



## Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

# Alto Minho TRES Prescribed Fire Training Exchange

Paredes de Coura—Alto Minho—Portugal  
November 17-24, 2017

Sixty-three fire practitioners from 16 agencies and organizations in six countries gathered to implement—and celebrate—the first Prescribed Fire Training Exchange held outside the United States. The TRES model, created and developed by the Fire Learning Network in numerous places and ecosystems of the United States, was successfully employed in the Alto Minho region in northern Portugal, thanks to the guidance and mentoring enabled by the TRES Coaches Network.

Portugal suffered through a shocking fire season this year, which included a tragic record 109 fatalities, largely civilians, in June and October. The season in this Iberian Peninsula country peaked in mid-October: on the worst day, firefighters were battling 440 fires. The TRES team that had been planning for months before these fire events was able to rise to the challenge of lighting fires so soon afterwards—with the need for additional prescribed fire more urgently clear than ever.

The TRES was led by Emanuel Oliveira and a group of international fire

professionals, under the umbrella of CIM-Alto Minho (*Comunidade Intermunicipal*). With the help of a couple of members of the TRES Coaches Network, they recruited a group of enthusiastic fire practitioners and together delivered eight days of TRES burning and learning on a new continent.

Just before the TRES, most of the participants attended the national Fire Camp Conference (November 16-17), with presentations and discussions that shed light on the organization and fire reality of the country and the latest research from Portugal,



Participants in the first TRES held outside the United States came from 16 different agencies in Brazil, Canada, Chile, Portugal, Spain and the United States. © Mauricio Martin



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Spain, Italy and Brazil. Participants then checked in at the Incident Command Post, located in the *Centro de Educação e Interpretação Ambiental da Paisagem Protegida do Corno do Bico* (interpretive center) at the Camp, in a natural protected area in the small village of Lamas, Paredes de Coura.

Everyone was introduced to the Incident Management Team, and to the expectations for various leaders and team members. The group then spent the first two days on presentations and basic training, learning about characteristics of the ecosystems and ecology of the area, fire organizations, systems, standards and protocols, specific expected fire behavior and safety concerns

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of the area and other team building activities. They also had the chance to visit some of the interesting historical, architectural, social and natural sites of this region of Portugal.

From the third onward, the group implemented burns, working in two *equipos* (task forces) of two *brigadas* (modules) each, and supported by *sapadores* crews—local fire fighters, who are also committed to prevention projects. By the end of the TREX they had completed more than 160 hectares (395 acres) of burning in 10 units strategically located near six towns in the area.

These burns had various objectives, with wildfire prevention, protection of plantations, regeneration of pasture areas, and ecosystem recovery and resilience among the main ones. There were also great opportunities to learn about procedures and protocols from other fire organizations—and meet an incredible group of people.

The TREX closed with a traditional *magosto* celebration in the camp and a reception at the City Hall with the mayor and other personalities, in appreciation of the benefits the organization of this event brought.



On the first burn day, the Alto Minho TREX team completed 55 hectares (136 acres) of burning, working in two teams and conducting simultaneous ignitions. The burn units were comprised of gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), which burns hot even on cooler days. The principal objectives of these burns were to rejuvenate managed pastoral lands for local shepherds and reduce flammable vegetation in strategic locations to protect communities; a burn adjacent to Peneda Geres National Park was designed to protect the park from wildfires.

Looking at immediate results of the burning (great fire effects and positive inputs from shepherds, for example), the community impact (incredible media coverage at the local, regional and national level) and the amount of good training at all levels, it is easy to conclude that the Alto Minho TREX was a great success. It certainly achieved the three main pillars of the TREX model: fire implementation, training, and outreach.

A month after the TREX, the change it has sparked is nothing less than amazing. According to the team leader, the effects are “very positive, people are burning like never before in the Alto Minho.” In addition to working

with local shepherds to conduct more burns, partners are conducting underburns in oak woodlands—a long-time goal, never realized. Good planning made sure key players were engaged in the TREX; a field tour to explore a woodland that burned nicely in a wildfire showed what was possible; and within weeks, progress. And a hopeful end to a tough season.

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The Fire Learning Network, Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges and the TREX Coaches Network are part of *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior.

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v. 19 Dec 17 / José Luis Duce



Midway through the week of burning, warmer and drier temperatures led to hotter burning conditions. Crews were careful, and burned slowly. On this day they burned 13.5 hectares (33 acres), mainly along ridgelines, creating fuel breaks in strategic locations to reduce wildfire spread in the region.

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