Springing Fire Management's Rigidity Trap: Inspiring Ecological Restoration through the US Fire Learning Network

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Panel: Resilience through Multiscalar Collaboration

Wildland fire management in the United States is caught in a rigidity trap. Despite wide recognition and public policy that suggests that public agencies should engage in ecological fire restoration, fire suppression dominates. The US Fire Learning Network, a multiscalar collaborative endeavor between federal land management agencies and The Nature Conservancy, offers the potential to spring the trap. By circulating people and planning products among landscape and regional-scale collaboratives, the network develops and disseminates innovative approaches to ecological fire restoration planning and management. The paper traces how the network has influenced changes in fire and land management plans as well as federal policy to support ecological fire restoration. Through experimentation and innovation generated in the network, the FLN initiates a “revolt” at multiple scales in the Panarchy of social-ecological systems associated with fire management. The analysis suggests that multiscalar collaborative planning networks can enable resource management agencies to overcome rigidity traps that prevent them from responding to complex cross-scalar problems.