



October 2007

Risk Roundtables

Without a doubt, one of the most often asked questions is where to place treatments that will make a difference in saving lives, property, and protecting communities. This implies not only an investment for initial treatments, but continuing costs to maintain treatment effectiveness.

In 2006, the Joint Fire Science Program asked fire managers throughout the nation about their critical research needs. Managers overwhelmingly stated that the quantification and characterization of risk was one of the highest priorities.

In response to this need the Joint Fire Science Program, in collaboration with the Western Wildland Environmental Threat Center in Prineville, Oregon, will hold a series of roundtables to better understand the issue of risk in relation to wildland fire management and launch a focused line of research over the next 3-5 years on wildland fire risk research.

The essential question

How do you quantify and communicate risks from wildland fire in such a way that you can compare changes in risk across the values of interest (ecological, economic, and social) under different fuel management and incident response scenarios?

Key aspects of the essential question

- Short-term versus long term costs, benefits and consequences
- Explicit probabilities and uncertainties
- Scalable risk assessment and communication approaches
- Costs and consequences associated with different levels of risk
- Risk reduction as a performance metric

Although risk assessments for fuels planning and incident response (and post-fire stabilization as well) must occur under very different timeframes and pressures, it is critical that the concepts and analytical approaches used are the same in both cases. Otherwise, inconsistent approaches could result in conflicting decisions in the same landscape.

Definitions

Risk consists of two parts:

1. The probability of an event occurring
2. The probability of adverse consequences if the event occurs

Wildland fire encompasses:

1. Wildfire
2. Wildland fire use
3. Prescribed fire

Next Steps

We will:

1. select participants for two roundtables to be held in the eastern and western United States in December 2007;
2. conduct interviews with a subset of roundtable participants to further define questions for the roundtable to address;
3. convene two roundtables with line officers, incident commanders, fire/fuels managers, and interested stakeholders to identify additional key characteristics and clarify the context in which new information and/or tools would be useful; and
4. develop a science plan to highlight opportunities and priorities for new research or synthesis.

If you have questions or comments about the Joint Fire Science Program or our Risk Roundtables please contact:

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