

# *Planning as Learning?*

## Policy-Mandated Collaborative Wildfire Planning in the United States



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# Fire Burns through Boundaries

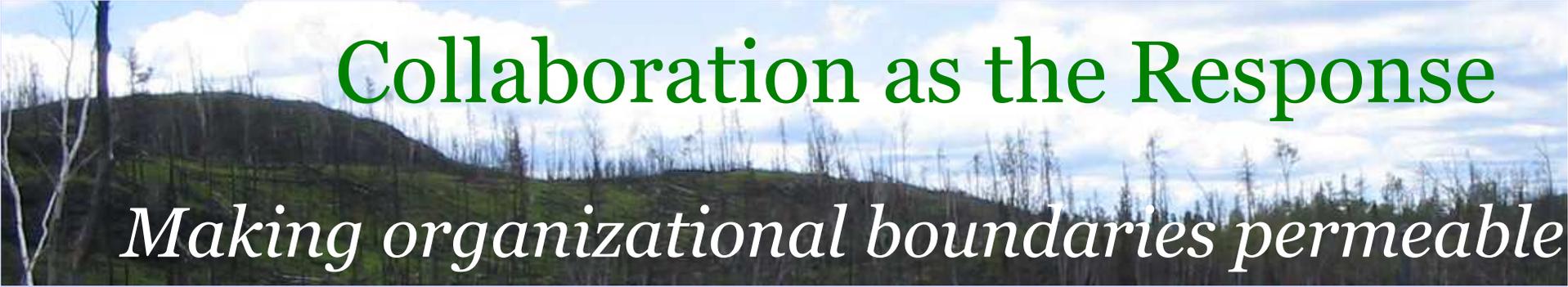
- Landscape • Organizational • Land Tenure

*Lake County, MN*



8 Fire Depts





# Collaboration as the Response

*Making organizational boundaries permeable*

- Enhancing coordination across land tenure boundaries
- Sharing information and data
- “Planning as learning” together, from each other

# Policy Mandated-Collaboration

- *Can federal policy successfully mandate relationships on the local/regional level?*



- More federal bureaucracy?
- Plans left on the shelf?
- Can diverse interests agree?
- Over-extended agency representatives?

# Policy Mandated-Collaboration

- *Can federal policy successfully mandate relationships on the local/regional level?*



We need a way to evaluate the success of policy-mandated planning efforts

# Social Learning

“...learning that occurs when people engage one another, **sharing diverse perspectives** and experiences to develop a **common framework** of understanding and **basis for joint action**” (Schusler et al. 2003).



# Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA)



## 2003 Policy Context

- Coming off a century of fire suppression policy
- Expanding Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)
- Lack of fire funding for local communities
- Busy fire seasons
- “Analysis paralysis” for fuels reduction



# Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)

- Elective, but required for community funding
- Must be collaborative
  - Local Fire Department
  - State Forestry Department
  - Local Government Official
- Define planning area, group
- No lead agency
- No formal oversight
- Flexible, organic



# Community Wildfire Protection Plans



Fuel Reduction

## Required Partners

- Local Fire Dept
- State Forestry Dept
- Local Government



Restoration of Fire-Adapted Ecosystems



Private Property  
Responsibility for Fuels



Fire Suppression

# COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

## Enhancing Collaboration & Building Community Capacity

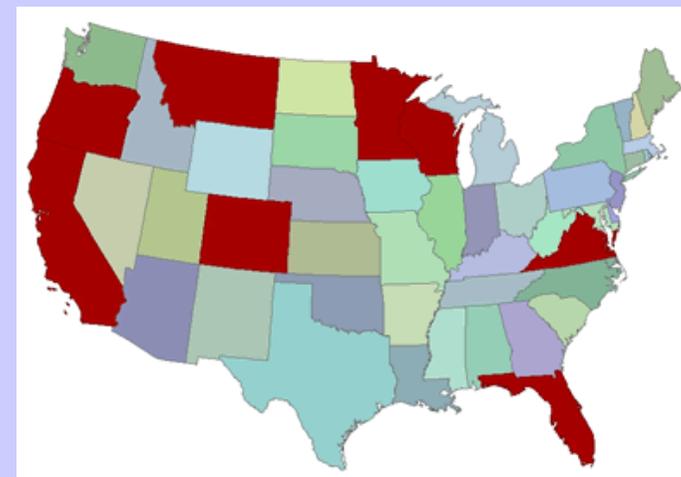
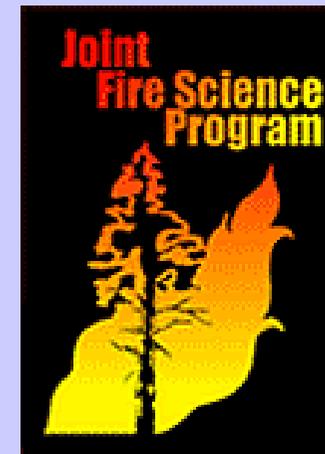
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### Partner Institutions and Investigators:

