



Understanding Impediments to Prescribed Fire in Northern California

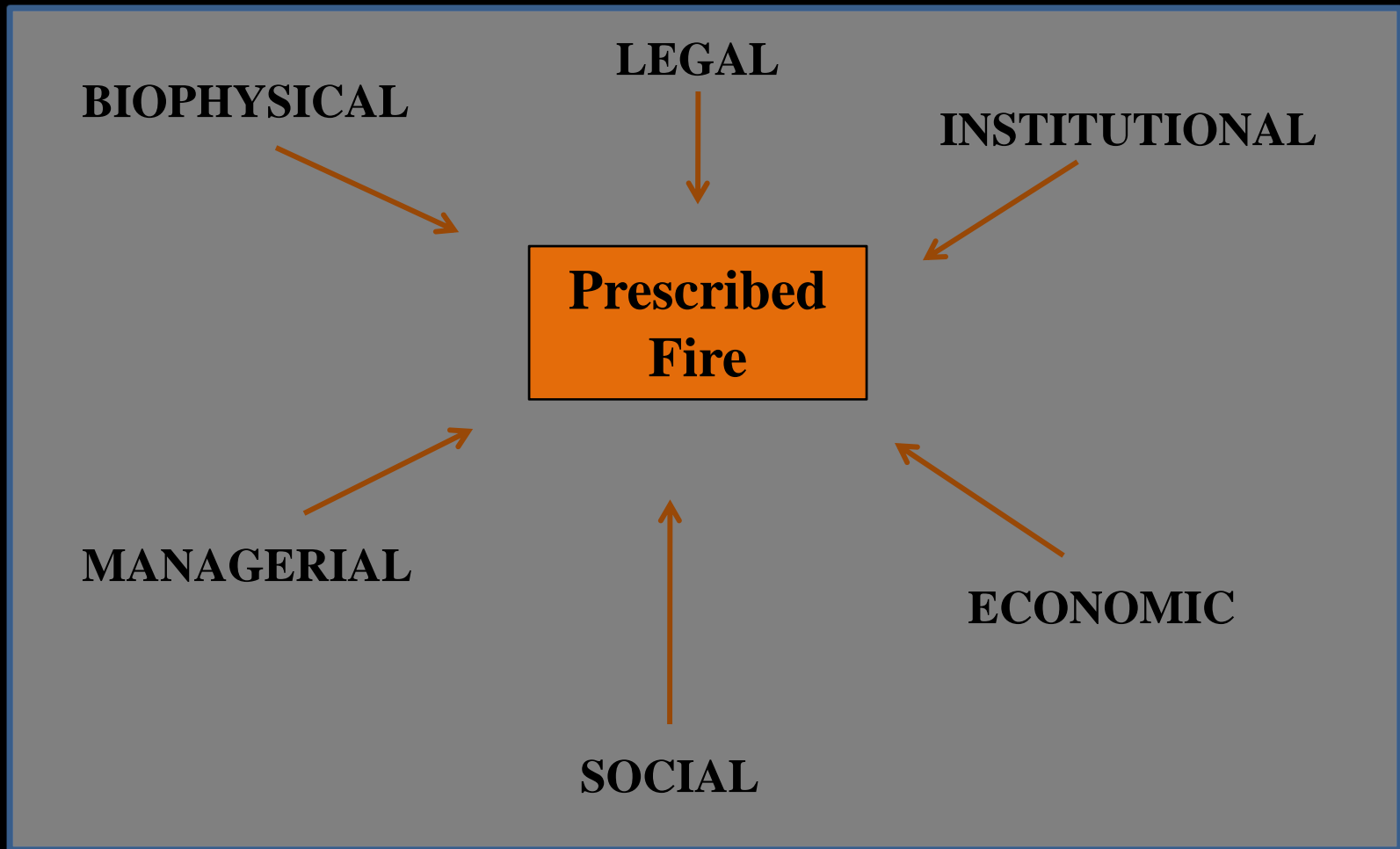
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-Efficient/cost-effective

