure why. Starting over from scratch.
 - * Did hire an FPMA. Excited about that; Bryan's been taking over a lot of those duties. Hope to have more time to help out. Fire Program Management Assistant.
 - * Jon Bailey: Wildfire - CMP telephone pole tipped over and sparked pitch pine fire. Luckily with BIL-funded treatments and wind direction, it was contained.
 - * In Kennebunk, a lot of WUI wildfires around large houses. Talking with County, a lot of FireWise education and outreach, local fire departments, starting to become an issue. Building partnerships, outreach. A lot of little road fires, too.
 - * ME ARNG - just completed 126 ac mastication at Hollis training site including fire breaks. Huge to get into units we've never been able to burn because too shaded, particularly with gray birch. Looks really great. Super-excited about that; whole site available to burn.
 - * Also completing a timber sale and fire break work at our Caswell and Loring training sites. Fire breaks should be done this winter. Working with FS to try to burn some of those cut-over areas. Spruce-fir forest type, some mixed hardwoods.
 - * Also Woodville training site near Lincoln, contract out for firebreaks, over 200 ac. RxB in future up there.
 - * Did not have any RxB in 2024 season. Did have a wildfire start at Hollis from a parachute flare, 1/4 ac. Unit did a great job of responding. Engineering unit had an excavator, responded with local FDs and MFS. Out in short time.
 - * Class 2 day; required to talk to local fire warden before using pyrotechnics. Helped keep it small size; there was a lot of fuel where it landed. Could have been much worse on a class 3-4-5 day.
 - * Just completed and signed Guard's wildfire mgmt plan. Sent a copy to Robby.
 - * Unit Aliesha bossed at Hollis, burn again in spring or fall, perhaps during TREX.
 - * Will do vegetative monitoring. Also considering herbicide use for stubborn gray birch. Maybe looking at Albany Pine Bush model. Hope is to reclaim those areas that have grown up so much to the point where we can maintain with fire and mechanical treatment.
 - * Why Killick Pond not incorporated into this? Part of it is IFW and part is BPL; BPL has some language about forever wild. Might be ecoreserve.
 - * MDIFW open to talking about that parcel.
 - * California Plains - Poland Springs wants to open up 20-40 ac with mastication, white pine, scotch pine. Planted over sandplain grasslands.

- ME DEP Air Bureau Update

- * Stacy: No update. Last time we joined you, I was telling you that air emissions rule was being updated, including that activity from RxB would be required. Right now, voluntary. MFS helps us with those data each year. But going forward, was proposed to be required. In case this becomes a thing again, data would be location, day, #ac burn, broadcast and understory burns 50 ac+, pile burns affecting 25+ ac. Excluded burns conducted by federal land managers. 2026 data might be required in 2027. Ag burns voluntary only (continued).

Biggest discussions about how this would be recorded. Did ask that EPA develop some sort of recording program.

- * Proposed, may still happen - ADRR not signed last summer as expected. Unofficial rumor that it will not be signed. Don't know what that means. May be shelved for 4 years. Know they don't want someone to review it and then poke holes in it. Keeping out ear to the ground. Will have some lead time. First data set that would have been required would have been 2026. should this be enacted, we'd still have a couple years of lead time.
- * Kevin O.: We monitor PM_{2.5}. No unhealthy group days (elderly, etc.). No days when value >35.5 mg/L³. Saw smoke impacts from Canada, but not direct hits like 2023. Ozone, only 2 days moderate for sensitive groups. >71ppb on 8-hr average. Saw strange things this year. Now seeing transport winds earlier, March/April. Some outlier points.
- * In 2023, 39 moderate days, and in 2024 0 days for ozone. About average.
- * A month ago, received an email from Kent Nelson. He asked us about air curtain burners and if we had any opinion on them. Regulatory concerns? We don't have any direct experience with them. None in ME that we are aware of. Without going into official department position, some thoughts about licensing perspective. We don't know, never been asked. Talked about where they're portable, not stationary for very long. Asked around New England States Consortium. NH does have some experience not only with permitting them, but also evaluating them on a regulatory basis. Today at 1:00, presentation about this exact topic. Hope to learn something and get back to Kent. We just don't know; no experience with them at all.
- * Me personally, I think it's a great idea. Looks a lot more controlled than touching off acres of land. Technology is fascinating that you could burn at such a high temp and not get much for smoke or emissions.
- * Survey - 2 years ago, we were seeing wildfire smoke and getting citizen concerns about health impacts. Martha was getting a lot of calls and messages to our hotline saying that most of the area is clear, but pockets of smoke typically around low-lying areas. Lake close to central ME, Winthrop. Smoke survey we put onto DEP webpage. Also sent it to Maine Lakes Association, try to get folks to take survey. If you notice anything, let us know. Pockets of smoke we can't explain, very localized. Survey closed for season, will reopen April-November. If you notice anything unusual, we'd love to hear from you, even a simple email.
- * Tim: Please send link to survey when that's open.
- * Are some of these smokes from RxBs that some of us may know about. Would Martha reach out to land managers in the area? We know smoke can set up inversions at night. Wonder if we can make some sort of feedback loop to incorporate us to help out if it is something we're doing, or if it is some other source.
- * They'd all be permitted, so could be checking wind direction, distance, checking with towns.
- * Could be really useful. Share who contacts might be. Prompt discussion.
- * Kent Nelson retired. Will most likely work under CWDG. Terry Teller is the new person in Kent's position. Aliesha will send her email to Stacy.
- * Air quality crystal ball - Portland and vicinity as population grows, are there any non-containment areas in the works?
- * We have monitors around Portland area, Tukey's bridge near UHaul dealership. PM monitor in Deering Oaks. Our monitors not showing anything out of attainment. Seeing elevated values there because of heavy construction presence by Back Cove. Busy traffic corridor. And complicated by B&M plant destruction and renovation. That's where we believe the source is. Very local to that section of Portland. In short, crystal ball shows business as usual.
- * Deering Oaks monitor will be moved over to Ocean Gateway. Never heard any discussion of non-containment area.

