Building Relationships With Tribal Partners to Enchance Stewardship on JDSF

At a recent cultural burn in the Chamberlain area of the Jackson Demonstration State Forest (JDSF) in Mendocino County, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) worked with Tribal partners to learn, create, and document cultural resources and practices, furthering its commitment to important tribal partnership and collaboration. The 12-acre burn was conducted as a learning session between CAL FIRE staff and Tribes local to JDSF where all participants shared knowledge on traditional stewardship through fire, and how CAL FIRE deals with fire on a California landscape with climate change in the forefront of the Californian's minds.

The burn was also conducted to remove hazardous vegetation and reduce the risk of conflagration fires and protect the resources on JDSF.

"I took part in a prescribed, cultural burn with CAL FIRE this week. First, I would like to say that the people of CAL FIRE and their crew made me feel very welcome. I see this as a great start to a relationship for the future vision and connection to the wilderness, rivers, watersheds. Hopefully we take this opportunity to come together and do some wonderful things for the wellbeing for all of our children," said Vernon Wilson, Tribal Member of the Cahto Tribe.



CAL FIRE's mission to improve California's natural resources incorporates the utilization of traditional tribal knowledge and practices. CAL FIRE acknowledges the significance of tribal governments and communities in restoring Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous expertise to the landscapes. This effort is aimed at promoting sustainable land stewardship for the benefit of all.

"We are strengthening both personal and professional relationships in Mendocino County between CAL FIRE and our local Tribal partners that will last well into the future. We have an understanding that as part of this continued learning and improvement, that we support and value everyone involved in this process. Sometimes this literally means sharing resources to help make it happen," said Deputy MEU

Unit Chief Brandon Gunn. “One of the most important aspects of this burn was bringing local Tribal partners to JDSF and be there with them when they express their cultural through the traditional use of fire. Fire is a part of the local heritage and tradition; I have both experienced it and heard of it spoken of as healing to the people and the land.”

As part of this cultural burn, Chief Gunn also worked to provide fire safety training for CAL FIRE’s local Tribal partners. This also allowed Tribal participants to train and educate CAL FIRE personnel on the importance of cultural burning and how it helps with the gathering and production of natural resources. Chief Gunn provided the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians the training materials they requested to ensure tribal members could burn safely. MEU and Sherwood Valley are still in the planning process to get this training implemented. CAL FIRE MEU staff are also working with the Cahto Tribe in developing cultural burning capacity. CAL FIRE is in the planning process for learning and training sessions as it relates to cultural burning.