**-Ecological and cultural
benefits**

There are many constraints on prescribed fire activity



Methods

Case study of
landowners in
a forest
community

Survey of fire
managers in
northern
California

Survey

- Distributed to district-level prescribed fire managers with 6 federal and state agencies:
 - USDA Forest Service (N = 22)
 - Bureau of Land Management (N = 6)
 - National Park Service (N = 6)
 - US Fish and Wildlife Service (N = 2)
 - Cal Fire (N = 9)
 - California Department of Parks and Recreation (N = 6)
- Also included a sample of tribes (N = 5), NGOs (N = 6), and timber companies (N = 8)

Survey

Asked managers to do the following:

-List the area treated with Rx fire for each of the last three years (2006, 2007, 2008)

-List the annual area of Rx fire needed to fulfill management goals

-Rate objectives for their Rx fire programs

-Rate impediments to their use of Rx fire

-Rate levels of agreement with statements concerning satisfaction with their programs and perceptions of risk

Name: <input type="text"/>	Position: <input type="text"/>
Email: <input type="text"/>	Phone: <input type="text"/>
Name of Management Area: <input type="text"/>	

For the purposes of this survey, prescribed fire refers only to broadcast burning. It does not include pile or slash burning, wildland fire use, etc.

• How long have you worked with your agency?

• Have you ever worked for another federal or state agency involved in fire management? Yes No

• If so, which one?

• What is the total size of your management area (in acres)?

• In the last 3 years, how many acres did you *plan* to treat with prescribed fire, and how many acres did you end up treating?

	2006	2007	2008
Acreage of Planned Treatment	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Actual Acreage Treated	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

• What is the annual acreage of prescribed burning needed to achieve management goals in your management area?

