

GOT TRUST? NATIONWIDE SURVEY RESULTS CONCERNING PUBLIC TRUST IN GOVERNMENT FUELS AND FIRE MANAGEMENT, AND PREFERENCES REGARDING FUELS REDUCTION METHODS

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ABSTRACT

Much of the public's attitude toward wildland fire as an important part of natural processes has been misguided, sometimes through programs perpetuating fear and misunderstanding of the vital role of fire in wildlands. Results presented here were part of a larger study that focused on the broad topic of public values, attitudes, and behaviors toward wildland fire. More specifically, the study was intended to contribute to development of a comprehensive understanding of public values, attitudes, and behaviors, and to understanding public preferences related to wildland fuels and fire management. Unlike previous research, this study aimed to provide national or "macro" level information. A broad-based national fire module was included with the ongoing National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE 2000). The survey is telephone-administered via CATI (computer-aided telephone interviewing) programs and random digit dialing through the Survey Research Center at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. A stratified random sampling procedure was used, resulting in 6,979 completed responses. Results presented here will concern public trust in governments' abilities to manage fuels and fire, and public preferences concerning fuel reduction methods. Results indicate that while there is a general trust in land management officials there are still concerns, particularly regarding ability and capacity to manage for fire in forest and rangelands, use of taxpayers' money, and long-term forest health. The public also has some fairly clear preferences concerning fire management practices on public lands. Prescribed fire was most highly regarded between it, mechanical thinning, and chemical treatments. However, its use is not without concern. Harm to fish and wildlife, smoke management, and effects on scenery and recreation opportunities are among public concerns.

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