



A PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH APPROACH FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN POST - FIRE RESTORATION

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As the magnitude and severity of wildfires continues to grow, the process of recovering from those fires presents significant challenges. Immediately after wildfire occurrence, technical decisions that will fundamentally influence short and long - term conditions are often made under a combination of uncertainty and significant pressure for prompt action. Conventional approaches to post - fire landscape and vegetation restoration tend to be focused on tactical interventions that address biophysical processes. Typical management strategies centered on erosion control and revegetation are broadly accepted in concept, but can lead to conflict at the site - and event - specific level. The potential for understanding and acceptance of a given restoration approach is influenced not only by how a proposed strategy is communicated at the time of the event, but also by the type and level of prior engagement with the diversity of people inhabiting wildfire - prone locations in peri - urban landscapes. The variety of interests, experiences, and perspectives among inhabitants are as influential to success as the communication approach of those working to restore the landscape. Top - down, expert - led approaches to public engagement tend to result in a uni - directional flow of knowledge, which is less likely to result in a supportive and well informed constituency or the trustworthy relations necessary immediately post - fire when decisions must be made quickly. An alternative approach, which is being used in wildfire prevention and risk reduction education programs, is to establish multi - stakeholder platforms, ideally well before a wildfire event, and base their governance on principles of collaboration and the co - production of knowledge. By making all stakeholders partners in the planning, assessment, and mitigation efforts, local knowledge and expert knowledge are shared, rather than dictated. Such a democratic (rather than technocratic) approach makes it possible for local perspectives and priorities to drive a process that encourages social learning, setting up the opportunity for collective action.