



Social science can help communities better live with wildfire through research on human behavior, institutions and governance, community dynamics, and social networks.

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CoMFRT

Co-Management of Cross-Boundary Fire Risk Transmission

A partnership to identify strategies and address cross-boundary fire risk

Landscape Social Network Mapping

Mapping the Wildfire Management System in North Central Washington

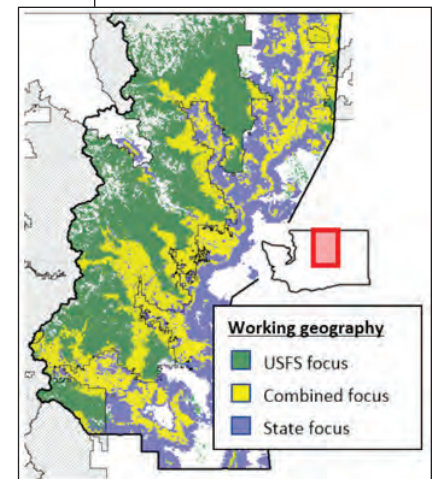
North Central Washington is one of twenty wildfire risk hotspots in the western US where wildfire risk has challenged residents, officials, and land managers to rethink how risk should be managed. To understand how local, state and federal investments are shaping this region's wildland fire management system, CoMFRT researchers conducted a survey of 295 wildfire risk management professionals in North Central Washington. The analyses identifies who is part of the wildfire management system, what their roles are, where they work, and how connected they are to each other.

Key Findings

1. The wildfire management system in North Central Washington is diverse and includes professionals spanning governmental and non-governmental boundaries across many scales.

Professionals in wildfire risk management in North Central Washington work at the federal, state, and local scales, as well as in the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGO), tribal nations, and others. Past investments in learning networks and collaboratives contribute to this diversity. Collectively, the practitioners in North Central Washington have extensive experience, with nearly two-thirds of survey respondents reporting more than a decade of experience working on wildfire. Nearly a quarter of those we surveyed indicated wildfire was the main focus of their job, while over 60% reported that wildfire was one of several major job components. Wildfire management roles respondents reported included education, public awareness, program administration, risk mitigation, emergency management, incident response, recovery, and research.

Working geographies of professional wildfire risk managers in the USDA Forest Service and the State of Washington. The overlap represents substantial opportunities for shared stewardship.



Partnership Vision

Wildfire is no longer seen as disastrous or catastrophic for communities, but becomes “more like rain”—normal and expected, but sometimes problematic in its intensity.

2. Risk management activities concentrate around the wildland urban interface and demonstrates opportunities for shared stewardship.

The wildland urban interface (WUI) was the focus of many respondents wildfire risk management work. Survey respondents indicated nearly 1,000 locations where risk mitigation activities had taken place in the past 5 years and 75% of those locations were within 2.5 miles of the WUI. There is substantial overlap in where state and local agencies and NGOs conduct risk management. Overlaps between the USDA Forest Service and other organizations were more limited, but reveal several key areas where interests are geographically aligned (see figure on front).

3. Practitioners in the North Central Washington have a wide array of relationships with people in other organizations, yet some organizational affiliations, tend to foster more diverse relationships than others.

Survey respondents identified a network of 769 professionals as part of the North Central Washington wildfire management system, including federal agencies (37%; 24% with the USDA Forest Service), state agencies (26%), local agencies (17%), NGOs (13%), and other organizations (8%). Twenty-two individuals were nominated 10 times or more, making them highly central to the wildfire management system. Almost 40% of these highly central actors were affiliated with local fire districts, municipalities, and similar local agencies, despite the fact that locally-affiliated individuals represent only 17% of the full network.

4. Some practitioners play an outsized role in bridging boundaries between the over 700 individuals who play a role in wildfire risk management.

Some respondents were particularly important for spanning boundaries between organizational affiliations. These “boundary spanning individuals” have important leverage and power in a network as they combine different perspectives, transfer ideas between groups, make introductions, and negotiate between different interests. Individuals affiliated with the Washington State Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network and The Nature Conservancy were the top boundary spanners, reflecting

deliberative investments by those institutions in networking building. Of the top 20 boundary spanners, local and state agencies were also well-represented, the Washington Department of Natural Resources in particular.

Recommendations

Our findings paint a picture of a well-developed and relatively diverse set of professionals working across boundaries of the wildfire management system in North Central Washington. Recommendation for continual improvement include:

1. Monitor the wildfire management system to understand where boundary spanning capacity lies.
2. Track the impact of investments in the capacity of the system and continue to improve the ability of communities to live with and manage wildfire risk.
3. Invest in boundary spanners to increase the connections and collaborative engagement between otherwise disconnected parts of the network.
4. Act on opportunities for shared stewardship between the federal government, the state of Washington, and other elements of the wildfire management system and focus on areas of existing capacity.

Next Steps

A current follow-up study in North Central Washington focuses on questions important for encouraging the collaborative engagement needed to ensure that wildfire management goals are strategically and programmatically aligned across organizations as called for by both the National Cohesive Strategy and Washington State's strategic fire plan. This work is also being replicated in Northern Utah's Wasatch and Cache Valley region and will be compared with results from North Central Washington to help provide a more general understanding of wildfire risk management systems in the United States and how they vary.

A full report and expanded executive summary of results are available at: <https://sites.google.com/a/pdx.edu/maxnp/research/Wildfire>.

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