

Maine Prescribed Fire Council

Meeting minutes

15 July 2025

Attendees

- Tim Bickford, ME ARNG
- Amanda Mahaffey, TNC
- John Leavitt, Burning Alternatives
- Robby Gross, MFS
- John Veale, MDIFW
- Chris McCandless, USFWS
- Jon Bailey, TNC
- Nick Jeros, USFS WMNF
- Connor White, MDIFW
- Tom Rounsville, UMaine Coop Ext Tick Lab
- Griffin Dill, UMaine Tick Lab
- Jon Janelle, USFS
- Parker Schuermann, NPS

UMaine Fire & Ticks research presentation

- Passive tick surveillance tells geographic distribution of ticks, associated pathogens, where on the body, what activity doing when encountering ticks
 - Seeing pathogen positive bacteria (Lyme-causing) in ~50% of ticks sent in
 - 70% ticks encountered on person's own residential property
- Setting up long-term monitoring sites throughout ME
 - Density of ticks, underlying factors with pathogen prevalence, tick species

- Wildlife hosts, climate zones, microclimate
- Tick abundance gradient - high abundance in Midcoast, far fewer interior
- Efficacy of surveillance methods, data utility
- Weather stations at sites, temp, humidity, precip, soil moisture, soil temp, veg
- Trail cams for wildlife, small mammal trapping
- Collecting ticks & blood samples
- Partner with IF&W at tagging stations
- ticks.umaine.edu griffin.dill@maine.edu
- Proactive approach = exploring mgmt methods
 - Some research on RxB and ticks, but not as much on what happens to pathogens in the environment
 - Blood meal analysis - what the tick fed on in previous life stage
 - Go in pre- and post-burn, assess what ticks fed on, how that's changed
- Reaching out to folks already burning areas, looking to sample pre- and post-burn, keep sampling into the future
 - Looking for partners to set up research studies on lands you'll be burning
- Q&A
 - Come to Hollis
 - What kind of lead time would you need before a fire?
 - Seasonality of burning vs. seasonality of ticks
 - Spring burning season around when ticks would be active. 1-2 day notice could probably manage it.
 - Field crew regularly sampling April-November
 - Issue with fall season; fall burns before ticks get busy. Could sample in spring. Some careful considerations for tick activity; not much tick activity August-September; they don't pick up until late October.
 - September burn planning?

- Could make it work if we knew ahead; could compare June-July to post-burn.
- As we start doing sampling, how much data do you need, timeframe to publishing results?
 - Some burn research on whether it reduces tick populations, at what time scale? Burning eliminates immediately post-burn. Sampling continues after the burn to help determine how frequently you need to burn an area to maintain reduced tick populations.
 - Could look on short and long time scales. 1-2 years post-burn publishable potentially, but 4-5 years stronger.
 - If extreme change, could publish very quickly, look for replicates
 - Could partner with other states, teach them how to do it.
- Permit process for collaboration with TNC, similar with other departments.
- NAFSE [Search Results: 'ticks' - NAFSE](#)
- USFWS will reach out - 2 burn units sitting on desk
- thomas.rounsville@maine.edu; griffin.dill@maine.edu

Review of previous meeting notes

- No changes.

Officer Review – Member at Large

- USFS Massabesic EF can no longer be part of the Council as a member. Jon Janelle was our member at large. Based on our by-laws, he can't continue in that role. Vacancies - need to vote in a new member-at-large. Have not solicited any nominations yet.
- According to by-laws, any exec council members - chair, vice-chair, administrator, member-at-large - from voting council member organization/agency.
- Recommendation to solicit nominations through a duration of time - 2 weeks. Tim will email voting members soliciting nominations. Will hold brief Council Teams meeting for that vote. Or vote by email.

- 1 year left of his term. Jon was voted in last summer. New member-at-large would finish out his term.

