INTEGRATED SUMMARIES

Planning and collaboration are keys to successful fire management

WILDFIRES FREQUENTLY START AT THE WILDLAND-URBAN interface (WUI), where human development meets naturally occurring vegetation. Therefore, clearly defining and mapping these areas are crucial to fire suppression and human safety. Platt (2010) offers an evaluation of five models used in WUI mapping based on characteristics of the wildland-urban interface as outlined in the *Federal Register* (USDI 2001), comparing and contrasting their uses across four U.S. counties in Colorado, Florida, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Differences among the models can be subtle or pronounced depending upon characteristics of each WUI area. Methods for WUI mapping, detailed on the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Silvis Web site (UWM 2010), focus varyingly on three components—settlements or housing structures, suitable buffer around such settlements, and wildland vegetation—so choosing the correct method depends on accurately surveying the protected area. While one method is useful for mapping tracts of land with ample vegetation, another is suited to areas with numerous existing structures. Implementation differs even among users of the same method because of variations in buffer zones, which can range from 0.5 to 1.5 miles (0.8 to 2.4 km). Depending on one's goals for identifying the number of structures, potential fuel ignition sources, amount of vegetation, and highest priority areas for mitigation, managers and stakeholders must evaluate their area and decide which method is best. "No single mapping approach is unequivocally superior, and each has trade-offs that need to be fully understood for use in management," writes Platt (2010). For instance, a trade-off in a housing-oriented WUI may be inaccurate structure counts because of gaps in zoning data. Choosing the correct WUI method and accurately mapping an area could improve fire suppression planning, not to mention leading to increased allocations of federal funds to certain areas, Platt adds.

Goldstein and Butler (2010) describe the inner workings of the Fire Learning Network (FLN), an organization dedicated to improving the restoration of fire-dependent ecosystems nationwide. The result of five years of policy analysis and interviews, this research proposes a theory of collaborative planning in which land management and conservation can best be improved by a synergy among stakeholder-based collaborations and communities of practice in which private-sector and federal entities share information and advise each other about prescribed fire practices. The authors claim that a long-standing practice of stakeholders collaborating only with other stakeholders has blinded natural resource planners to the potential success of more inclusive approaches. Stakeholders aiming to effect a specific change in policy or regulation surrounding the complex issue of fire management can become entrenched in the advice of external advisors, but communities of practice should not be overlooked.

Organized around trading advice and expertise about a common issue, communities of practice have no explicit aim to solve the issues facing stakeholders, but can offer a fresh perspective nonetheless. In the Pacific Northwest, the Fire Learning Network has a presence in Washington and Oregon. The Northwest Fire Learning Network creates a flow of information among lumber companies, conservation and community organizations, private landowners, universities, fire departments, and state and federal government entities, educating the public along the way.

Goldstein and Butler (2010) found, using the Fire Learning Network as an example, that expertise in restoring ecosystems that depend on fire is best shared through collaborative planning. As in the Fire Learning Network, in collaboration among stakeholders (state and local governments) and communities of practice (regional networks), the potential for positive change is amplified. This approach nurtured expertise and expanded and sustained collaborative networks. While the progress made by the Fire Learning Network is highlighted extensively in the article, it is used as an example. "The power of the FLN is not found in the plans it produces, but in the way it disrupts old habits and fosters new routines and collaborative relationships," the authors surmise. In protected area management, not having enough cooks can spoil the broth.

References

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—Jonathan Nawn, Mindi Davis, and Jeff Selleck

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