



# Module 4: Trainer's Guide

## Communicating with Interface Residents and Leaders



### USING THIS MODULE

This module will help improve natural resource professionals' communication skills as they work in the wildland-urban interface. Communication is perhaps the most important skill that ties together the different activities of a resource professional working in the interface. Working with policy makers, forest landowners, and interface residents requires communication skills. Although fact sheets and exercises in this module could have been included in any or all of the other modules, we chose to present them in this communications module to emphasize this important skill.

*Part I* of this module provides information and exercises to reinforce the basic dimensions of communication. These sections may be more useful for new resource professionals than seasoned staff who are accustomed to working with people.

#### *Part I: Communication Foundations*

1. How to communicate effectively
2. Considering the sender
3. Engaging an audience
4. Considering the message
5. Putting it all together

*Part II* uses these basic skills to address concerns more typical of the wildland-urban interface.

#### *Part II: Interface Communication Skills*

6. Getting to know the audience
7. Building support for change
8. Planning a program

This document synthesizes background information on these eight themes and explains how you might use the fact sheets, case studies, and exercises. The module includes a variety of resources that can be used in any combination and order. Please take the time to review the accompanying fact sheets, case studies, exercises, and handouts; decide which skills and interface topics are most relevant to your area; and adapt the exercises to meet your needs. The Trainer's CD includes Microsoft Word® and PowerPoint® files that can be adapted if needed.

As you build your training program, you can consult the **Trainer's Introduction** to obtain ideas for using elements from other modules along with these exercises. You should also assess your participants' skills, previous training, and needs. Training programs that use the exercises give participants a chance to share their ideas, interact with each other, and discuss new solutions to their own communication challenges.

These materials are flexible. You could present the information in the fact sheets and case studies or distribute these as handouts before or during a training session. Several slide presentations are included. **Presentation 4** covers the entire module; **Presentation 4.1** provides information on the concepts in *Part I*; **Presentations 4.2, 4.3, 4.4** and **4.5** cover the concepts in *Part II*. Images for the case studies are in **Presentation 5**. These can be altered to best suit your needs. The exercises, case studies, and discussion questions were designed to help convey these communication concepts in engaging and interactive training activities. You can pick and choose among them to create a training program that fits your interface issues and audience. You can also design a quiz to measure participants' learning by selecting or adapting the sample questions provided behind the evaluation tab.

This module was written from the collective experience of several people who have backgrounds in education, psychology, and natural resources and experience in giving presentations and conducting training programs. It was reviewed by experts in communication, natural resource management, and wildland-urban interface issues and pilot tested in Lufkin, Texas with a group of interface forestry professionals. The following table lists the presentations, fact sheets, exercises, and case studies for each section of this module; they are listed in the order mentioned in this trainer's guide.

Section	Training Materials
Part I: Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation 4.1</li> </ul>
1. How to communicate effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.1: Communication Basics</li> <li>• Exercise 4.1: What Went Wrong?</li> </ul>
2. Considering the sender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise 4.2: Perception is Reality</li> </ul>
3. Engaging an audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.2: Starting an Informal Presentation</li> <li>• Exercise 4.3: Questions to Build Understanding</li> </ul>
4. Considering the message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.3: The Language of Conservation</li> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.4: The Power of Information</li> <li>• Exercise 4.4: An Edict to Edit</li> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.1: Communication Basics</li> </ul>
5. Putting it all together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise 4.5: Connecting Prose to People</li> <li>• Exercise 4.6: Critiquing Brochures</li> </ul>

Section	Training Materials
<b>5. Putting it all together (cont.)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation 4.2</li> <li>• Case Study 9: Karst Habitat Restoration in Arkansas</li> <li>• Case Study 13: A Multi-Agency Initiative: Water Education in Kentucky</li> <li>• Case Study 15: Outdoor Environmental Classrooms in Oklahoma</li> <li>• Exercise 4.7: Using Case Studies</li> <li>• Presentation 5</li> </ul>
<b>Part II: Interface Communication Skills</b>	
<b>6. Getting to know the audience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.5: Tools for Understanding Audiences</li> <li>• Exercise 4.8: Knowing the Community</li> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.2: Starting an Informal Presentation</li> <li>• Exercise 4.5: Connecting Prose to People</li> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.6: Working with African American and Hispanic Communities</li> <li>• Case Study 22: Working with Diverse Stakeholders in Newbirth, South Carolina</li> <li>• Exercise 4.7: Using Case Studies</li> <li>• Presentation 5</li> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.7: Addressing Misconceptions about Wildland-Urban Interface Issues</li> </ul>
<b>7. Building support for change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.8: Communication Challenges—When People Will Not Agree</li> <li>• Exercise 4.9: Working with Conflicts</li> <li>• Case Study 1: The Challenge of Controversial Resource Issues: Southern Pine Beetle</li> <li>• Case Study 4: Deer Debate in Hilton Head, South Carolina</li> <li>• Case Study 12: Mediating for Change in Martin County, Florida</li> <li>• Exercise 4.7: Using Case Studies</li> <li>• Presentation 5</li> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.9: Reducing Conflict</li> <li>• Presentation 4.3</li> <li>• Presentation 4.4</li> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.10: Social Marketing Tools</li> <li>• Exercise 4.10: Understanding Social Marketing</li> </ul>
<b>8. Planning a program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise 4.11: Event Planning</li> <li>• Fact Sheet 4.11: Planning a Communication Program</li> </ul>

