

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

NATIONAL COHESIVE WILDLAND FIRE STRATEGY

Podcast: Importance of Stakeholder Engagement

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NARRATOR: You are listening to *In Brief* Podcast, reporting progress toward a National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy. In this podcast, we are talking about the importance of stakeholder engagement with Dan Smith, who represents the National Association of State Foresters, and Bob Roper, Ventura Country Fire Chief, representing the International Fire Chiefs Wildland Fire Policy Committee, and local government groups.

Bob, why is it important that people get involved with a cohesive strategy?

ROPER: It's important for people to get involved with a cohesive strategy at the local government level because we realize that local government needs to begin to address wildland issues tied to urbanization in the fire-prone areas. Addressing the wildland fire problem deals with everything from planned growth development in each area that we live, to how we deal with the resources, addressing values at risk, developing our community wildfire protection plans, our CWPPs, and really bringing the community into the issue.

NARRATOR: The cohesive strategy is trying to engage a wide range of interested parties in its development. Why is that important?

ROPER: The cohesive strategy for success really has to have a large base of interested parties in its development. It has to be part of a real collaborative process that has the fingerprints of all the interested parties to make it successful.

Where we haven't really seen this in the past was the National Fire Plan or under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act. These kind of appeared to be a federal-centric document, in that a lot of federal players came into play in certain groups; but, did it have the buy-in of feds, state, and locals? From that perspective, we need to ensure that the stakeholders make sure that it's federal, state, and local people, as well as environmental groups, nonprofits, and the people who actually live in these areas. If we can get that total buy-in and build a collaborative approach, then we can make the cohesive strategy a true success.

NARRATOR: Dan, in your opinion, what are some of the most important themes that stakeholders should understand about the cohesive strategy, and what it will achieve?

SMITH: First of all, for stakeholders, I hope they will understand the effort that's been extended for outreach in this. The intent is to be all-inclusive as we develop the cohesive strategy,

including stakeholders. Forums, other outreach mechanisms have taken place across the country in Phase 1 and currently in Phase 2. The input we receive from the stakeholders will certainly make the strategy much stronger than if we're not able to do that; but it has been a tremendous amount of effort on outreach, and that will continue.

NARRATOR: Is it worth the effort to get involved now?

SMITH: Here again, the complexities of addressing the wildland fire problems we have nationally are significant. I commend the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior in the approach they have taken in making the cohesive strategy inclusive of all lands across the U.S. That really increased complexities of preparing and coming up with a strategy that we all can agree to, but it's worth the effort.

NARRATOR: And why should folks get involved?

SMITH: This is probably an opportunity that doesn't come around very long. You know, for years we've had national federal fire policy. We've never had national fire framework that federal, state, local government could actually say they participated in, developed, and could agree to, so this is a real unique opportunity in those respects.

NARRATOR: And Bob, what can listeners do to help with this process?

ROPER: The biggest challenge about the cohesive strategy is how do we really make it a collaborative process that involves federal, state, and local entities? The cohesive strategy has to have the buy-in of all three parties to make it a success. We've reached out in different outreach groups and with focus groups to establish that buy-in in Phase 1 and 2, and we plan to continue that collaborative approach back into Phase 3. This cohesive strategy is not going to get done overnight, as once a document's printed and it's done and over with, it has to be a living document; and the collaborative approach will bring that buy-in into that collaborative process that I don't think that people really felt were there in the two prior federal documents.

NARRATOR: This concludes our interview with Bob Roper, representing the International Fire Chiefs Wildland Fire Policy Committee, and Dan Smith, representing the National Association of State Foresters. Other national, state, and local agency and non-government organization perspectives can be heard at www.forestsandrangelands.gov, under Cohesive Strategy Podcasts.