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Publication Date

2024

DOI

10.1111/rec.14330

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Peer reviewed

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The potential of collaborative solutions to improve management of California (United States) wildlands

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Across the western United States and elsewhere, the frequency and intensity of wildland fires are projected to increase, posing a challenge to natural-resource management. While collaborative, multi-benefit partnerships can provide opportunities to overcome barriers to effective management, in many cases these collaborations have been slow to form. To investigate this issue, we surveyed natural-resource professionals in California to identify barriers to effective management and potential solutions in the form of collaborations. Analyzing our data using social network analysis, results show that limited financial and human capital were the most salient barriers in our sample, while lack of public support and data were less common concerns. Collaboration networks were dominated by land-management and other public agencies, as they were the most frequently mentioned as collaborators. Tribes, universities, private-sector organizations, and watershed-service providers mentioned other actors as collaborators more often than they were mentioned as collaborators, while the opposite was true for land-management and other public agencies. Universities, land managers, watershed-service providers, and private-sector organizations displayed a strong desire to establish new collaborations, while other public agencies and tribes displayed less of a desire to do so. Overall, this study highlights insufficient financial and human capital as barriers confronting natural-resource management in California. It also shows that organizations with the capacity and capability to help mitigate these shortcomings, such as the private sector and universities, are among those most positive toward additional collaborations. Our findings suggest that initiatives to expand regional collaborative partnerships could increase the effectiveness of natural-resource management in California.

