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Fuels Planning: Science Synthesis and Integration

Social Issues Fact Sheet: 10

Stages of Collaboration



Rocky Mountain
Research Station



Pacific Northwest
Research Station



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*Synthesizing
Scientific
Information
for Fire and Fuels
Project Managers*

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The Collaborative Process

Collaboration is a powerful tool for improving both the management of wildland fire and the overall health of forests and other elements of fire-dependent ecosystems. But collaboration is not a one-time effort. It is an ongoing process that is most effective when maintained throughout program and project planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

How can you expect the collaborative process to unfold? The following seven stages are typical of most collaborations.

Identify the Issue and Context

Successful collaborations begin with issues that the community considers to be urgent but for which there is no clear consensus. Issue identification can be a delicate matter: residents need to become aware of the danger of wildland fire but often do not respond well to scare tactics. Meanwhile, local governments want to attract development and shy away from too many planning regulations. Remember, too, that who defines the issues may be as important as what issues emerge. So involving a broad range of interests and experience at this stage is critical.

It is important to assess whether the situation is even favorable for collaboration. Is there a history of conflict between different interests in the community over land management issues? If so, an experienced third-party, neutral facilitator can help. Are there adequate resources? Is there enough time? Are there political and legal restrictions that could impinge on the collaborative process? Limitations in these areas can make collaboration difficult but not impossible.

Gather Players

Initiating dialogue about wildfire and fuels management is typically the job of land management agencies. However, they are not always effective at assembling a sufficiently large, representative, and active group of community stakeholders. It might help to bring in a local convener, someone widely perceived as fair and respected.

Core participants are often land management agencies that are already cooperating and seeking similar solutions. Committed citizens, community leaders, public officials, and nonprofit and community organizations should be included as active partners in the group. At this stage it is essential to clearly define everyone's roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

Establish Goals

Goals are created by discovering and building on shared values, perceptions, or experiences. A written mission or vision statement will underscore a common purpose. It can help focus participants, especially when the group is in conflict or considering strategic efforts, and it can reunite the group when motivation and cohesion wane.

Create a Collaborative Structure and Process

The group must agree on a process and group structure, including meeting times and formats, makeup of working groups, required resources, communication protocols, and other ground rules. This includes establishing realistic timeframes, even though the collaboration may take years. An experienced facilitator is especially helpful for this stage.

It is essential at this point to determine any legal requirements that may affect the collaborative process, such as possible conflicting agency directives. A formal agreement can help avoid later, unanticipated problems.

Share Information and Build Relationships

Information sharing means not only gathering data and developing a common knowledge base but also learning more about each other—exploring participants' interests and values, and building trust. It may start with citizens identifying specific values they hold and places they want protected. Participants can also work together to identify hazards and strategies for fuel reduction and community preparedness in their neighborhoods.



In initiating the Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan, serving southwestern Oregon, planners gathered diverse partners to represent a broad range of stakeholders. Photo: N. Benson

Implement

It is not difficult to agree on the need to reduce wildland fire risk, but it is more challenging to agree on implementation—how and where to reduce fuels. Conflicts may emerge. But a focus on project outcomes can help mitigate personalities or constituencies that are at odds.

Recordkeeping and other mechanisms for ensuring accountability are important for keeping players and the broader public informed of accomplishments, and to facilitate monitoring and evaluation.

Monitor and Evaluate

Monitoring and evaluation can help determine the effectiveness of both the collaborative process and the project. Monitoring is often most difficult to accomplish, because groups may not recognize early enough the importance of gathering baseline data or identifying measurable objectives. But it is important for building accountability—a key issue since managing wildfire and fuels has become so politically charged.

The stages of collaboration seldom occur in linear fashion. Consider monitoring, for example, which must begin early in a collaborative project, and information sharing, which should take place throughout.

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

Stages of Collaboration is one of a series of four fact sheets on the topic of collaboration and fuels management. See also *Benefits of Collaboration*, Social Issues Fact Sheet 9 (RMRS RN-21-9-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