RX Fire Council MOU

- Moving forward slowly.
- State agencies on Council - ARNG, IFW, MFS - have draft very different than the previous version. Changes with other agencies including TNC, looked at NH model; NH got theirs signed in last month. We took NH's model, based off U.S. Space Force MOU model. Concise, better format. Were supposed to have a meeting with AG's office yesterday, but postponed to early August to get final approval with state AG. Once that happens, will push out to rest of Council members for their review. Hope everyone will be able to jump on board quickly.
- How different from NH's version that TNC signed? Includes an appendix with everything TNC needs to see. We only made minor changes to make sure it fits ME instead of just NH. Hopefully passes TNC legal muster.
- A lot of things changing at TNC. Either this MOU needs to be in place for TREX, or TNC needs to have individual MOUs with agencies with IF&W, MFS, MEARNG. Time-sensitive. We may want to do the one-on-one with TNC-MFS in case this gets hung up. Then cover all our bases.
- Encourage that signature sooner than later. No guarantees.
- MFS: We should connect - Robby, Aliesha, JB.
- Next meeting scheduled August 5. If goes extremely well, if part of this group signs, and part doesn't sign, does the MOU hold a place in lieu of doing individual agreements? With other agreements we sign, it's good if others don't sign.
- Would like to think that would work. Concern that if 3 agencies sign agreement, gets passed along and another org needs to make changes to it, at what point does that MOU change enough that we need to all re-sign it.
- From TNC's lens on MOUs, have had multiple partner agency MOUs, and if one partner doesn't fulfill all written obligations in MOU, then the remaining parties that do meet the requirements are still part of that MOU; MOU still functions.
- TNC currently in litigation with an incident on a fire out West. Since we're a large, global nonprofit, that we don't have tort law covering state or federal agency. TNC requiring more recently that other NGOs carry proper burn insurance if they're on signed MOUs. Will not sign unless proof all parties have adequate fire insurance. Big

problem. TNC really cautious on signing something and then being the softest target of a lawsuit.

- Still a success that TNC signed MOU with NH recently. If our language is almost the same, hope it will move quickly.
- Haven't gotten comment back yet from AG's office. After 8/5, if they're satisfied, will send it to everybody.
- TNC state and div director, fire legal attorneys all know it's coming.
- Robbie will connect with Jon end of week.

ME TREX 2025 overview

- Great interest, lots of applications, ~45. Vetted those, looked at what we could provide for training, narrowed to ~30 attendees. A little shift. At this point, 32 attendees, some also in the wings from Wabanki tribes to join. Registration's out, a few already done that, filling out release forms. All due end of this month.
- Honing our cadre and IMT staff. Great team together. Unfortunately, NB and NS unable to attend. 1 from Ottawa not associated with the Compact, another from PEI is a Compact member, might be able to get permission to come down.
- Planning going well. A lot of stuff to do. 2 months from today it all starts.
- Next planning meeting next Friday; will hammer out details then. Start working on daily agendas for rainy day events, burn plans, logistics for equipment, transportation, etc. Starting meetings every 2 weeks leading up to event.
- MFS: If you need something you don't have, please let me know sooner than later. We're willing to fill in the gaps.
- All in planning mode now; come September, we'll separate into IMT roles.

Training Committee update

- York County Wildfire Academy
 - 2nd annual successful. Fewer courses this year because of TREX.
 - S130/190, S211 pumps, UTV/safety. Dropped first aid because only 2-3 participants.