Section	Training Materials
8. Planning a program (con't)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation 4.5</li> <li>• Case Study 9: Karst Habitat Restoration in Arkansas</li> <li>• Case Study 13: A Multi-Agency Initiative: Water Education in Kentucky</li> <li>• Exercise 4.7: Using Case Studies</li> <li>• Presentation 5</li> </ul>

## BACKGROUND

### Introduction

Wildland-urban interface issues are characterized by the people who visit, live, and work in the interface. Visitors to parks, residents of new subdivisions, and farmers and loggers who struggle to maintain their livelihood are some of the people involved in the complex web of interface issues. Community planners, county commissioners, firefighters, and urban tree removal companies also have a stake in interface issues. To work effectively on interface issues, these people need information. Natural resource agencies often have that information.

Communicating that information is a tricky endeavor. While it may be easy merely to provide information, it takes a completely different strategy to share information so that it is understood and motivational. Good communication is a two-way process, requiring that the provider also be a listener. This module helps resource management staff understand and use basic tenets of good communication in the context of wildland-urban interface issues with several audiences.

We assume that natural resource professionals will have opportunities to work with residents of the interface on concerns that residents can do something about on their own property—e.g., landscaping their yards, reducing fuel loads, removing invasive plants, building compost piles, or providing wildlife habitat. At this scale the resident is making decisions about private property. In many areas of the interface, the number of owners and their management of small parcels constitute great risks to ecosystem health. Communicating with residents requires that resource professionals understand the residents' viewpoints and concerns. Several of the exercises in this module help participants practice working with residents.



We also assume that resource professionals will have opportunities to communicate with large landowners, county commissioners, and town planners about interface issues that affect the community. **Module 3** provides information about working at the community level with decision makers, but the communication skills for doing so are in this module. At this scale the issues spill over from one landowner to another, from one subdivision to the region, and reverberate through the community. A resource professional can help a community prepare for wildland fire, place a

resource biologist on the planning commission, consider how urban trees reduce the need for storm-water management, identify funds to hire an interface educator, or help a community recover from a forest pest outbreak.

The basic tenets of communication are the same for the individual landowners and community leaders, but the strategies for using them vary greatly. You, the trainer, can decide whether to split these two contexts or cover them together. We recommend you try to address them both, as the contrasting strategies may help make the differences more apparent.

## Why Focus on Communication?

Where resource management activities fail to achieve their goals, part of the problem is often poor or inappropriate communication: the defiant landowner may refuse to be told what to do, even though the resource professional's recommendation will help earn him more income; the newcomer may wonder why she should conserve water when the lakes are still full; a brochure may alert residents to the threat of wildfire by showing cinders and sobbing families where houses once stood; commissioners might develop a tree ordinance that aggravates the risk of insect pests or wildfire. Instead of achieving clarity, agency communications, when not carefully planned and prepared, may generate confusion, fear, or anger. People may ignore messages or simply refuse to change their behavior. Trust in the agency may be damaged. Worse, budgets may be reduced, business opportunities may be lost, and legislation may be overturned.

Sometimes circumstances, prior experience, and attitudes prevent people from understanding the resource professional's message. But in many cases, a resource professional can change the message, engage residents in thinking through the problem, and guide people to reach a conclusion similar to his or her own.

There are several important reasons to promote good communication in a natural resource agency:

1. The public may not understand the basics of ecosystem function or resource management, and without this understanding may practice inappropriate behaviors or may oppose the agency's efforts. Although resource professionals cannot make someone understand information, they can present it in such a way to make acceptance and understanding more likely.
2. No agency can manage all of the natural resources in the interface single-handedly. Community residents can help enhance the quality of their own environment. They need information and skills and opportunities to become more aware of the problems, to know what to do, and to do it.
3. Communities can join with resource agencies in partnership to manage the resources in the interface. The support of community leaders and officials could be useful for decisions that affect state management policy. The technical information will support leaders, residents, and visitors as they join agency efforts to enhance their environment.



