

Managing the Risks of Risk Management on Large Fires

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and

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ABSTRACT

Large fires pose risks to a number of important values, including the ecology, property and the lives of incident responders. A relatively unstudied aspect of fire management is the risks to which incident managers are exposed due to organizational and sociopolitical factors that put them in a position of, for example, potential liability or degradation of their image as a leader. This paper explores the hypothesis that the concept of risk in large fire management extends beyond the potential for physical harm and includes perceived potential damages in the form of social harm that can accrue to fire management personnel. A set of fires from USDA Forest Service Regions 5 (Pacific Southwest) and 6 (Pacific Northwest) for the years 2009 – 2013 are selected based on cost (>\$5,000,000) and examined using a combination of structured interviews and a self-report protocol to elicit and codify the experiences of fire managers (including line officers, fire staff and incident commanders) with regard to a range of risks associated with incident management, including sociopolitical factors that influence incident management and perceptions of career risk. The resulting information will be modeled in terms of the relationship between incident manager perceptual factors and decisions on the incident.

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