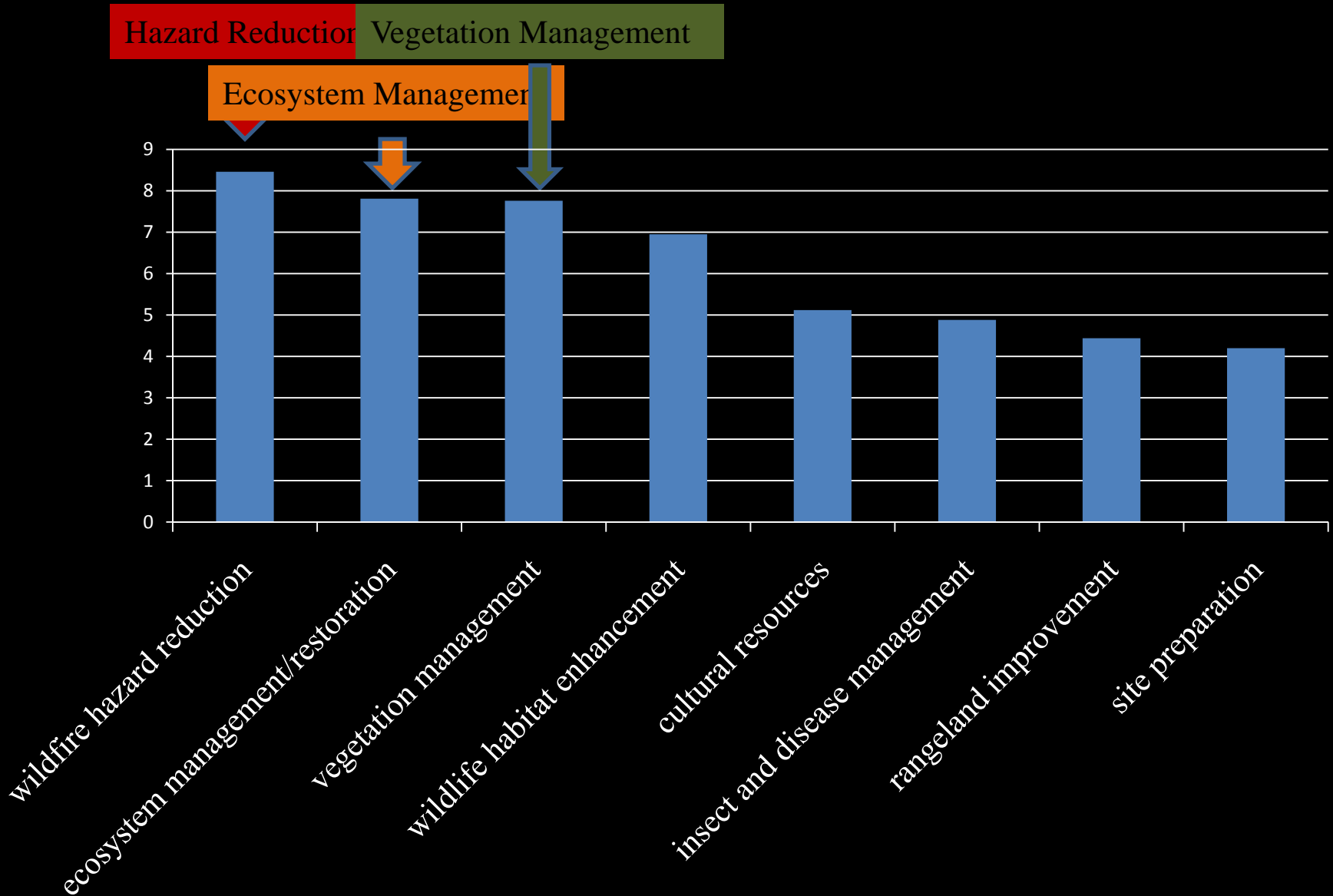
Survey response rates by entity

Agency	Returned/Surveyed	Response Rate
USFS	20/22	91%
BLM	6/6	100%
NPS	6/6	100%
FWS	2/2	100%
Cal Fire	7/9	78%
CDPR	6/6	100%
Agency Total	47/51	92%
Timber Companies	7/8	88%
Tribes	2/5	40%
NGOs	3/6	50%
Overall Total	59/70	84%

Prescribed fire activity

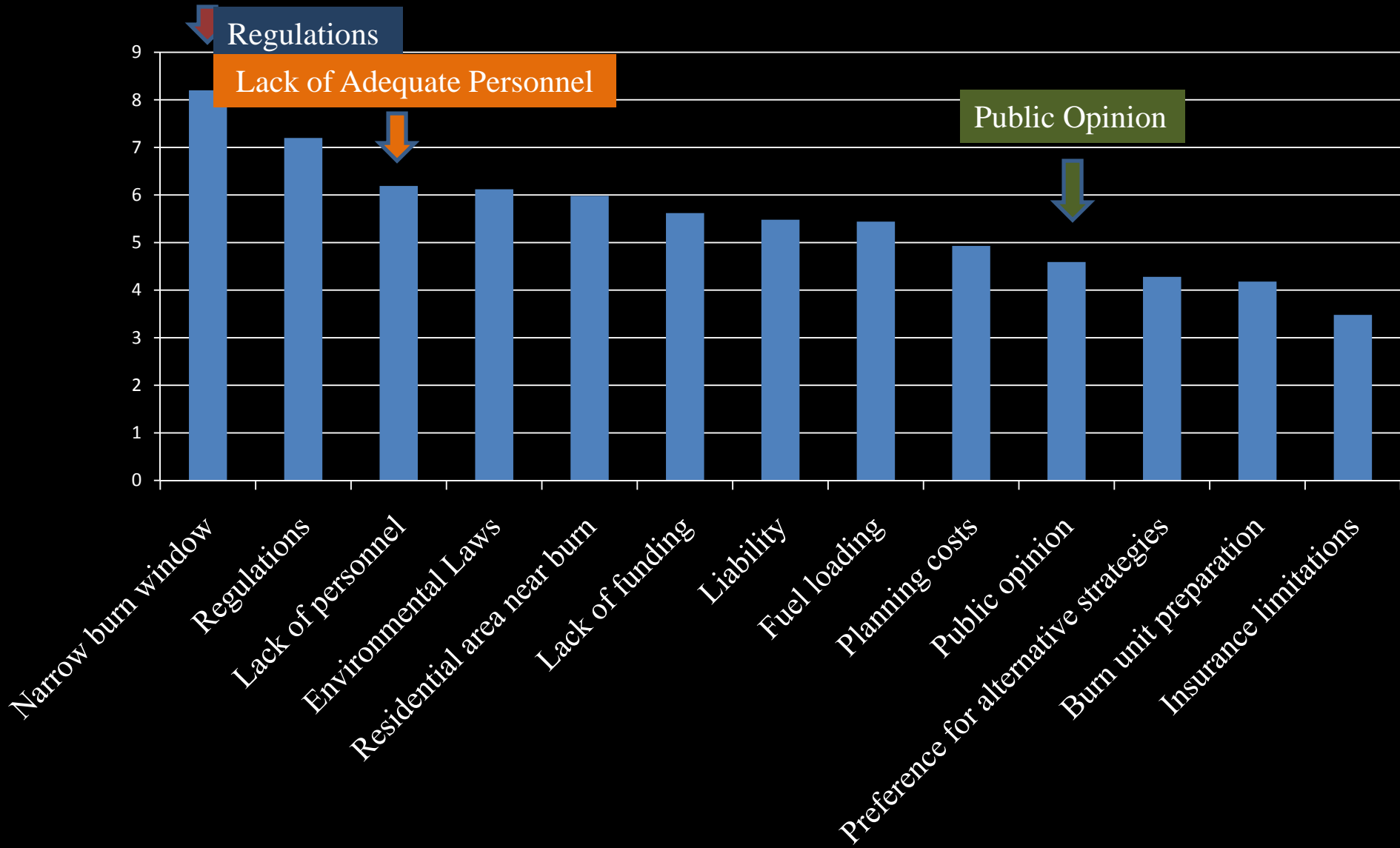
	Size of management area (acres)	Average area burned (2006-2008)	Area needed to achieve objectives	Percent burned of managed area	Percent burned of area needed to achieve objectives
USFS	8,490,163	19,394	60,300	0.23	32.16
BLM	3,788,045	1,784	13,050	0.05	13.67
NPS	441,560	5,325	7,572	1.21	70.33
FWS	148,181	20,492	27,800	13.83	73.71
CAL FIRE	-	4,253	5,450	-	78.04
CDPR	253,276	106	13,150	0.04	0.81
TIMBER COs	1,488,500	277	6,565	0.02	4.22
TRIBES	42,000	0	0	0	0
NGOs	-	50	800	-	6.25
TOTAL ALL	14,651,725	51,680	134,687	0.04	38.37

