

**ENGAGING VARIOUS AUDIENCES IN  
PRESCRIBED FIRE**

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**“You may not be a communications professional,  
but you ARE a prescribed burn professional, and  
as such, your involvement in communication is  
key to having a successful prescribed burn  
program.”**



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**Why Communicate?**

- Create public acceptance and support
- Address audience concerns
- Share your objectives
- Build awareness and public trust
- Foster a culture of living with fire
- Correct and consistent messaging
- Information Sharing vs Communication
- Tell your story




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**Who is your audience?**

Who needs to know?  
 Internal vs External  
 Rural vs Urban  
 Identify barriers  
 What are their cultural/social norms?  
 Where and from Who do they get their info?  
 Are there technology challenges?  
 Are they receptive or unreceptive?

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**Why do we use prescribed fire?**

Prescribed fire vs wildfire  
 Proactive vs reactive messaging

Ecosystem health  
 Hazardous fuel reduction

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**How do you communicate?**

Develop a communication plan

- Timely
- Manageable
- Effective
- Measurable
- Format
- Consistent terminology
- Words matter
- Images matter

\*\*\*Crisis Communication Plan



COMMUNICATION  
HAVE A COMMUNICATION PLAN



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The story of two prescribed burns  
January 21, 2020



Orlando

Tampa

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What does **social media use** reveal about **current perceptions** regarding the use of prescribed burning in Florida?



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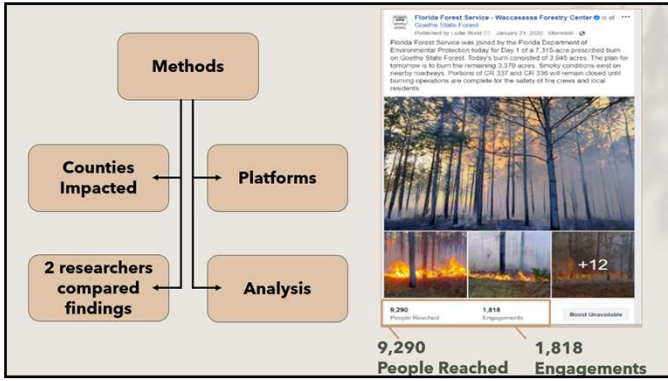
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### Social Media Post Examples

**242 Comments**  
**457 Shares**

**143 Comments**  
**241 Shares**

**195 Comments**  
**191 Shares**

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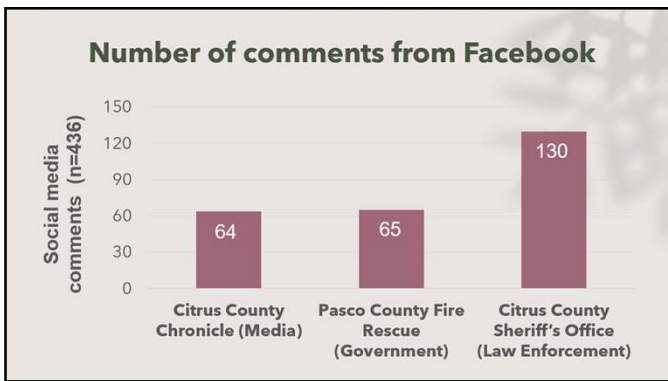
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**Champions** - passionate support with positive comments to social media posts

**Why are they burning??!! Wildlife is already struggling for places to live...**

A controlled burn rids the forest of built-up materials that create the uncontrolled fires.

You need to understand the benefits of prescribed burns for wildlife.

**Why are we having intentional fires? Trees provide oxygen for us to live.**

Not burning trees. Just build-up of undergrowth and dead material...

California and Australia are why. Don't want super fires.

It's also good for wildlife. The fire will burn off the dead leaves and brush. New growth will begin immediately.

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**Champions** are important for fire communications

**Champions** - emerging trend can assist in building capacity of prescribed fire messengers

'Peer-to-peer' conversations increase strength of communication outreach

Strength of community **champions**

Dissuades misinformation & rumors/ encourages trust in the agency

Future research should examine platforms (i.e., Nextdoor app or Facebook groups; like "Word-of-Mouth")

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**Build Trust and Support**

Trust is a predictor of public support

Build relationships with audience

What are their concerns?

What are their values?

Do they understand?

Who are the trusted messengers?

Consistency in spokesperson

Include PIO in Rx burn organization

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What **methods** are natural resource communication professionals using for prescribed burning communication?



What are their **needs** for implementing outreach, and how can their agencies become **trusted messengers**?

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State	Number of Interviews
Alabama	2
Florida	4
Georgia	2
Louisiana	2
Mississippi	1
North Carolina	3
South Carolina	2
Southern Group of State Foresters	2
Tall Timbers	1
Tennessee	4
Texas	3
<b>Total number of interviews</b>	<b>26</b>

### Participant Selection

Interviewees from state forestry and other natural resource agencies, as well as regional organizations

Zoom interviews –successes, failures, perceived barriers

Semi-structured approach

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### Findings

- Primary communication barrier is capacity
- Communication methods use many platforms
- Audiences vary – cultural/geographical/generational barriers
- Communication successes AND failures depend on timing, accuracy, and transparency
- Trusted messengers can vary
- Mostly positive perception

### Recommendations

- A collaborative approach = consistent, timely, and transparent approach to prescribed fire communications



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Who are the **trusted messengers**?

What are the **preferred methods** of receiving those messages?

Which sources are considered **trusted and/or up-to-date**?

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### Current and preferred sources of prescribed fire information

Sources	NIPFLs n=4,598	Prescribed Burn Professionals n=90	Public n=42
U.S. Forest Service	39%	40%	
	43%	55%	
State Forest Service / State Department of Agriculture	33%	81%	31%
	41%	90%	55%
County Forestry Agency or County Council	26%		22%
	32%		30%
Social media			36%
			33%
Southern Fire Exchange		43%	
		42%	

Key: Current Preferred

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### Preferred methods of delivery for prescribed fire information

Sources	NIPFLs n=4,598	Prescribed Burn Professionals n=88	Public n=41
Email	48%	87%	61%
Social Media	30%	51%	34%
Newsletter delivered by e-mail or mail	30%		34%
In-person workshop		49%	

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### Most trusted and up-to-date sources of prescribed fire information

Sources	NIPFLs n=4,598	Prescribed Burn Professionals n=90	Public n=42
State Forest Service / State Department of Agriculture	N/A	90%	85%
	N/A	49%	80%
U.S. Forest Service	N/A	53%	56%
	N/A	38%	50%
County Forestry Agency or County Council	N/A		39%
	N/A		43%
Southern Fire Exchange	N/A	63%	
	N/A	49%	

Key:  Most Trusted  Up-To-Date

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### When do you start and how often do you communicate?

- Start early and update often
- Don't wait until the day of the burn
- You don't have to do it alone – Delegate
- Coordinate with your partners - Collaborate
- Don't recreate the wheel
- Tape short and engaging videos
- Share land management plans w HOAs and others
- \*Create realistic expectations



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### Community Events

- Fire Festivals
- Invite those unfamiliar with prescribed fire
- Invite those with 'skin in the game'
- Face-to-Face communications



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**Working with the media and cooperators**

Share prescribed fire messaging and posts with PAOs and PIOs  
(ripple effect)  
Increases capacity  
Continuity of messaging  
Reaching different audiences



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**Expanding collaborations**

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**Identifying trusted messengers and sources of prescribed fire information**



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