- * Air curtain burner - land trust on Martha's Vineyard purchased one, but then MassDEP pulled permit.
- * Can't speak to whether they're permitted for a state agency or private entity. Sidebar discussions about intended use.
- * For NY, Forest Health is purchasing an air curtain burner under invasive species program to mitigate fuels and address treatment of propagules that could otherwise spread. Collaborating with SUNY-ESF to explore impacts on soil, air quality emissions, and cost-benefit analysis of using air curtain burner.
- * Believe Alex Entrup has secured permission to use one for MassWildlife.
- * Important tool for efficiently addressing fuels, especially where lack of markets to deal with woody material. More efficient than pile building and burning. Flexibility to get max consumption and minimal particulate matter.

- Due outs

- * Tim will send out MOU
- * Everyone with trainings and RT-130 will send dates
- * Tim will share contact info for NRCS person in NH.
- * Leavitt will share contact info from Sean Horan and Gerry Barnes, Katie Hall.

- Applying the National Fire Scar Survey - in Maine and Beyond Joe Marschall and Mike Stambaugh, Center for Tree-Ring Science, University of Missouri (1100)

- * Joe Marschall & Mike Stambaugh
- * Disappearing resource. Value for future managers and researchers.
- * Develop skills for ID and interpretation of wood and fire scars in the field. An "eye for time." can enhance your capacity to manage a place.
- * Support use of historical information to inform modern management.
- * Natural archives of information beyond fire record - historical forests, climate, human history.
- * Remnant wood is a natural archive.
- * Red, pitch, and eastern white pine good candidates in the Northeast. Longevity, high resin content.
- * Pine remnant wood field ID
- * Physically hard
- * Char often present (but not on live trees)
- * Bark usually not present
- * Broken-off pieces smell resinous
- * Fire-scar healing lobes observable
- * Poor sites a good place to look first. Vaccinium.
- * Mark Twain NF project
- * 400+ fire scar samples, rare data set for eastern U.S.
- * Partnership saved samples
- * National Fire Scar Survey123
- * Mike - Maine research
- * PC2FM map motivated seeking better data in New England
- * Since 2012, surveying areas across Northeast, including ME
- * Seriously investigated about 20 sites across ME
- * Found six excellent candidate sites, 139 fire-scarred red pine
- * Study sites

- * ~1km²
- * 20-50 trees, typically single species
- * Extend into pre-European colonization
- * Includes stumps, logs, snags, live trees
- * Publication coming soon
- * Pleasant Mountain, Whipple Pond, North Millinocket, Turkey Tail Lake, Fourth Machias Lake, Gassabias Lake
- * Look at footprint of fires, size, and intensity from different years
- * Years between fires MFI 11.8 at WIP
- * PLS MFI 15.1 yrs, fire scars 1609-1919
- * NWM MFI 31 yrs, 1684-1934 fire scar years
- * Stack of trees initiated in response to 1801 fire, even-aged red pine
- * Informs our understanding of red pine ecology
- * Wood in Maine on site since 1494 TTL. 500 years, pre-European periods
- * Much more frequent MFI than national model
- * Fire scar seasonality - most fires happening in growing season. Some activity in dormant season, 10-25%. WIP anomaly, more fire in dormant season. Most likely due to heavy human control in that area.
- * Believe we'll start seeing a lot more evidence of historical fire in more places.

- Next meeting

- * Mid-July. July 9, TNC-ME office.

Other

- * By-laws discussion.
- * In other states, landowners will come under umbrella of a state RxB Council. Most have a steering committee or exec committee. Typically the NGOs, state, federal. Almost every one of them allows individuals to participate, but they might not have voting rights, not part of steering committee. Doesn't affect hierarchy or MOU. People who want to participate, some places charge a fee.
- * If the council will grow, needs to be a mechanism for outreach and bringing in people not on MOU.
- * John Leavitt wants to feel like a participant, doesn't have to be a voting member.
- * Article 1 of our mission, NGOs have ability to be part of the Council. With listed potential partners, is an associate membership a possibility?
- * Potential conflict of interest. Identify conflicts, recuse from voting.
- * In practice, that's exactly what we're doing. Voting members on the MOU, and members can participate. Don't know that we need to memorialize that in our by-laws.
- * Article 3 includes corporations
- * John Leavitt will write up his concerns and a suggestion for how they should be addressed.
- * Have exec committee meet before July meeting - virtually - with a proposal on how to move forward