Mean ratings of management objectives



Impediments to prescribed fire

Narrow Burn Window



Top-rated Impediments:

Narrow Burn Window, Regulations, Lack of Personnel

No significant differences between groups

Legal Impediments:

Environmental Laws, Liability, Insurance Limitations

Significant differences between groups:

- Private entities gave higher ratings than public entities
- Cal Fire consistently grouped with private entities

Economic Impediments:

Lack of Funding, Planning Costs

Significant Differences Between Groups:

-Funding more of an issue for state and private entities than for federal

-Funding more of an issue in NW CA than in NE CA

Social Impediments:

Public Opinion

Significant Differences Between Groups:

- Private entities gave higher ratings than public agencies

- Cal Fire grouped with private entities

Satisfaction with Prescribed Fire Programs

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
“I am generally satisfied with the amount of prescribed burning achieved in my management area each year.”	76%	9%	15%
“I wish that we could treat more acres in our management area with prescribed fire.”	0%	5%	95%

-Majority of managers dissatisfied with the amount of burning they do

-Almost all managers want to expand their use of prescribed fire

Perceptions of Risk

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
“Managers must take personal risks in order to get prescribed fire on the ground.”	26%	9%	65%
“I am willing to take personal risks in order to use prescribed fire in my management area.”	35%	10%	55%

-Majority feel that managers must take personal risks when using prescribed fire

-Slight majority are willing to take personal risks

-No significant differences between groups in responses to these statements

Major findings

-Prescribed fire is used to meet a wide range of objectives

-Managers want to expand their use of prescribed fire

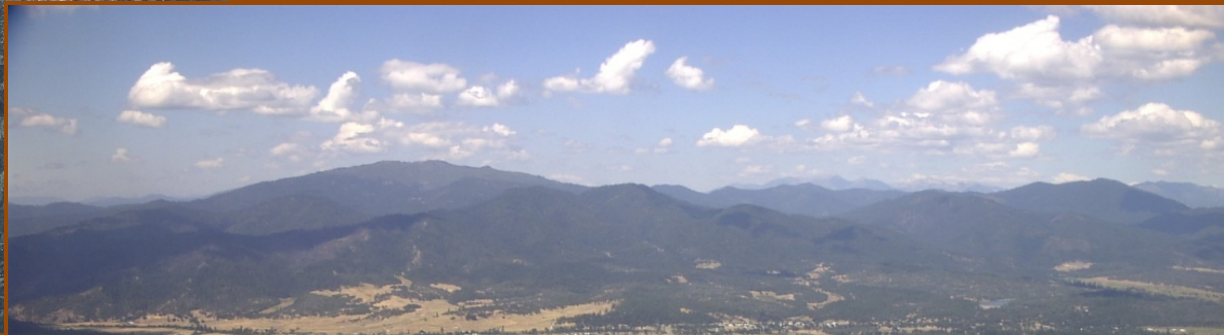
-Operational and regulatory issues are the biggest impediments

