

Participant Perspectives on Collaborative Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation: Old Woman South case study

Land management agencies in Utah and across the western U.S. seek to increase the use of prescribed fire to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk. However, a lack of public support for prescribed burning can be a barrier to implementation. As a result, agencies seek ways to build public acceptance and support. One such approach is to conduct prescribed burns as **interagency collaborative projects that actively engage affected neighboring landowners**.

Researchers at Utah State University studied one such project, the Old Woman South Prescribed Fire project, planned and implemented by U.S. Forest Service and Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands personnel on the Fishlake National Forest and adjacent private lands in 2022-23. The research examined perceptions of agency personnel, landowners, and other affected persons about the project, which included strong efforts to maintain communication and collaboration among agency personnel, landowners, and other affected persons, using a prescription designed to minimize the risk of escape or loss of valued resources.

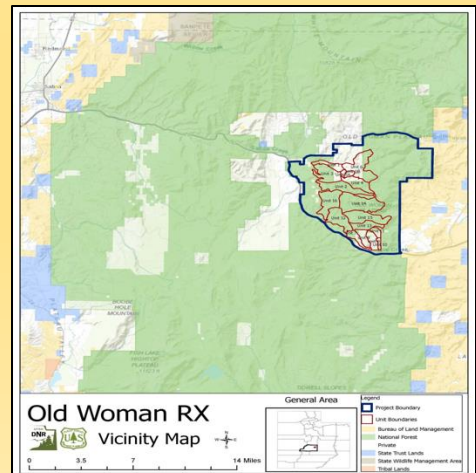
Interviews of agency personnel, private landowners, and local health department officials took place in Spring 2023, with questions focused on public perceptions, benefits of treatment, obstacles, and outreach approaches.

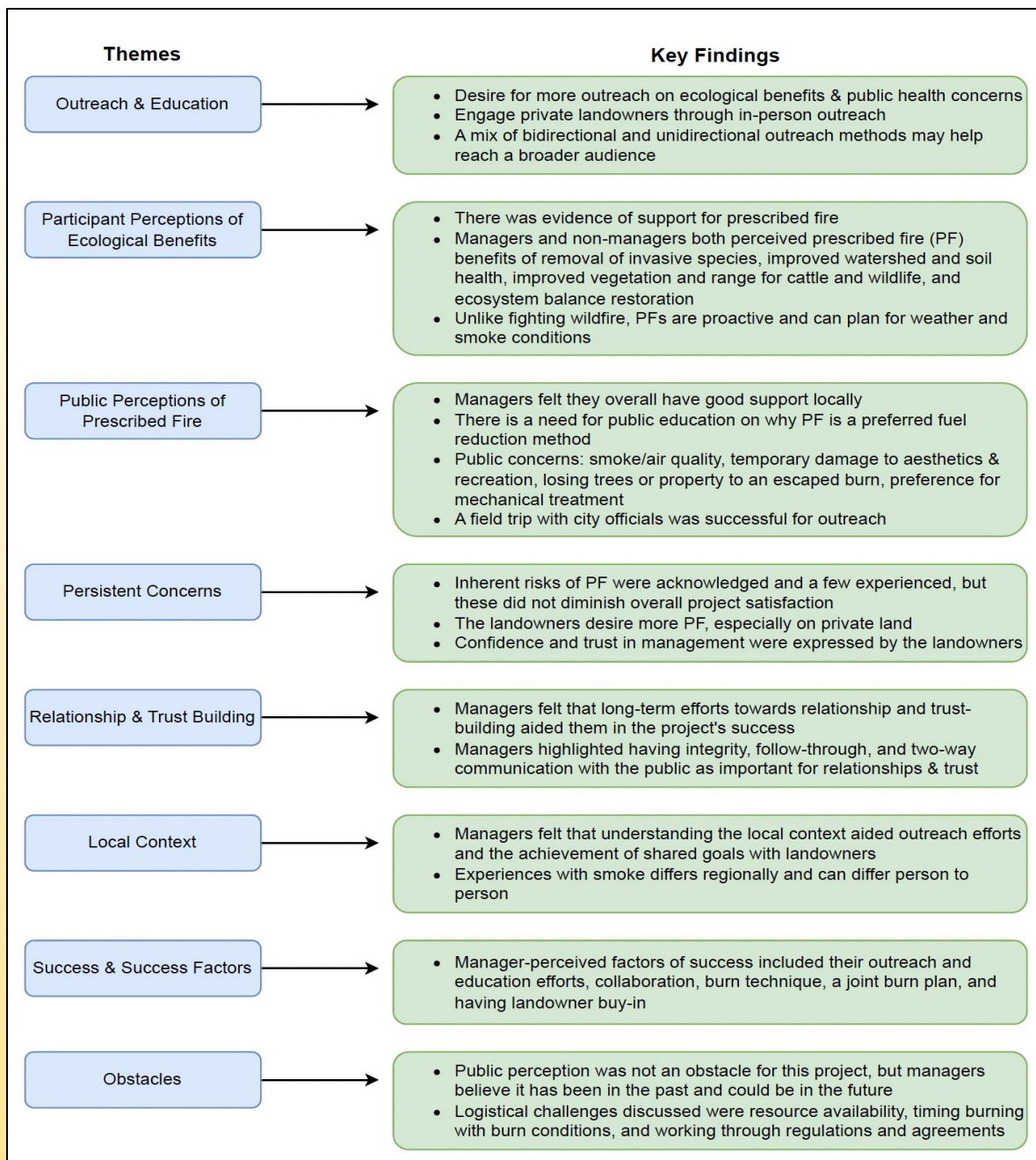


Old Woman South outreach photo posted on Facebook, April 21, 2022.

The Old Woman South project

Total project covered 16,400 ac east of Salina, Utah. Burning occurred daily on small acreages in April and May as fuels dried. Mechanical treatment was used on <2,000 ac. Public engagement before and during the project included field tours, social media posts, and information kiosks. Private landowners actively participated in planning alongside state and federal personnel.





Conclusions and Implications

The persons interviewed for this case study – agency personnel and community members alike – perceived the project to be a clear success. The incremental burn plan protected people and resources, though smoke could have become an issue in a more populated area. Interagency collaboration and extensive public outreach helped build community support for prescribed fire. Employing this approach more widely could require additional staff time for planning and public engagement, especially pre-burn, but promises considerable long-term benefits for forest health.

For further information

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