

FIGHTING FIRE WITH NATURE:

How homeowner preference for 'natural' landscapes can be used to promote wildfire mitigation in the Wildland-Urban Interface

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How are spaces of home, nature, and community produced and experienced in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)?
2. How is wildfire hazard produced and experienced in the WUI?
3. What is the impact of these constructions on the vulnerability of the people and environment in the WUI to wildfire hazard?

METHODS:

- Participant observation
- 80 interviews with residents & risk managers
- Qualitative analysis

FINDINGS:

- Residents and risk managers experience the landscapes of home, community, and nature very differently.
- Residents tend to draw on a romantic version of nature borne out of 200 years of cultural history. As a result, they manage their homes and land based on a strong emotional attachment to 'natural' spaces.
- In their verbal outreach, risk managers have learned to use this romantic affinity to promote compliance with wildfire mitigation policies. They do so by emphasizing forest health and environmental stewardship. However, the visual outreach materials used by managers are not in alignment with this message - relying instead on a fear-based approach that can work against the goals of wildfire management.
- A focus on certain mitigation strategies (i.e. 'defensible space') over others (i.e. 'home hardening') has led to a lopsided view on the part of residents as to what can be done to reduce wildfire risk.



IMPLICATIONS:

- If risk managers align their visual and verbal outreach strategies and limit the use of fear appeals, they can better connect with residents and increase public compliance with wildfire mitigation policy.
- Public trust increases when risk managers promote an understanding of wildfire that incorporates the strong emotional attachments residents have to place.
- Risk managers should balance their focus on various mitigation strategies, especially since WUI residents indicate a greater willingness to make changes to the exterior of their homes.



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