- Required \$50 fee/student/course to mainly cover supplies, workbooks, IRPGs, stickers. First year, a lot of sign-up/no-shows. Did provide a scholarship and way for folks to communicate if barrier.
- Everybody passed pack test and courses. No safety issues.
- ATV/UTV especially very popular; might want to continue offering annually.
- Rod Hooper interested in continuing to offer it.
- Want to coordinate with MFS on timing. Really appreciate support on this.
- Having instructors in varying knowledge and experience super-important.
- Polly Forest Stewards Guild did a lot of admin support.
- Cadre from every org in Council.
- Absolute success, building RxB culture in southern ME.
- MFS sees immense need for training. We started our wildfire academy back. We'll do our AAR for you with what we did. Maybe in fall, we can connect and make sure we're making the best use of everybody's resources, classes, hit those items in a good way, make sure we're not duplicating efforts. If a particular class needed, can collaborate.
- Strengthening partnerships, opening new doors.
- MFS academy update
 - Cumulatively, ~60 people statewide.
 - Traditionally when we offered it, was all at Thomas College. Was good. Dropped because of funding. Trying to be creative on how to do this. Offered it regionally. Original goal was core group rotating so everyone has an opportunity to hit a particular class every 2-3 years.
 - We get people that don't show either, and it's a pain to work hard to plan and get no-shows.
 - All in all, successful. Do we go back to that one central location, or continue to do it regionally? Big cost to attendees.
 - How can we bolster York County Academy, hold a different class somewhere else on a different weekend?
 - Fire chiefs in particular very thankful. Most students come from FDs.

- Obvious by number of attendees that these trainings are valuable.
- ME-TREX applicants, many looking for FFT1 quals. Didn't have room for them all. Shows interest in moving folks up into leadership roles.
- ME ARNG working with MFS on S130/190, not exclusive to Guard. Will be slots for a few others to join. In-person September 2-6, Tuesday-Saturday after Labor Day. Contact Tim or Aliesha. Bolton Hill.

Outreach Committee update

- No updates.

Individual partner updates/Grants/2025 RX projects

- TNC
 - TNC's fire managers met in CO. A lot on insurance market change. TNC updating its complexity analysis and consequence analysis. Rating burn risk.
 - Mitigate down to reduce risk. Now if houses >\$2M in close proximity, can be a no-go. Gray area, e.g. continuous fuels? They're hoping to have this be required around October. Shifting gears, looking ahead to make sure we don't do a burn that triggers one of these.
 - e.g. Martha's Vineyard basically can't be burned by TNC because of insurance risk.
 - Saying a lot is L.A. fires and insurance industry. Don't want to completely lose insurance because of a bad burn.
 - New forms, more elements to burn plans, revised sections.
 - Discussion of different states' liability laws, how TNC would handle gross negligence vs. other forms? TBD. Fire legal and safety team, infused with senior firefighters.
 - Concern based on labor and time is that there might potentially be a partner burn evaluation, might have to evaluate smoke or values at risk in high-risk scenarios.
 - Blane Heuman navigating this.
- USFWS

- At Rachel Carson NWR, moving forward with BIL project, prescriptions, all Wells-adjacent, working on Section 7s, getting working access roads, hoping to get started sooner than later. All lights green on that for now. Scope of work 50% removal in some stands, following up with RxB.
- Program got moved to Wells from eastern MA. Building built beginning of May, 427 Post Road. Acquired a reserve Type 6 engine, to be picked up in eastern MT. Zach Doffins(?) ENGB. September 21 first day. Just needs RX410 and will be RXB2 required. Let him be competitive for that position, then will fly a ENGB behind him. Seasonals, 3 permanent staff, skid steer, building up program. Trying to build back. We're moving.
- Monomoy burn this fall.
- NPS
 - Just hired AFMO at Cape Cod, ENGB supposed to be coming behind. Still wondering when it's going to fly.
 - FMO coming to Acadia soon. Know Matt Carroll interviewed recently.
 - Zone 2 hired FMO, AFMO, ENGB, have a crew on. Battlefields in that zone.
 - Parker in both zones, doing science. Can attend USFWS burns.
 - Going through a lot of fire management plans.
 - Cape Cod equation - whether they'll move into treatment burns outside of old fields. Parker will go down in a couple weeks to meet AFMO and maintain their weather station.