- Kristen C. Nelson, *University of Minnesota*
- Vicky Sturtevant, *Southern Oregon University*
- Tony Cheng, *Colorado State University*
- Sam Burns, *Fort Lewis College*

- 13 Case studies nationwide
- Today – Eastern US
- 57 interviews, 4 groups



# Methods: Case Study Analysis

Four Eastern U.S. case studies:

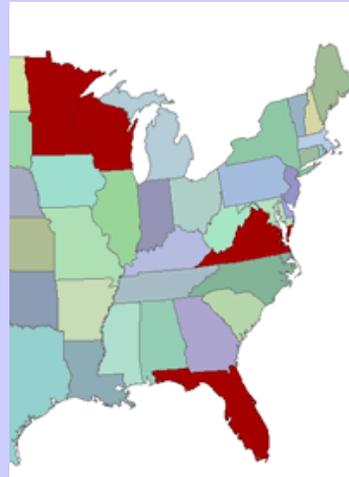
Lake County, Minnesota



High Knob Owner's Association  
in Front Royal, Virginia



Barnes and Drummond,  
Wisconsin



Taylor, Florida





# Questions

1. Mandating relationships
2. Learning
  - Data sharing
3. Beyond Planning
  - Implementation/Action
  - Continued Interaction

# Findings





# Flexible Policy, Diverse Outcomes

- **Composition of the Group**

1. Agency-driven

- Federal
- State
- County
- Municipal

2. Community-driven

- Local leaders
- Retired Residents



# Policy Created a Forum for Learning



- Groups came to a shared understanding of wildfire in their area

*“I think everybody had a heightened sense of awareness on an issue that [before]...no one would even give much thought to.”*

- Virginia

# What did they Learn?

Enhanced **ecological** understanding of wildfire causes, consequences, and management

- Locally-specific (and they agreed!)
- Understanding on *what* to act and *why*



# What *Else* did they Learn?

## **Social and Institutional** systems around wildfire management

- Others' roles, policies, limitations, capabilities
- Understanding of ***how*** to get things done



*“I think...[the planning process] really helped the partners come together and understand what everybody’s role is as a whole. Looking at the big picture ... ‘cause everybody was just working on their own before.”*

- Minnesota

# Data Sharing: A Blessing (and some Cursing)

- Sharing data created more complete picture  
*“When you take the road maps, that kind of puts everybody in perspective of where everything is at. Then you put [in] the residences. Then you put the fire history on it. Then you put the fuel types...everybody’s looking at this and...it was a lot easier to make the plan.”*
- Logistical and political challenges



# Data Sharing: A Blessing (and some Cursing)

- Standardizing Measures
  - Neither possible, nor preferable
- Discussing data assumptions = better decisions

Need to make time for this in planning



# More Important Planning Information (Other than “Data”)

- Local knowledge of the participants
  - In particular, the volunteer fire departments



# Moving into Action

- Lake County, Minnesota
  - Group identified weakness in VFD coordination
  - Created political leadership to address the issue
  - Outcome:** Creation of a new fire coordinator position
- High Knob, Virginia
  - Concern about wildlife habitat and fuels reduction
  - Decided hazardous fuels as an issue
  - Outcome:** Community-wide fuel reduction project
- Taylor, Florida
  - CWPP group identified Taylor as at-risk
  - Created political support as a group
  - Outcome:** Fuel break put in around the community



# Created Learning Networks between Organizations

- Learning extended from CWPP to organizations



*“...I had a much better understanding of [wildfire] after the process. And I tried to bring that back to the fire departments...and give them the information.”*

# Created Learning Networks between Organizations

- Learning extended from CWPP to organizations



Communication enhances impact of planning  
Builds Cross-organizational capacity

# Limitations and Open Questions

- Volunteers vs. Paid Agency
- Leadership
- Funding/Implementation
- Local resident involvement
- Meeting restoration objectives
- First generation
  - Can efforts be sustained?





# Conclusions

- Communication and maintaining relationships
- Stepping outside of organizational roles is key
- Mandating works...but
  - Must be met by local leadership
  - Identifying leaders is important
  - Agency leadership needs to make it a priority
- Can enhance impact of planning effort by pushing the boundaries of what is “mandated”



**Thank  
You**

## **JFSP CWPP Research Team**

– All CWPP case study groups

**NSW RFS**

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**Project Website** <http://jfsp.fortlewis.edu>