



The Watershed Research and Training Center

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2023 Butte Cal-TREX

By Wolfy Rougle, José Luis Duce, and Andrea Bustos

This year marks the [Watershed Research and Training Center](#)'s third year supporting the Butte County Cal-TREX event. The Watershed Center has supported this event utilizing funding from the California Department of Conservation's [Regional Forest and Fire Capacity program](#) (RFFC). This funding has supported Watershed Center staff time to provide coaching, mentorship and organization, as well as a community-based prescribed fire subaward, awarded to the [Butte Resource Conservation District](#). The subaward in turn has supported both the Cal-TREX event and the [Butte Prescribed Burn Association](#) (PBA). The flexibility of the RFFC funding has allowed the Watershed Center and the Butte County RCD to focus on investing in people, with a focus on local prescribed fire capacity building. **This funding is a unique and invaluable example of what empowered funding focused on the right factors with reduced barriers can provide to a local area.**

The Butte County Cal-TREX Incident Management Team (IMT) is made up of 18 different local partner organizations with 40 individuals, including liaisons, leaders, coaches, trainers and organizers.

Over the last three years, this alliance of diverse backgrounds, experiences, skills, visions and passionate fire practitioners have accomplished an equally diverse array of goals and objectives. The Butte County Cal-TREX team has provided an enormous amount of hands-on training hours in a safe, inclusive and healthy environment, maintaining and extending relationships among organizations, cooperators and stakeholders and continuing building local capacity with a strong cultural and ecological component. The team has also paired up with the Plumas County Cal-TREX in sisterhood, offering resources and technical support to each other from one end of the Feather River Canyon to the other.

The Butte and Plumas Counties Cal-TREX teams have obtained and gained recognition and appreciation from the communities and, most recently, from the agencies who originally offered some hesitation about community-based good fire. Through a steady commitment to strengthening cooperation among organizations, the Butte County burn community has transitioned from a situation in which permits were sometimes difficult to get and were required 365 days a year, to a situation where CAL FIRE burn permits are no longer required after the end of declared fire season (which is in alignment with the California Public Resources Code).

Cal-TREX Training Days*

Butte TREX 2021:

212 participants, 1 training weekend

Butte TREX 2022-2023:

323 participants, 2 training weekends

Butte TREX 2023-2024:

283 participants, 2 training weekends

Cal-TREX On-Call Burn Crew*

2021-2022:

21 days burning, 310 participants, 523 acres treated

2022-2023:

18 days burning, 387 participants, 153 acres treated - totaling 3,905 hours

2023-2024: Season has just started!

Butte PBA Burns*

2021-2022:

3 days of burning, 65 participants, 12 acres

2022-2023:

2 days of burning, 50 participants, 17 acres

2023-24:

As of 11/30/23: 5 days of burning, 60+ participants, 19 acres

***Participants may double-count individuals who attend multiple trainings to deepen their fire skills and experiences.**

PARTNERS ENGAGED ON THE BUTTE CAL-TREX INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Butte County Resource Conservation District/Butte PBA; CAL FIRE/Butte County Fire Department; Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve; Chico State Enterprises; Plumas Fire Safe Council/Plumas Underburn Cooperative; Butte County Fire Safe Council; Butte County Air Quality Management District; Feather River College; NRCS; Plumas and Lassen National Forests; City of Chico Fire Department and City of Chico Parks and Natural Resources; Paradise Recreation and Parks District; Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria; Deer Creek Resources/Terra Fuego; the Watershed Research and Training Center

Another sign of positive effects and results are the members of the IMT. **There is a “new generation” of leaders and mentors, those who attended the Butte Cal-TREX the first time, and now are part of the cadre, fully engaged and playing essential roles in continuing providing learning opportunities and exchanging experiences and knowledge.** Original 2021 Butte Cal-TREX instigators such as Eli Goodsell, Wolfy Rougle, He-Lo Ramirez, Don Hankins, and Zeke Lunder, will still play an essential role, but meanwhile, newer names from 2022 and 2023 such as Dallas Koller, Mitch Bamford, Maira Iqbal, Lindsay Amundson, new Butte PBA coordinator David Mitchell, Ian Colunga and others, will start to sound more familiar among stations and positions when burning in the foothills of the valley. Thanks, Butte County Cal-TREX, for being an example of what cooperative community fire can look like.



Above: Ian Colunga (left) had no fire experience before joining the Butte PBA in 2021. Now, after several community-based burns and TREX events, he is a firing boss trainee, seen here on November 2, 2023 briefing a PBA crew on a landowner burn in Forest Ranch. New Butte PBA Coordinator David Mitchell (right) looks on. Photo credit: BCRCD.



Above: Dallas Koller briefs some of the 95 attendees of Butte Cal-TREX 2023's first training weekend on Oct. 20, 2023. Dallas, who recently was the 23rd person in California to earn CARX qualification, is the Fire Program Manager at the Butte County Resource Conservation District and has served as the Butte Cal-TREX Plans Section Chief in 2022 and 2023.



Above: Community members, landowners, students and local volunteer firefighters gather to hear a briefing, led by California State-Certified Prescribed Fire Burn Boss trainee Zeke Lunder, at a PBA burn in Forest Ranch on November 2. PBA burns are open to all with no experience necessary and attendees ranged in age from 13 to over 70. Photo credit: BCRCD



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