- Communities make decisions that affect how resources are used and managed. Your agency might have information the community leaders can use (*Module 3*).

## PART I: Communication Foundation



**Presentation 4.1** provides an orientation to this entire section. Please select the slides that will help you make the points you wish to cover.

### 1. How to Communicate Effectively



Communication is a two-way enterprise. If effective, a sender and a receiver share information with each other. Not only does the receiver understand the message from the sender, but the receiver communicates that new knowledge back to the source with feedback or questions. **Fact Sheet 4.1: Communication Basics** offers information if your participants need a refresher in how communication works. There is a great deal of information here that can help improve communications in the interface. The accompanying **Exercise 4.1: What Went Wrong?** gives participants a chance to apply this information in interface situations. This exercise may help experienced participants share their ideas with newer employees.

For communication to be effective, it must be designed to fit the audience. Information that is too simple or too complicated is often ignored. Telling someone what they already know can bore people and cause them to disregard other more important information. Giving them information that is too complicated may make them tune out. For information to be “just right,” it helps to identify the audience and understand a bit about what they know. Similarly, knowing what the audience cares about also helps a resource professional pitch the message appropriately. Messages should build on what people know by adding new insights and details. When the audience is a group of decision makers or community leaders, it is equally important to construct a presentation that matches their level of understanding of the problem, addresses their concerns, and gives them the technical information they need to weigh consequences of proposals. *Section 6* in *Part II* of this document has additional information about how to find out what the audience is thinking.

### 2. Consider the Sender



The three elements of communication—sender, receiver, and message—suggest ways that communication activities could be improved. In this section, the emphasis is on the sender. It is prudent for resource professionals to examine the perceptions the public has about their agency, as well as their own attitudes about working with interface issues and residents. **Exercise 4.2: Perception Is Reality** enables you to lead a discussion as training participants mull over several questions. How is your uniform perceived? With what questions do people turn to you for assistance? There are also personal questions that resource professionals can contemplate. What motivates each resource professional to communicate with the public? What attitudes about the public and the resource might be apparent in their conversations? How might they be perceived by residents or by community leaders?

Many communication problems stem from difficulties across all of these elements, but one classic example speaks to the attitude of the sender. In the 1890s the dean of Cornell University's forestry school, one of the first in the country, was so convinced that his science-based plan for converting the low-grade hardwoods to a high-yielding, profitable forest was sound that he neglected to help the residents understand his perspective. The school forest was located in the Adirondacks where nearby landowners enjoyed hunting and restful vacations. The dean failed to listen to residents' concerns. He had been trained in Germany and knew much more than the local residents about good forest practices. Cornell's president sided with his dean, but the wealthy landowners had the governor's ear. With a stroke of the pen, the entire forestry school ceased to exist in the next year's state budget (Fazio and Gilbert 1986).

Building trust, so that a given audience is receptive to the ideas of the sender (in this case the agencies and resource professionals), is important. Participants may wish to consider strategies that help build trust with different audiences, or consider partnerships with organizations that already enjoy a high level of trust.

As an agency increases communication with the public, resource agencies should be sure that the appropriate personnel are easily reached by those who have need assistance. Resource agencies do not have a presence in every town, nor are their offices *in town* in many cases. Making agency personnel accessible is an important step toward good communication.

Consider the following questions when determining if an agency is meeting the needs of the local residents: Do people call the office with the types of questions the agency wants to answer? Do people know which agency to call for information about natural resource issues in the interface? How is the agency listed in the phone book? Is the website address easy to remember? Is the website easy to navigate? It is often difficult to find government agencies since they may be listed under another department; for example, county foresters are often hired by state agencies; extension offices may be listed under a university. Agencies that want to provide information about the interface should make sure they are easy to find in the places residents would think to look.

### 3. Engaging an Audience

It is easy to understand that some approaches are more damaging than helpful: an authoritarian lecture on what not to do, a threatening message of "bad things are going to happen if you don't," or an overly cautious treatment of too many options that do not compel anyone to action. Audiences may react negatively to the attitudes and information that presenters convey. The most helpful approach for resource agencies may be one that strengthens a partnership between resource professionals and the public, conveys a "we're all in this together" attitude, and provides messages that are relevant to each audience. One of the most powerful techniques of good communication is to engage the audience so they are asking and answering their own questions. This is made easier if the speaker knows about the audience (*Section 6*). The basics of getting people to talk to each other by prompting them with the



right questions is presented in **Fact Sheet 4.2: Starting an Informal Presentation** and **Exercise 4.3: Questions to Build Understanding**.

