It Takes More Than a Village--
The Importance of Community to Wildfire Management

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Wilkinson’s Theory of Community as an Interactional Field

- Contacts among people define the local territory

Contacts around wildland fire—readiness, response and recovery
Wilkinson’s Theory of Community as an Interactional Field

So long as people interact, the community will persist and give rise to collective identity and continued action in the locality.
Community and Wildfire Management

- Context
- Process
- Outcomes
Grizzly Flat—Importance of Community to Planning
Grizzly Flat

- no local unit of government
- reputation as outlaw community
- contractor went in with open mind
- contractor supported and used what was being built by the community itself
Wildfire concerns in NZ:

- Global climate change scenarios
- Expanding rural-urban interface
- Land tenure review
- Residents unprepared
Importance of community to wildfire impacts...
Importance of community to wildfire impacts...
West Melton fire damage...

- grasslands
- woodlots
- orchards
- vineyard
- hedges & fences
- farm equipment
- one house
Lifestylers

A rural smallholding attractive to people who wish to live a rural lifestyle but whose income is derived from non-farming activities.

In West Melton...

New lifestylers < 15-20 years

Old lifestylers > 15-20 years
West Melton fire highlighted differences

Old lifestylers describing new lifestyler...

... you have the rugby and ‘chardonnay set’, the wives, they all meet for drinks every Friday and Saturday, it’s not healthy, and they don’t mix with anyone else.
Impacts greater on new lifestylers because...

Old Lifestylers
- More rural experience
- Correct local knowledge
- Take responsibility--prepared
- No additional steps to take

New Lifestylers
- Risk assessment based on urban experience
- Depend on authorities
- Relatively unprepared
- Have taken steps
West Melton wildfire risk...

New lifestyler explaining that they were not prepared because they had no experience with wildfire as a risk...

We were prepared for a civil defence emergency, what to do, in that we had a meeting point, but not for fire. We had long grass, we were way unprepared, and the experience of having a fire has now made us very aware.
West Melton wildfire risk...

New lifestyler describing changes they’ve made...

We mow a strip now around the house, we have put in sprinklers around the house and make sure we now plant less flammable plants. No more pine trees, we won’t plant pine trees again...
Importance of community to wildfire impacts...
Mount Somers fire damage...

- deer fences
- boundary fences
- equipment
- pasture
- plantations
- shelterbelts
Mount Somers community interactions

Observations of emergency official who has worked in area...

They’re very close knit up there, very close knit. And once you’re in that area they do treat you like family... they’re very good at talking amongst themselves too, which of course, is the best way of getting over something...
Mt Somers community interactions

- Help with stock during snowstorm
- Assist family following accident
- Raise money for village park
- Support rugby team
Mt Somers community interactions

- Help with stock during snowstorm
- Assist family following accident
- Raise money for village park
- Support rugby team
- Moved stock
- Feed fire fighters
- Housed those evacuated
- Tried to fight fire
- Offered pasture
Community Wildfire Protection Planning

Context → Process → Outcomes

Feedback loops:
Context → Process
Process → Outcomes
Outcomes → Context
Communities as part of the solution...

The success of wildland fire management hinges as much on the acceptance, support, behavior, and cooperation of at-risk communities and individuals and the general public as on biophysical fire science the technology.

People, Fire and Forests (2007)
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