

Public Information and Education Plan (Communication Plan) 7/5/17 FINAL

The intent of the Outreach and Communications Working Group of the Fire Memorandum of Understanding (Fire MOU) is to provide high-quality science-based fire *information* for targeted audiences.

To this end, the Working Group has developed a communication plan (commonly referred to as a “comm plan” in public relations circles). *A communication plan is a document that expresses the goals and methods of an organization's outreach activities, including what an organization wishes to share with the public and whom the organization is trying to reach. Generally presented as an internal document, a communication plan should serve as a guide for any media and public relations activities in which the organization is engaged.*

In this case, the organizations are those who are participants of the Fire MOU. This plan provides focused messages, strategies, and audiences in an effort to achieve message consistency within the various signatories of the Fire MOU, while respecting their mission differences.

The Outreach and Communications Working Group is referring to this Communication Plan as the Fire Information Response and Education (FIR&E) Plan, which emphasizes the agreed upon goals specifically stated in the Fire MOU:

- A. Engage with of a variety of stakeholders,
- B. Encourage minimizing barriers by improving smoke management coordination and engaging in public education and outreach,
- C. Work to increase capacity through expanded training and resource sharing, and
- D. Include as many parties as possible who are interested in increasing the use of wildland fire to meet ecological objectives.

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Goals

The FIR&E Program has four goals:

GOAL #1 – Offer year-round education on fire ecology, fire history, and fire effects in California. Communicate how prescribed fires and natural ignition fires may be managed to meet

natural resource objectives and community protection goals for land management agencies and private landowners, and how proactively managing fire benefits Californians.

GOAL #2 – Provide accurate and timely incident information for local, regional, and national fire operations as needed.

GOAL #3 – Work with local communities to promote fire safety, fire prevention, defensible space, Firewise community planning, and fuels management. Help them to understand that restoring fire on the landscape, well-planned and when safe to do so, is also a key tool to protect public health and safety, and the natural resources of our state.

GOAL #4 – Build and maintain interagency, educational, and community partnerships to improve fire education activities.

Key Messages

The FIR&E Program will provide target audiences with accurate information about fire management from both the national and local perspectives.

These key messages (in bold) are broad and leave room for individual agency missions and identity. They are also arranged into key messages with examples of different ways to communicate that message with some variety over time.

Fire is an essential, natural process:

- There is NO NO-FIRE OPTION in California: Fire is a reality in the fire-prone and fire-adapted ecosystems in California.
- Fire can be effectively and efficiently used to reduce fire hazard and gain the ecological and other management benefits, and avoid increasing and transferring fire risk to the future.
- Fire is an agent of change that has long been a natural part of the California landscape.
- Annual rainfall and frequent fire both provide ecosystem resilience.
- Ecologically beneficial fire prevents more destructive fire and fire effects.
- Native Americans in California used fire as a tool to drive game for hunting, to encourage the growth of plants used for food or tools, and rarely thought of fire as something that needed to be excluded.
- Land management agencies are committed to a balanced fire program that will reduce risks and realize benefits of fire.
- Improving the health of the land and reducing risks to communities requires partnerships among federal and state agencies, tribal governments, fire departments, communities, and landowners.

Managing Risk:

- No loss of human life is acceptable while managing a fire event.
- There are results from a century of fire suppression which shape how we respond.
- Fire suppression defers risk including smoke exposure.

- Fire managers respect the force of fire and take their responsibilities very seriously.
- There is risk assumed when excluding fire from fire adapted ecosystems. There is risk, as well, when using fire to obtain ecological and other management objectives. Close evaluation of daily and seasonal weather and fuel conditions, social and economic considerations, and other factors influencing fire behavior and fire effects are integral in determining appropriate place, time, and circumstances to use fire to accrue beneficial, and avoid adverse, fire effects.
- Fire is a powerful force and *Living with Fire*¹ requires education, preparedness, and precaution to gain the benefits of fire and prevent loss of life and property.
- Society has influenced and altered historic fire cycles, resulting in a net dangerous build-up of vegetation in our wildlands.