## 4. Considering the Message



The actual message is also of great importance in communication. **Fact Sheet 4.3: The Language of Conservation** explains how the public perceives key words and phrases that are commonly used by resource agencies. Resource professionals will likely have a very different definition and perception of these words, highlighting the importance of understanding the audience and pilot testing materials with them if effective communication is the goal. You might ask your group to rate some of the words on the fact sheet, or guess how the public might react before distributing the information.



**Fact Sheet 4.4: The Power of Information** briefly describes that all information is not equal. Some information provides background understanding, while other information provides steps of what to do. Since providing information is an important role for natural resource agencies, it is important to consider what type of information should be shared. The following information supplements the fact sheet:

### Background explanations

Some people find it very important to understand *why*. Indeed, we are curious creatures and explanations that provide rhyme and reason are helpful, particularly if we anticipate that we will have to apply this information and identify problems on our own. Some resource professionals have a tendency, however, to explain an interface problem using the reasons they personally find most important, based on their extensive knowledge of ecosystem function. Instead, explanations should be based on what is most helpful to the residents. A letter alerting residents of an upcoming prescribed burn on nearby land should not begin with the importance of fire to restore ecosystem health. It should start with the importance of reducing the risk of wildfire to their neighborhood. Similarly, a presentation to a county commission might introduce the benefits of an urban forest with projections of dollars saved by not constructing storm water retention ponds and enhanced community spirit.

### Procedural information

When asking residents to do something to improve the quality of the interface—reducing fuel loads, removing invasive plants, restricting wandering cats, planting butterfly gardens, etc.—it is very common to provide prescriptive, how-to lists of bulleted points. Such information should be short and clear: a one-page flyer with essential points that will help people know what to do. The single biggest difference between recyclers and non-recyclers in an Ann Arbor, Michigan, study was that the non-recyclers didn't know the details—do newspapers have to be tied? do cans have to be flattened? (De Young 1988-89).

Without the appropriate background to support the action steps, however, procedural information is often not sufficient (*Box 1*). There is a fine balance between providing background and providing how-to information. Both are needed; neither can

suffice without the other. In Colorado focus groups, for example, residents said they wanted to know more about fire behavior and why they should manage fuels in a certain way (Burns et al. 2003). Yet it is often overwhelming to provide all this information. A careful assessment of the audience, what they already know, what they want to know, and how much they need to adapt the information to their own circumstance will be helpful. For instance, if a resource professional visits a home and instructs the resident to remove this tree, trim that limb, and plant a new shrub, this specific direction may be sufficient. But if generic information is provided about the importance of removing trees, trimming limbs, and planting shrubs, the residents probably need to understand more about how fire moves through the landscape to be able to apply these concepts at home. When the residents are interested, committed, and asking questions, they are able to take in more information; they then are willing to put forth the effort to learn (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). And of course the information provided must be clear and comprehensible.

### **Box 1:** Bayscapes Program Provides Information

The Alliance for Chesapeake Bay and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service jointly sponsor the Bayscapes program to help homeowners reduce nonpoint source water pollution by changing their yard landscaping practices. Launched in an area of the Chesapeake Bay watershed where nitrogen and phosphorus pollution came from lawns and gardens, the program is succeeding in changing the expectations people have for attractive front yards. A variety of communication tools are used to provide information. A few emphasize background—the program brochure and fact sheets—but most provide procedural information—directories of plant nurseries, lists of native plants, sample garden designs, and butterfly garden kits. Training workshops blend the two types of information as well, providing principles of “bayscaping” and hands-on practice building a model garden. Websites are typically excellent tools for providing all the introductory information and the specific details that anyone might need. Since people navigate to the information they want, they do not have to suffer through information they cannot use.

*Source: NCTC 2004.*

## **Information about impact and consequences**

People also need to know the consequences (both benefits and costs) of taking action. There are a variety of ways this information can be relevant. While they might need to know that removing a tree is important to reduce risk of fire, they also want to know what their home will look like *without* that tree. People may be excited about putting in a butterfly garden, only to realize later that it requires maintenance and upkeep, and worse, that caterpillars destroy it! A better understanding of the consequences of their actions helps prepare them for related and subsequent events.

Focus group members in Colorado mentioned the importance of knowing if their actions were sufficient (Burns et al. 2003). This is often called impact information.

