Del Norte PBA

Prescribed Burn Association Newsletter

OCTOBER 2026 | DEL NORTE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



Together at Ship Mountain Ranch on October 17. Photo courtesy of Aaron Babcock.

Neighbors bring good fire to Ship Mountain Ranch

On October 17, landowners, neighbors, volunteers, and experienced fire practitioners gathered at Ship Mountain Ranch in Big Flat for another day of good fire and learning together. Led by burn boss Henri Holbrook of the Humboldt Prescribed Burn Association, the day built on September's work and gave our growing PBA more experience to carry into future projects.

Learning together on the ground

With support from the Del Norte Fire Safe Council crew and PBA participants, the October 17 burn continued efforts to reduce accumulated fuels and understory vegetation while protecting larger trees. It was also an opportunity to learn alongside experienced practitioners, get comfortable working together, and strengthen the relationships that make community burning possible.

A big thank-you to Henri for sharing his knowledge, to landowner Julianna Olate for welcoming this work, and to everyone who helped prepare the site, support the burn, and care for it afterward. Every contribution helps our PBA grow.

A place in Smith to Klamath

DNFSC's Smith to Klamath Initiative connects community protection and forest stewardship across ownerships, including future prescribed fire and Tribal-led cultural burning. The PBA helps build the local skills and relationships that can turn those plans into work on the ground.

The work after ignition

The teamwork continued after burn day. DNFSC crews returned for daily mop-up through October 21, checking and extinguishing remaining heat along the perimeter and farther into the unit. Hose remained in place to support follow-up.

Preparation, patrol, and equipment care all help make a burn possible—and offer plenty of ways to lend a hand. Our November 1 workday will bring participants back to the ranch to gather and organize equipment, reconnect, and take another look at how the fire affected the site.

Thanks to the partners who helped get us started

The October burn built on our first burn at the ranch on September 28. We're grateful to CAL FIRE, Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation, Smith River Fire Department, Winchuck Fire Department, Cross Contour LLC and burn boss Sam Commarto, the DNFSC crew, and the neighbors and volunteers who supported that effort. Their time, equipment, and experience helped lay the groundwork for the work we continued in October.

Building the PBA together





October 17 at Ship Mountain Ranch. Photos from the Dennis McCorkle (left) and Jess Swanson (right).

November 1 hose cleanup

Sunday, November 1 at 11 a.m.
Ship Mountain Ranch, Big Flat

Help gather, drain, roll, and organize hose and burn equipment. Bring sturdy boots, work gloves, water, and clothing for the weather. RSVP to Jess for meeting and access details. Equipment cleanup is a useful way to learn about the work that supports a burn.

Returning to record fire effects

We also plan to document fire effects during the November 1 visit. We will look at fuel consumption, unburned patches, tree and shrub effects, and the condition of the soil and duff, the partly decomposed material beneath the litter. Photos and field notes will help us compare conditions over time and learn from this burn.

Founding board gathering

Thursday, November 5

Prospective founding directors will gather to discuss the PBA's organization and next steps. DNFSC is helping the PBA get established, with the goal of an independent nonprofit led by its own board. The gathering will focus on the proposed structure and the decisions needed to move ahead.



September 28th at Ship Mountain Ranch. Photos courtesy of Julianna Olate.

Why beneficial fire matters

Many California ecosystems evolved with fire. Carefully planned burning consumes accumulated leaves, needles, branches, and brush. It can also reduce heavier fuels, such as at this site, which was logged decades ago. Reducing those fuels lowers the intensity of a future wildfire and gives firefighters better opportunities to protect communities.

Fire also helps renew habitat. It can encourage native plant growth and improve food and habitat for wildlife. Tribal-led cultural burning carries distinct goals rooted in each Tribe's knowledge, traditions, and relationship with the land, including caring for culturally important plants.

These benefits depend on the place, season, and how fire is applied. Weather, smoke, and site conditions shape each burn. Returning to observe the results helps guide future stewardship. For our PBA, that means learning from each project as we build local capacity to care for the land with fire.

Further reading: USDA Climate Hubs; California Beneficial Fire Plan

Join the next opportunity

No prior fire experience is needed to sign up. Help with preparation, equipment, or field assignments matched by burn leadership to your experience and the event's needs.

Join the interest list for workdays, training, and burn notices. There is no obligation to attend. Burn dates depend on weather, permits, smoke requirements, staffing, and equipment.

Sign up for the Del Norte PBA

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