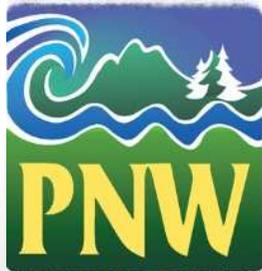


Fire managers and air quality regulators on communicating with the public about smoke

Stories from four states

Christine S. Olsen, PhD, Dept of Forest Ecosystems & Society, Oregon State University
Danielle Mazzotta, Environmental Science Program, Oregon State University
Eric Toman, PhD, School of Environment and Natural Resources, Ohio State University



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Rationale



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NASA

Forest chief says wildfires show urgency for restoration

“As firefighters battle blazes in New Mexico and Colorado that have forced evacuations and destroyed hundreds of structures, the U.S. Forest Service chief is renewing his call to restore forests to a more natural state, where fire was a part of the landscape.”

“The Forest Service is on a mission to set the clock back to zero and the urgency couldn’t be greater, Tom Tidwell said. The plan calls for accelerating restoration programs - everything from prescribed fire and mechanical thinning - by 20 percent each year in key areas that are facing the greatest danger of a catastrophic fire.”

Rationale

Few studies examine public perceptions of smoke
Target communication as potential influencer

Objectives

- 1) Explore status of smoke-related communication and perceived perceptions
- 2) Identify tactics used for sharing smoke information; successes and challenges
- 3) Examine influence of partnerships and collaborations

Year One

- Selection of Research Locations
- Site Visits and Semi-Structured Interviews
- Transcriptions and Analysis

36 Interviews with 60 Participants
across four locations

(5) Environmental Non- Governmental Organizations

(6) Air Quality

(2) Local Governance

(29) State or Federal Agency

(8) Private Landowner

(6) Local fire protection

(4) Timber Industry



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Fremont- Winema NF, Oregon




**IBERDROLA
RENEWABLES**
LAKEVIEW COGENERATION LLC



Shasta-Trinity NF California





**Kootenai NF,
Montana**





Francis Marion NF, South Carolina



Influencing Public Perceptions

Concerns about fire and smoke

Cultural and ecological considerations

Agency/Industry practices and regulation

- Public lacks understanding of agency boundaries and roles

“It doesn’t matter which agency is burning, if something bad happens, I think the public perception automatically tags it to Forest Service . We get a bad rap for it. “

Influencing Public Perceptions

Concerns about fire and smoke

Cultural and ecological considerations

Agency/Industry practices and regulation

- Public lacks understanding of agency boundaries and roles
- Public lacks understanding of regulations
- Agencies not showing genuine concern for smoke impacts on communities
- Smoke seen as a sign of wastefulness

Challenges to Influencing Perceptions

- Communication about fire historically unclear
- Communication with communities lacking
- Communication tactics lack effectiveness
- Public lacks understanding of regs and policies
- Building relationships with the community takes time





Toolbox

Strategic Public Communication Strategies

Participation in Community-Based Partnerships

Interagency Collaboration

Strategic Public Communication Strategies

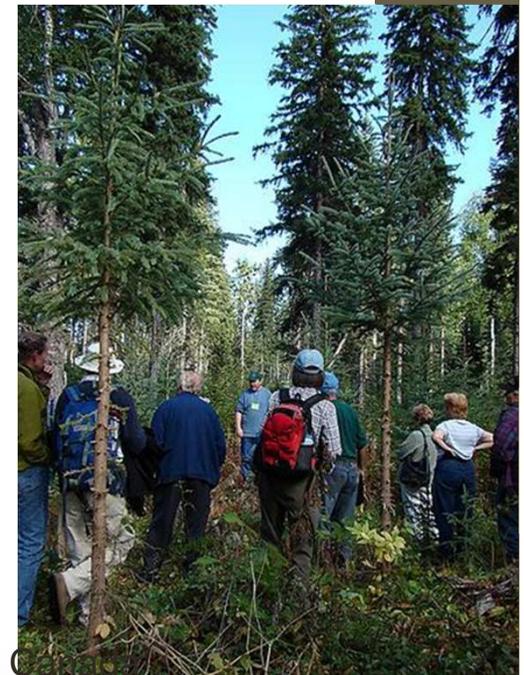
Interactive!

- “Communication Traplines”

“Who is that one person that you know if you talk to within an hour there are going to be 100 other people that are going to know?”

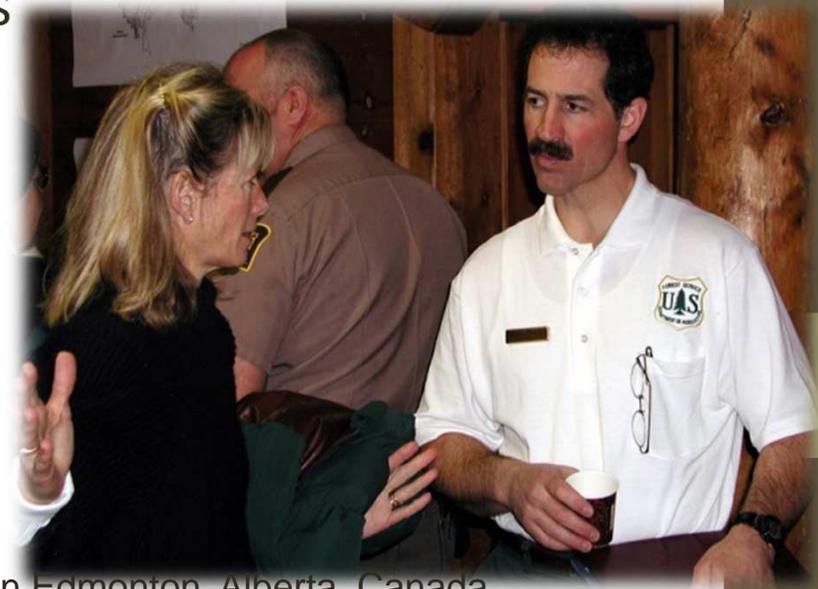
- Timing

*Attending public events
School programs
Community field trips
Face to face discussion
Personal phone calls
Public information officers
Open houses
Government meetings*



Participation in Community-Based Partnerships

- Dialogue between managers and stakeholders
 - Concerns identified and discussed
 - Common ground established
 - Uncertainties resolved
- Formation of community associations
- Access to broad base of resources
- Build long-term relationships



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Interagency Collaboration

- Discuss outreach messages prior to public interface
 - Avoid contradiction
 - Messages appear coordinated and organized
- Make more informed smoke management decisions
 - Awareness of surrounding projects
 - Minimize impacts on communities
 - Information resource



Interagency Collaboration

“Sometimes it is a little cumbersome to spend a half an hour listening to burns you don’t care about but it is worth it because I think it is the single most important thing we do. You get to talk to the meteorologist, the air districts, the board and the other burners. You can kind of get a good feel for how high the stakes are for burning that day. I think it is probably the best tool that we have.”



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Moving Forward...

- Site reports back to locations
- Work with Phase 2 (public surveys) on interpretation
- Contribute to Phase 3 development (site interventions)



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Questions



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