Burn plans

- ME ARNG
 - Hollis ready for fire. Large mastication project out there, fuel on ground ,looks really good.
- MDIFW
 - Verne Walker WMA - Lands Program finishing up harvest plan, will include RxB in pitch pine areas, ~60 ac to be divided into 3 x 20-ac units, map out to make each unit accessible by Type 6. Hoping to have harvested fall of next year. BA 30 target.
 - Alfred parcel newly acquired, in New England cottontail area.

- Coordinating with MFS to burn on management areas this fall around Merry Meeting Bay area. Primary focus is enhancing grassland habitat. We burned a 30 acre field this past spring on Swan Island and hope to burn again either this fall or next spring
- Burning Alternatives
 - Some work with USFWS
 - MassWildlife has pulled off 27 burns this spring, over 1,000 ac. Ben Mazzei now RxB2, so multiple burns on same day.
 - Don't do much summer burning due to AQI.
- USFWS
 - Day's Landing
 - Biddeford Pool
 - Petit Manan
 - Invasives issues, cut twice, burn once.
 - Monomoy almost 2,000 ac, fall.
 - Assabet convo on BIL projects, WUI fuel reduction
 - Great Bay getting RxB plan implemented
- USFS
 - Most of our units hung up in timber sales. Waiting for those for majority of units. Other units potential for reburning in Moat units near North Conway.
 - Contract to get mechanical line put in. Over winter had a contract for hazard tree removal due to spongy moth. Created a slash problem on fireline areas.
- MFS
 - Capacity continues to be a problem. Stats this year, 7 burns done for ~80 ac. We're still 10% vacancies for our organizations.
 - Outfitting RxB trailers. Excited to expand out of southern ME.
 - Possible to develop system to coordinate around burns 2-3 months out?

- Importance of highlighting cumulatively what we do in ME, across eastern states. With funding being what it is, have to keep working together to tell important story. Support each other.
 - Yearly state of the state?
- TNC
 - Collaborative partnerships
 - Mechanically harvested commercial logging 230 ac at Waterboro Barrens, fuel reduction, SPB, setting up burn units. Some areas not recently harvested, some second treatment. Another 2 years of logging treatments to be had to be somewhat set.
 - Worked with Penobscot Nation & Wabanaki communities looking at culturally significant sites lacking recent fire history. Penobscot Nation submitted a CWPP grant, TNC funds in tandem to help implement burning. Some dates to meet with Passamaquoddy on site. TNC in strong support of assisting Indigenous partners.
 - Burning more locally, 4 units set up. Need to go through new evaluation.
 - Kennebunk Plains 4 units, 1-2 need updating.
 - Waterboro, 4 units set up, 1 around Pine Springs Lake might be mechanical now (25 ac) based on new complexity analysis.
 - Hollis supporting Tim.
 - Would love to see fire in Fryeburg pine barrens.
- NPS
 - Updating fire mgmt plans, seeing how to support others to see where fire makes sense.
 - Certain lack of initiative and planning, still waiting to see how we'll be staffed and whether we can use available funding. Lot of freezing going on. Parker can only travel for public safety.
- ME ARNG
 - TREX burn units.

NE-MW workshop takeaways

- Amanda summary – built off of momentum from last year's in-person workshop in Albany. Hybrid format worked. 1st day focus on Many Cultures of Fire theme; talks & discussion with Steven Pyne, Mary Huffman, Bazile Panek. Day 2 concurrent field trips, including ours at Hollis. Day 3 focus on State of the State; lots to learn from what other RxB Councils are focusing on, as well as presentation by John McCabe from Chicago.
- Hollis field trip went well. Land trust folks, IF&W. Good crowd, everyone interested, great questions.
- Kelly from IF&W identified 25 bird species, most she's ever identified in a walkaround. Attributed to fire mgmt.

Due outs

- Tim solicit for member-at-large nominations

Next meeting

- January 14, 2026 proposed winter meeting date

Equipment and site tour