

Managing Fire Across Boundaries—Essential Elements For Collaboration

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The wildfires of the past decade have emphasized a number of truths about wildfire, including the fact that they show no respect for property boundaries. As long as wildfires occurred mostly on public land far from valuable homes and other community resources there was little need to involve private citizens or community representatives in wildfire management efforts. But as more people move into wildland areas and the values at risk in these areas increase, wildfire management becomes much more complicated, hazardous, and expensive. Increasingly fragmented property ownership presents major challenges to effective and efficient wildfire management across a landscape. For vegetation management and defensible space efforts to be truly effective, work cannot stop at property lines; it is not enough for one homeowner or agency to manage their fuels if the adjacent property owner does not.

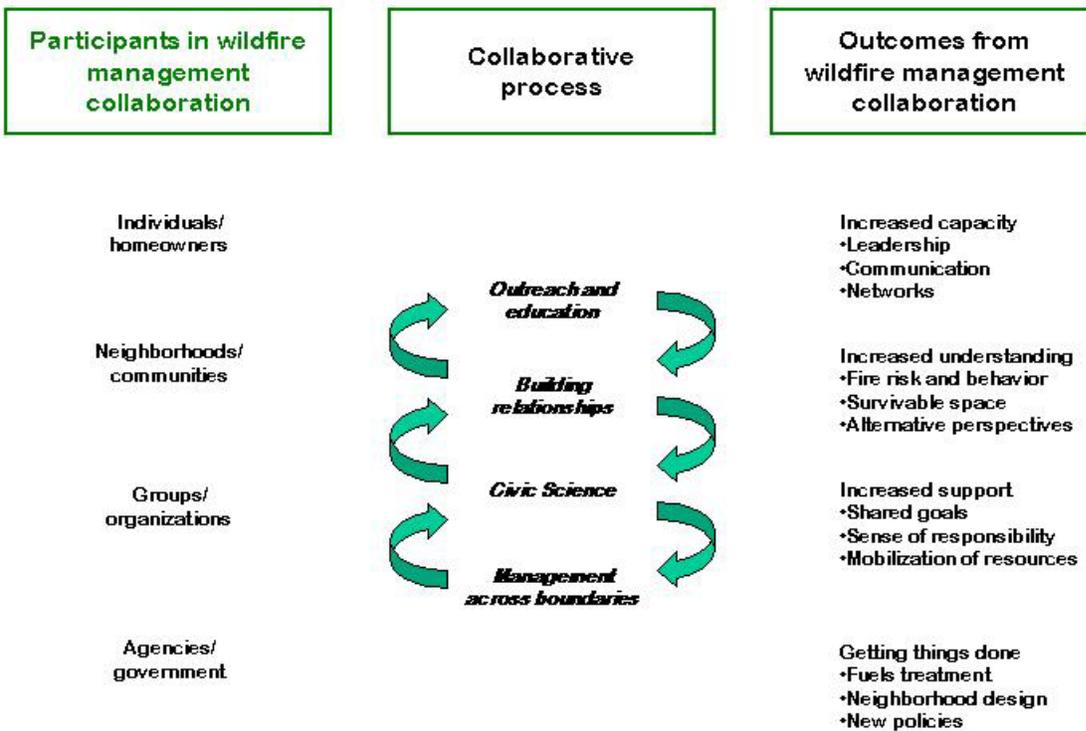
With more diverse ownership comes more potential views of what the landscape should look like and how it should be managed. These diverse views include different agency missions and varying public desires—from wanting to utilize natural resources to leaving the land untouched. Even if all parties agree that something needs to be done to reduce fire risk, there can be great disagreement over the what, how, and when of any wildfire management action.

As wildfires directly affect more people, active public involvement will be integral to the success of any wildfire management initiative. The trick will be for wildfire managers and the public to develop a new understanding of the issues and the extent to which the concerns of all those involved can be addressed. To accomplish this, fire management efforts, particularly those at the wildland urban interface, require collaborative efforts. Given the scale and immediacy of the fire problem and the concomitant need for collaborative work to reduce the danger, understanding what contributes to successful coordination and cooperation across boundaries will play an important role in facilitating more rapid development and implementation of fire management plans.

We have defined collaboration as comprised of three components: participants, the process itself, and outcomes (Figure 1). We see the collaborative process itself as being comprised of four steps: (1) outreach and education, (2) building relationships, (3) civic science, and (4) managing across boundaries. Each step has a number of questions that help define that step:

- *Outreach and Education*
What messages have been critical to involving people in collaboration?
How has the emphasis on fire hazard enhanced your ability to draw in the public?
How have you reached a wide range of potential participants?

Figure 1.—Model for understanding the collaborative process for wildfire management



- *Building Relationships*
 What tools (process) have you used to facilitate collaboration?
 How did you develop a sense of ownership (of the problem and process) among parties?
 How did you get individuals or groups with potentially conflicting motives to communicate effectively and begin to trust one another in order to find areas of mutual interest?
 Did the common threat of fire help develop common ground?
- *Civic Science*
 How has collaboration improved your ability to apply the latest scientific knowledge on the ground?
 What innovations in data collection and sharing have resulted?
 How have you gained credibility and respectability from various partners?
 What roles will various parties play in monitoring efforts and how will they inform future management decisions?

- *Management Across Boundaries*
How has collaboration improved your ability to gain acceptance and support for fire management activities from the community?
What social and political elements have been necessary for successful collaboration?
What new sources of support and resources were mobilized by your collaboration?