**-Issues are different for public and private lands managers
(Cal Fire tends to group with private)**

Influences on Community Support

A photograph of a forest at night. The trees are dark silhouettes against a dark blue sky. A bright fire is burning in the trees, casting a warm orange glow. The fire is located in the upper right quadrant of the image. There are several smaller, scattered fire spots throughout the forest.

Case Study: Hayfork, CA



In-depth interviews with 25 landowners (18 ownerships, ~4,000 acres)

Interviewees represented range of landowners present in Hayfork:

- Ranchers
- Back-to-the-landers
- Loggers
- Native Americans (Nor-El-Muk)
- Retirees
- Newcomers

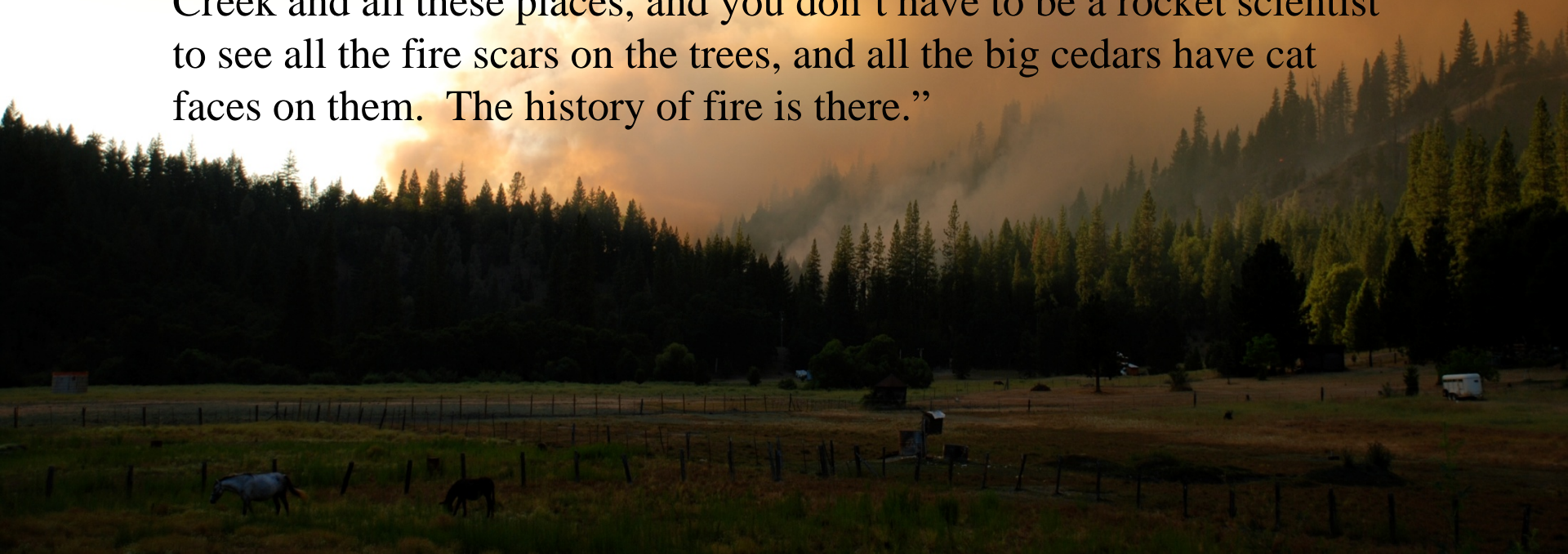
Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours and were voice-recorded for future reference

The role of fire in local forests

Many landowners mentioned the natural role that fire plays in local ecosystems.

Many brought up the history of fire in the area:

“[Historically], there was a lot of fire, but the fire didn’t get rampaging like it does now because there wasn’t that much fuel on the ground, and you go out and you look at Indian Valley and Butter Creek and all these places, and you don’t have to be a rocket scientist to see all the fire scars on the trees, and all the big cedars have cat faces on them. The history of fire is there.”



