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Prescribed fire policy barriers: Findings from a JFSP project on challenges and strategies on federal lands across the West

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Time: 12:30 - 2 pm (MT)

Prescribed fire is an essential management tool for restoring and maintaining fire-dependent ecosystems; however, land managers are unable to apply prescribed fire at the necessary levels. Past surveys have identified a range of policies and regulations that managers say limit their ability to conduct prescribed fire. We are conducting a project investigating barriers to prescribed fire across the West for the BLM and the US Forest Service. Our goals are to identify the origin and range of interpretation of perceived policy barriers (i.e. whether these reside in law, agency guidance, culture, or individual discretion) and characterize the opportunities and mechanisms that are available to overcome barriers at various scales. The first phase of our project involved a legal analysis and interviews across the 11 Western states with BLM and Forest Service fire and fuels managers and state-level air quality regulators. We report on the diversity of regulatory approaches, policy barriers, and strategies for overcoming challenges across the West, based on our legal review and interviews. While air quality regulation limits managers' ability to conduct prescribed fire, it is only one of many issues that managers say affect their programs; other significant challenges include capacity limitations, a lack of incentives to increase accomplishments, and individual risk aversion. We will discuss the importance of governance and communication strategies for overcoming the challenge of integrating air quality and land management concerns and discuss other suggestions from interviewees that would afford managers greater opportunities to get more prescribed fire on the ground.



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