

# I don't think that means what you think it means: Differing conceptions of co-management in complex decision areas

3<sup>rd</sup> Annual National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy  
Workshop

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Anne-Lise Velez, Virginia Tech

# Meet the Fire Chasers

[www.firechasers.ncsu.edu](http://www.firechasers.ncsu.edu)

## Co-PIs:

- ❖ Branda Nowell, North Carolina State University
- ❖ Toddi Steelman, Duke University

## Collaborator:

- ❖ Kate Albrecht, University of Illinois at Chicago

## Current Graduate Students:

- ▶ Shannon McGovern
- ▶ Elliot Nauert
- ▶ Ryan Scott



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# Cohesive strategy

- ▶ 3 prongs of cohesive strategy
  - ▶ Resilient landscapes
  - ▶ Fire adapted communities
  - ▶ Response to wildfire
- ▶ Better management= need to align local, state, and federal actors→ requires co-management
- ▶ JFSP interest in co-management indicated by funding

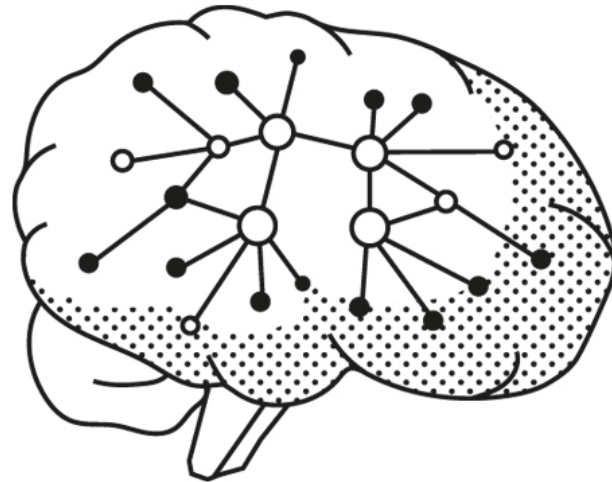


# Complexity is here to stay

- ▶ Wildfire management
  - ▶ Interaction of environmental, market, government, & political
  - ▶ Weather, climate, and management systems collide in the context of wildfire response
  - ▶ Overlapping interests & multiple affected jurisdictions
    - ▶ actors must coordinate to prioritize values, make decisions, share responsibility
    - ▶ different tension points than in past b/c of added actors
- ▶ ICS as structure to help manage task interdependencies ... but the predictability of the context changes

# Co-management as part of the solution for managing jurisdictional complexity

- ▶ Co-management as a concept shows up in academic literature & national policy discussions
  - ▶ Part of solution in complex contexts—ex. JFSP funding
- ▶ When new concepts are introduced, or concepts are introduced to a new area, there is a process of finding common understanding



# What do we know about co-management?

- ▶ Increasingly complex actor groups must make decisions about wildfire response that affect one another
- ▶ There are very real consequences of not knowing what other affected actors are thinking/doing
- ▶ Co-management lenses are often used to understand other land-management decisions
  - ▶ BUT in the wildfire context they are usually made more quickly and under more duress than traditional land management policy directives
- ▶ When we borrow concepts from other spaces definitions and associated expectations can shift



# What don't we know about co-management?

- ▶ How is co-management being used to advance the conversation in wildfire?
- ▶ How is the concept of co-management manifest in heterogeneous groups of stakeholders?
- ▶ We asked: What does co-management mean to you (in the context of wildfire management)?

# Study Context

- ▶ 10 of the most jurisdictionally complex fires in 2017
- ▶ 5 GACCs
  - ▶ Northern Rockies, Northwest, Southern, Southern California, Southwest
- ▶ 5 states
  - ▶ AZ, CA, GA, MT, OR
- ▶ Interviews with 88 ICs, AAs, and private landowners



# When we asked, we found...

- ▶ Co-management as a concept is largely undefined within and across jurisdictions
- ▶ 16 of 74 respondents were unfamiliar with the term (or did not conceive of the term in a WF context)
  - ▶ *“I’m not so sure I’ve heard of it.... I can only speculate as to what I think it means and I think it’s probably the operational level of unified command. Bringing both jurisdictions to the table and working through differences of opinion and prioritization that sort of thing.”*
- ▶ Continued with a grounded/inductive approach to define co-management and expectations around co-management

# We also found...

- ▶ People saw co-mgmt. as:
  - ▶ Synonymous with UC, cost share arrangements
  - ▶ Both in terms of tools and strategy, such as consistent public communication
  - ▶ Aspirations for type of engagement they hope would be happening - voice, satisfactory representation



- ▶ What became interesting, two ideas about co-management that were mutually exclusive emerged...

# Mutually exclusive views of co-management



▶ Either **“one captain”**

- ▶ one leader as decision-maker—

—or—

▶ —as **“one direction”**

- ▶ all involved agency leaders get together, decide joint objectives & goals, then hand direction over to the IMT to be planned and implemented



# “One captain” mental model



- ▶ *“...the approach of unified command...it still should be one IC, even though it may be three different people making the decision.”*
- ▶ *“I think co-management means there's more than one interest there, and so consideration for multiple priorities....And, how to address that, again, is kind of our job as an incident management team, you know? ... It helps to have a delegation to be in charge of the incident so that we have final say”*

# “One direction” mental model



- ▶ “[Co-management is] that the agencies need to do just as we did, roll out one plan, or you know, one letter of direction with this to help the teams”
- ▶ “First and foremost, you have to agree on the same ideas and principles.... if there's any, if there's any variation in what that looks like, then, we need to talk about it more.... then, you've got to communicate your plan and you've got to implement your plan.”

# Mutually exclusive views of co-management



- ▶ We found differing expectations of the system and role within it
- ▶ Different expectations about where negotiation occurs
- ▶ Orientation toward co-management plays itself out regardless of what structure you use



- ▶ Do the stakeholders expect to negotiate amongst themselves and share those instructions with the IC, or do they expect the IC to balance the priorities as an expert?

# What's next for understanding co-management?

- ▶ Tensions lie in different ideas about where/ with whom reconciliation of potentially competing interests should occur
  - ▶ What is the way to bridge the gap between those who expect the IC to act as one captain, and those who expect the AAs to provide one direction?



# Key takeaways/ things to consider

- ▶ What needs to be negotiated in what spaces?
  - ▶ For one direction?
  - ▶ For one captain?
- ▶ Should some decisions be made using a one direction approach, and others delegated as one captain?



and/or





# Thanks!

Learn more at  
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