Managing smoke levels:

- Smoke levels are monitored in partnership with state and local air quality regulatory agencies and the best days for smoke dispersal are used. Just as small fires prevent future big fires, so do small smoke events prevent future, bigger smoke events.
- Every acre that burns under favorable conditions helps prevent the larger, unwanted fire and its smoke event.
- There's far less smoke and fewer health problems with smaller managed burns than with uncontrolled mega-fires.
- Smoke associated with fire is part of the natural fire cycle that makes our forests resilient and healthy.
- Early fire notification helps communities and at-risk populations (elderly, children, people with respiratory problems) better protect themselves and reduce risk.

Thank you for your patience:

- We appreciate the patience of visitors, residents, and gateway communities during the fire and associated smoke event.
- The fire management program considers smoke management in every step of the program. We know that our visitors and the mountain communities are affected by our management decisions. We attempt to find a balance in the program that addresses your concerns while also returning natural fire to the landscape to reduce the risk of larger, unwanted fires and to achieve the ecological benefits of natural fire. The (agency) appreciates your patience and understanding during this period.
- Fire managers and air quality regulators are working together to lessen impacts to residents from unwanted smoke events such as the Rough Fire or Rim Fire. Planning and working together we can limit long-lasting mega-emissions while using fire to reduce fuels.

¹ *Living with Fire* is fundamental to the vision of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) and the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (April 2014). The three National Cohesive Strategy goals are: Restore and Maintain Landscapes, Fire-adapted Communities, Wildfire Response, p.3.

Target Audiences (suggested)

- Local leaders: county supervisors, county sheriff's departments, public health officials, chambers of commerce, outdoor recreation groups, special event coordinators and participants.
- Fire Safe Councils.
- Neighboring Land Management Agencies (LMAs), air districts.
- Visitors/recreationists (including on site visitors, internet visitors, and special groups).
- Employees (including LMA employees, concessions, and volunteers).
- Local communities including the medical community, air quality regulators, recreation groups, etc. (this would need to be tailored case by case).
- Students/Teachers (including K-12 students, college students, elder hostel groups, and teachers).
- Professional peers (including other federal, state, and county agencies and policy makers, professional associations, and academics).
- Media (including print, television, radio, internet and film). While multiple media venues offer a valuable communication opportunity to reach a broad and diverse audience, it is also listed as a target audience due to the amount of time and energy that goes into facilitating interviews, film projects, etc.

Communication Methods

The following methods will be used to communicate with the six target audiences listed above. There are both personal and non-personal methods which will facilitate reaching the greatest number of people.

Personal

Interpretive Programs – integrate fire messages into hikes, walks, campfire programs, and special off-site presentations.

Education Programs – Incorporate fire ecology concepts into standards-based education programs, student field research experiences, and in-class programs.

Employee Training – Coordinate employee training sessions to improve staff understanding of the fire and fuels management program.

Roving – During fire operations, station employees in high-use visitor areas, including trails, to answer questions about the current activity and/or explain the fire and fuels management program.

Conference Presentations – Give peer presentations at conferences about current fire research, planning, or operations. These presentations will share information, generate feedback, and ultimately improve the fire and fuels management program.

Public Meetings and tours – As needed, conduct special public meetings or tours related to a specific fire event, planning effort, or to share general program information.

Media Interviews – Complete in-person or phone interviews for print, radio, and television outlets. When necessary, facilitate special media projects (books, documentaries, media tours or events, etc.) by guiding research, scheduling interviews with agency staff, and coordinating filming schedules. Work with media to help redefine how they cover wildfire

Non-Personal

News Releases / Updates – Email, post to webpages, social media accounts, and bulletin boards to reach target audiences as needed.

Publications – Research, write, and design additional handouts specifically about fire and fuels management such as newspapers, student materials, videos, photos, animations, and brochures.

Recorded Phone Message – Incident specific

Share Fire Success Stories – Develop year-round messaging, see recommendations in appendix.

Annual Plan by Season

For six to seven months of the year, the FIR&E Program is largely in a reactive mode disseminating information about actual fire events. While this is the nature of the business, strategic timing of the messages is necessary. For example, talking about smoke ecology (plants that germinate with smoke or smoke-cued germination) is not a message that will be well received during a substantial smoke event. This message will be better timed to use when addressing an audience of ecologists, fire scientists, or CNPS.

