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Rocky Mountain
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Fuels Planning: Science Synthesis and Integration

Social Issues Fact Sheet: 9

Benefits of Collaboration



Rocky Mountain
Research Station



Pacific Northwest
Research Station



North Central
Research Station

*Pacific Southwest
Research Station*

*Synthesizing
Scientific
Information
for Fire and Fuels
Project Managers*

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Collaboration—Achieving Goals

Wildland fire professionals at the Federal, State, and local levels have a long tradition of collaborating across agencies and jurisdictions. Collaboration helps them achieve goals together that they could not achieve independently. But more can be done. Citizens, managers, and policymakers continue to express the need for expanded and improved collaboration for wildland fire and fuels management.

Collaboration is the pooling of information, money, labor, and other resources by two or more stakeholders to solve a set of problems that neither can solve individually. It can lead to decisions that are more likely to be implemented, while better preparing agencies and communities for future challenges.

Why should managers collaborate? There are plenty of reasons.

Increases Efficiency

Collaboration can create relationships and agreements that increase the efficiency of fuels management by sharing personnel, equipment, and data; leveraging resources to attract grant monies; and mobilizing citizen volunteers. Although it may initially take more time and money, collaboration bears long-term benefits of increased efficiency and bigger “bang for the buck.”

Increases Agency Awareness of Changing Values

Social values are changing and becoming more diverse. Attitudes, values, and beliefs about wildland fire and fuels management are changing too. Through collaboration—building coalitions, identifying common ground, engaging in collective learning, and sharing information—land managers can better identify, understand, and respond to these changes.

Builds Trust

Relationships that are built during collaborative projects help to create trust. Trust can be further fostered if collaboration is inclusive and shows by example that the partners value diversity.

Also, local residents may trust individual employees of a government agency, but distrust the agency. When Federal employees participate in collaborative activities as individuals, trust builds between them and residents, and may eventually expand to include the agency.

Promotes Landscape-Level Management and Planning

Although fuels mitigation may be planned and implemented at the local level, to be effective it must contribute to and support a broader landscape-level plan for fuels management. Several case studies of collaborative groups working in watershed restoration show the positive results of joint resource management planning across a broad geographic area.

Motivates Private Landowners

One of the major challenges of fuels management is motivating private landowners to take responsibility for necessary mitigation actions on their land. Studies show that collaborative projects have promoted personal responsibility and motivated landowners to mitigate their vulnerability to fire.

Supports Science

Scientific truth is being debated publicly and contentiously these days. Collaboration among agency, university, and community scientists can facilitate a shift from relying on agency expertise toward emphasizing shared learning and responsibility. This can anchor a project in the community, while meshing traditional science with local knowledge.

Produces Intangible Benefits

Many of the benefits of collaboration are intangible, or “invisible successes.” New attitudes, shared knowledge, support, and working relationships can lead to new policies and government initiatives. Collaborations also foster improved job satisfaction and motivation among agency workers who report greater public support for action.

Builds Community Capacity

Collaborative projects build the abilities of residents, community organizations, and leaders to meet local needs and expectations. They bring people together not only as stewards of public and private land but also as empowered citizens—enabling them to sustain wildfire and fuels management programs into the future on their own.

Builds Agency Capacity

Collaboration can increase an agency’s ability to meet its mission and goals, expanding the scale and complexity of its projects, available technical expertise, and project support. Collaborative work enables organizations to spend less on



Collaboration involves private landowners in defining objectives and prioritizing projects. Such involvement helps motivate them to take responsibility for necessary mitigation actions on their land. Photo: V. Sturtevant

projects and undertake those that would not otherwise happen or would take longer to complete.

Source

Sturtevant, Victoria; Moote, Margaret Ann; Jakes, Pamela; Cheng, Antony S. 2005. Social science to improve fuels management: a synthesis of research on collaboration. Gen. Tech. Rep. NC-257. St. Paul, MN: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, North Central Research Station. 84 p. Available online at <http://ncrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/viewpub.asp?key=3123> [2006, August 25]. For a hard copy, contact Pamela Jakes at pjakes@fs.fed.us.

Additional Collaboration Fact Sheets

Benefits of Collaboration is one of a series of four fact sheets on the topic of collaboration and fuels management. See also *Stages of Collaboration*, Social Issues Fact Sheet 10 (RMRS RN-21-10-WWW); *Challenges to Collaboration*, Social Issues Fact Sheet 11 (RMRS RN-21-11-WWW); and *Keys to Successful Collaboration*, Social Issues Fact Sheet 12 (RMRS RN-21-12-WWW).

Social Science Team Fact Sheets

Look for fact sheet topics from the Social Science Team including information on developing personal responsibility for fuels reduction, communicating fire hazard, topics for community fire plans, guidelines for community education, collaboration, and the “golden rule” for communicating fire hazard to people.

Fuels Planning: Science Synthesis and Integration is an inter-agency research/management partnership to support the Ten-Year Fire Plan, led by Russell T. Graham, RMRS, and Sarah M. McCaffrey, NCRS.

Fuels Planning: Synthesis and Integration

This fact sheet is one in a series being produced as part of a larger project supported by the USDA Forest Service to synthesize new knowledge and information relevant to fire and fuels management. Fact sheets address topics related to stand structure, environmental impacts, economics, and human responses to these factors. Information in the fact sheets is targeted for the dry forests of the Inland West, but is often applicable across broad regions of the country. For more information, please visit our Web site at: www.fs.fed.us/fire/tech_transfer/synthesis/synthesis_index