



COMMUNITY LIAISON PROGRAMS What They Are and How They Work

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Community Liaison Programs (CLPs) are formal arrangements between communities and wildland fire management agencies. Their purpose is to provide interactive communication between the community, wildland fire managers, and Incident Management Teams (IMTs) about how fires are managed, what values are at risk. They provide fire managers with valuable local knowledge.



Trust is critical to the success of Community Liaison Programs between agencies, Incident Management Teams, and Community Members.

"They listened, and did what they said they would do."

Kathy McBroom
Salmon River Fire Safe Council

Photo: Will Harling, Salmon River Community Liaison coordinating with Adrienne Harling, Community Member, Butler Incident, Aug 2013, by Al Storey.

Success in California

In 2013, in the sparsely populated Salmon River Basin of the Klamath National Forest (NF), the local Community Liaison Program (CLP) partners included the Klamath National Forest, National Incident Management Teams, and the local Fire Safe Council CLP.

The Salmon River Fire Safe Council (FSC) established their CLP to create professional and planned information management among community members and between a single, primary community liaison and an individual from Incident Command during every fire. Their model has been so successful that the head of local US Forest Service unit, Klamath National Forest Supervisor Patty Grantham, asked all other Klamath FSCs to replicate and begin using the Salmon River model.



IC Glen Uhlig, Ranch Liaison Sam Mori, Agency Administrator Rich Adams and NE NV FMO Mike Ford on the Wieland Fire, July 2013, by Elko BLM.

Success in Nevada

The Northeast Nevada Interagency Fire Management area has developed a long-standing and successful interagency Community Liaison Program that has led to better understanding, communication and working relationships among the wildland fire community, local ranchers and permittees.

The 15 year old program uses local ranchers as liaisons for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Elko District and Incident Management Teams (IMT). The liaison works with the agency administrator, as well as the Incident Commander (IC) to facilitate information sharing, resolution of issues, and stakeholder input during the incident.



“This program has paid off with many dividends; from direct fire support, to better community understanding of agency procedures and fire policies, to effective IMT interactions, and to a clearer sense by the community that they are part of solving a common issue,”

**Dylan Rader, Assistant FMO,
Elko BLM**

Elko BLM Acting FMO Dylan Rader discusses the fire situation with IC Cody Goff, Fire Operations Supervisor, Wells Station, Elko BLM.

Keys to Success

People close to the liaison programs have described how the programs work and keys to making them successful. It is important to **involve** people who are well connected in the community and agencies. **Communicate** frequently. Work on building and keeping **trust**. Provide real time and relevant **information** people can use. Build **knowledge** – of wildland fire and of the communities. Knowledgeable people collaborate more effectively.

How to Implement a Successful Community Liaison Program

- Establish and use the Community Liaison Program before a wildfire threatens. The program serves many agency-community collaboration purposes besides wildfire.
- Choose people who can “speak for” their neighbors or the agencies because they are well connected within the informal social networks and are trusted and reliable.
- Involve people who work well together and are effective collaborators.
- Create single points-of-contact between the community liaisons and the agency and incident management teams.
- Use the informal communication networks and established media used by the community rather than creating new ones.
- Organize formal areas of responsibility and communication channels.
- Two-way communication is essential. Communication is most effective when it is a conversation among equals rather than a “briefing.”
- Develop and share a common overall goal for management of the wildfire.
- Establish and maintain interpersonal trust by sharing reliable and useful information, listening, and following through on commitments.
- Learn about the incident command system and how it works. Know who does what on an incident management team.
- Agency and Incident Management Team personnel need to learn about the communities, their needs, perceptions, and values-at-risk.
- Provide real-time, reliable, and location-specific information about the fire that people can actually use.
- Communicate frequently. Communicate even when nothing has changed.
- Learn from each situation and use the learning to improve communications and collaboration.

COMMUNITY LIAISON PROGRAMS

Success stories analyzed:

Better than Ever: Partnership of Community Liaisons, USFS & Incident Management, Cohesive Strategy Success Story: California. http://forestsandrangelands.gov/success/stories/2014/documents/KlamathNF_SalmonRiverCLP_SuccessStory.pdf

Northeast Nevada Local Liaison Program, Cohesive Strategy Success Story: Nevada. <http://forestsandrangelands.gov/strategy/documents/rsc/west/stories/WRSC-Oct-2012-Success-story-NE Nevada.pdf>

“The residents show up, they want to be involved, they are proactive and very knowledgeable about fire. If there is a large wildfire near a community, you want to work with these types of people,”

**Patty Grantham
Klamath NF Supervisor**



The Cohesive Strategy Digest is a publication of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy Communications Team.

Digests describe themes common to success from Cohesive Strategy Success Stories.

The goal of the Digests is to make Cohesive Strategy Implementation Projects more successful.

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