Tools for Communicators

Communication strategy:

- Fire is a natural process that we talk about in clear scientific terms, not emotionally driven terms
- Choose language that fosters understanding, confidence and security in the fire programs in California. Avoid terms that increase confusion, inaccuracy, fear and insecurity in the professionalism of the fire cadre or in the scientific basis for their work.
- Discussion of the scale, intensity, net public benefits, and fire effects compared to the natural range of effects in a functioning fire-restored environment is helpful in fostering public understanding and acceptance.
- We respect the missions and differences of the Fire MOU participants and work to support each other's decisions based upon this mission direction.

Examples of good messages:

“Fire behavior is within the natural range of variability”

“Fire is uncharacteristic in size and intensity”

“Fire has beneficial fire effects”

“Fire is providing an effective fuel break for upcoming years”

“Fire managers or fire crews (versus “firefighters”)

“Crews are seeing active spotting on the western flank” instead of: “Crews are battling the fire”

Examples of messages to be avoided:

“A raging wildfire” “A path of destruction” “A forest destroyed” “Firefighters are fighting the monster in the woods,” etc.

Success Stories:

- In any media presence (personal or non-personal), share fire success stories from prescribed fire or wildfire managed for multiple resource benefits
- Share events where previous fires helped contain the spread of current wildfire events.
- Develop a Fire MOU media presence where fire science, visuals, fire event history and other background information is accessible for Fire MOU Partners and the public.
- Report annual outcomes including acres, effects, smoke management, priorities.
- Conduct annual discussions with PAO/PIO partners during training periods.
- Develop inter-agency team to share beneficial information during fire season (i.e., information from fire managers and air districts relevant to shared resources, collaborative burning, the value of air monitors and modeling tools to assess smoke impacts with increased accuracy).
- Develop fire focused “guest opinion” effort across the region/state to highlight fire managed for resource benefit and the collaborative efforts of the Fire MOU Partnership.
- Demonstrate how fire managed for resource benefit can save taxpayers money as we re-establish appropriate fire in California's fire-associated landscapes.

Strategic and Targeted Outreach Recommendations/ Messenger Cadre:

- Outreach to the local community and downwind neighbors is key
- Go where the audience is within local communities: fire departments, community centers, local hospitals, local Red Cross, hospice, real estate and vacation rental offices, etc. Message is (for example) welcome to the (Sierra Nevada, Central Coast, Northwest California) living here responsibly requires understanding and living with fire. Provide Firewise living brochure regarding clearing fuels at home and within your community. Appropriate land management includes fire and smoke which equals resilience and public safety.
- Consider partnering with local real estate offices to share proactive management messaging & provide new home buyers with info on ways to reduce fire risk around their homes
- Local leaders: county supervisors, county sheriff's departments, public health officials, chambers of commerce, outdoor recreation groups, special event coordinators and participants.
- Fire Safe Councils.
- Capture the audience and utilize visuals to help get the messages across
 - Use time-lapse, video, web cams
 - Use before & after photos, comparisons between different events
- Talk with people you don't normally talk to and share a positive fire message. This will help to build friendly messengers.
- Identify what is valued by each of the above groups, and message around that (i.e.: safety, health, economic impacts, etc.)
- Develop a network of partners that can respond to media inquiries and share incident information with them so that they can speak to the specific event using the MOU's shared messaging.
- Develop a social media presence to represent the Fire MOU Partnership and the MOU Outreach and Communication Plan.

Messenger Cadre

Recruit an issue-specific cadre of scientists, community leaders, air quality regulators, public health officials, policy makers, agency leaders, fire staff, recreation group representatives, water-focused spokespersons and others who are willing to work with the Fire MOU Partners to address critical fire topics during each fire season.

- Forest Service, CALFIRE, NPS and other agencies who support fire programs.
- Scientists – fire and vegetation ecologists, air quality experts, public health officials, watershed and water quality experts (both agency and academic).
- Water agency and water purveyors.

- Wildlife ecologists (academics) and other wildlife regulatory agencies.
- Local, state and federal policy makers who can articulate fire need to the public.
- Community fire safe councils who can offer two messages: (1) do the work around homes to protect property from fire and, (2) Fire managed for resource benefit enforces community protection both as an initial treatment, where possible, and for maintenance of existing fuel breaks targeting surface and ladder fuels.
- Air regulators: EPA, CARB, and local districts.