Forest health

Many landowners described local forests as being in a state of poor health and elevated fire hazard:

“It’s overgrown. It’s like a time bomb.”

“Now you have this second growth jungle, which is not good for the growth of the trees, they’re choking each other, it’s a total fire hazard, and bugs and everything else, and the range is gone, the multi-purpose of it is gone, and the wildlife can’t survive in that either. It’s a lose-lose, the way I see it.”

The only comments landowners made about good forest health were in regard to their own properties:

“Well I think the forest around here, by us, is very healthy.”

“I think in our area, we have a pretty healthy forest and not much needs to be done. Where we are.”

Personal responsibility

The issue of landowner responsibility emerged frequently:

“People definitely need to take some initiative and clean up around their places...If people expect the Forest Service to come in and save their place when they haven’t done anything ahead of time, it’s just not going to happen, and if people would do that, we’d probably solve a lot of the fire problem we have.”

“[People aren’t] being proactive when they should be...And I think all of us...need to rely less on the government and more on ourselves and take back some of that power and do what we need to do.”



Need for year-round management

The need for year-round management was stressed by many landowners :

“You know, there’s so much money spent to put the fires out, but never enough money to do preventative work.”

“They should be doing a lot of preventative stuff and we wouldn’t be having so many problems.”

Prescribed fire

Support for prescribed fire was high:

“I think [Rx fire] is smart. In some areas, there are still the air quality concerns, but it does make the forest and the area around you healthier and safer.”

“Probably one reason why we haven’t had wildfire on this property is because [we] used to do a lot of burning in the spring...we had a lot of planted timber, about a mile of it along the road up here, and it was always a concern that someone would torch it or throw a cigarette, and so every spring we burned it...burned off the duff to keep it clean. We did that up until the Forest Service and everybody started getting antsy every time you dropped a match, so we quit doing that.”

Five landowners currently use prescribed fire on their properties



Support for prescribed fire was, in many cases, conditional.

“I believe in burning, I think we need a lot more of it, and it’s the right way to go if it’s done right.”

“As far as a control burn goes, I'd go for it if they did it in a controlled way.”

Lack of trust



Lack of trust stems from the feeling that the USFS isn't fulfilling its responsibilities:

“Our biggest danger is the national forest.”

Lack of trust

Perceptions of USFS and the history of logging:

“Even people who agree with controlled burning and thinning have such distrust, they don’t trust the Forest Service and you know, I have the same sort of mindset because of the history...It just seems like for the Forest Service, the special interests...have always been premier before the health of the forest.”

Lack of trust

Landowners were upset by the 2008 fire season:

“We have had an experience with the Forest Service that does not give us confidence.”

“If you go about 10 minutes down the road...you’d start to see where they did the burnouts, and that’s pretty much all the crowning, where they did the burnouts. ”

“Well, the backfiring can backfire.”

Lack of local input and control

Many landowners mentioned a need for local control:

“Sometimes it seems like they don’t want to bring in the locals who know about it, and we should have the pre-training of the locals who could go out, and it used to be that they could make a lot of money, the water tenders and the people with chainsaws and everything, but they don’t always get to do it.”

Many shared the perception that local USFS staff have little power:

“I don’t like to pick on the Forest Service, a lot of nice people work there. But it’s bad politics, is what it is. These people here don’t have anything to say, they get told what to do, and they got to do it if they like their job, even though they may not agree with it.”

“I don’t think it’s so much the people locally, it’s probably in the high courts where the problem is. Our forests are burning up because of what’s going on in Washington DC.”

Major findings

Hayfork-area landowners generally share the following perceptions:

- Fire is a natural component of local ecosystems
- Fire suppression and logging practices have increased fire hazard and degraded forest health
- Management needs to happen year-round in order to be effective
- Prescribed fire and thinning are important elements of a year-round strategy *if they are implemented correctly*

Lack of trust in the Forest Service is the biggest influence on support:

- Perceived agency incompetence, lack of local input/control

Conclusions

Tension around public opinion/involvement

Building trust

Addressing operational, regulatory, and other impediments
-NW CA Prescribed Fire Council



Thank You!

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