Educators have long acknowledged the importance of providing feedback to learners through comments on papers and test grades. People need to know that their actions were done correctly (Brandon and Lewis 1999). In the context of reducing problems in the interface, however, there is another element to “did I do it right?” The need to receive feedback could also be driven by wondering if the activity is effective at reducing the severity of the problem. Will this landscaping practice conserve water? Will this application repel deer? Will removing these shrubs reduce my risk of wild-fire? Since many agencies are hesitant to promise results (i.e., “If you clear 50 feet of defensible space, your house will not burn.”), residents do not have good knowledge of the efficacy of their actions. If agencies cannot make such promises, they should consider obtaining more media coverage when good practices lead to intended results. In this way, residents and decision makers can see the impact of the resource professionals’ suggestions.

For the issues that are likely to involve a major effort for the long term, an agency may consider developing systems to monitor the consequences of key actions. This information should be provided to the people who are involved (so that they know their actions are achieving their goal) and can be used to entice more people into taking these actions. Feedback mechanisms are extremely important in helping people realize the consequences of their behavior. With environmental issues in particular, the consequences are so diffused and long term that it is challenging for anyone to feel a personal commitment. Clever agencies find ways to shorten that distance between action and consequence with an indicator. A highway cloverleaf has been used to test car emissions and inform drivers of their contribution to air quality as they circle around the exit. The Center for a New American Dream’s Turning the Tide website offers participants a sense of how much energy and water are being conserved by those who commit to the organization’s key actions. Before and after photographs of habitat restoration projects help build support for invasive exotic species removal in South Florida.

Presentations to community leaders and decision makers should stress the consequences of action and inaction with very specific projections. Use models and data to suggest that if this decision is made, the consequence could include so many acres of habitat lost, so many species affected, so many acres of impervious surface created, and so many dollars spent to recover the lost ecosystem services. If this is the type of information they are accustomed to hearing, do not disappoint them.



**Exercise 4.4: An Edict to Edit** allows participants to practice their hand at converting technical information into a message the public can understand. You might review elements from **Fact Sheet 4.1: Communication Basics** and engage them in a discussion of what elements draw an audience to read and learn from written material. It is a fairly straightforward process to reduce jargon and simplify sentences in these examples. Challenge your participants to rewrite their paragraphs with relevant information, meaningful examples, and the words “you” or “we.”

## 5. Putting It All Together

With a new perspective on how to improve perceptions of the sender, the interest of the audience, and the message, your participants are ready to put the pieces together

and communicate! Good communication can help build understanding, which can defuse conflict, build support, and engage community members in working with resource agencies to maintain ecosystem health. Partnerships in resource management are built on trust, common goals, and good communication.

Good communication also depends on some of the things we learned in fifth grade. A presentation, a poster, or a brochure should start with an introduction, continue to a body of three to five main points, and have a conclusion. The introduction should “hook” the audience and make the message relevant to them. The body should provide clear and compelling reasons, couched in the language of the audience and addressing their values and concerns. The conclusion should remind them of the main points and stress what actions they should take. Several exercises and case studies help reinforce these messages in your training program.

**Exercise 4.5: Connecting Prose to People**, suggests adding an audience to the newly edited paragraphs from **Exercise 4.4**. You can select the audiences that are most relevant to your region, or see what the participants can do with all of them. As they work to make their message relevant to each audience, you might challenge them to consider a group made up of all of these potential audience members.



A capstone activity for this section, **Exercise 4.6: Critiquing Brochures**, uses agency brochures to summarize many of these concepts and communication basics. A few brochures are provided in this module, but you can also make your own collection and adapt the worksheet to help participants review the concepts you have already discussed. Is the text interesting and relevant to the audience? Does it provide background, procedural, or impact information? The purpose of the exercise is not to train resource professionals to become graphic designers, but rather to use brochures to reinforce the elements of good communication that you are presenting. It may be difficult, however, not to focus on the design elements. The lack of white space, the size of headings, and the placement of graphics tend to affect brochure quality. **Presentation 4.2** offers some information that will help you prepare your group to critique brochures.



Several case studies may be appropriate at this point in the training program. **Case Study 9: Karst Habitat Restoration in Arkansas**, **Case Study 13: A Multi-Agency Initiative: Water Education in Kentucky**, and **Case Study 15: Outdoor Environmental Classrooms in Oklahoma** offer glimpses into how agencies have wrestled with developing communication programs in various circumstances. These vignettes can be used in a number of ways (see note below).



**Note:** For each of the case studies mentioned in this Trainer's Guide, discussion questions can be found in **Exercise 4.7: Using Case Studies** and slides can be found in **Presentation 5**.



You can also collect your own case studies from the local newspaper. Stories about nuisance wildlife, noise and light pollution, water quality programs, new zoning, and wildland-urban interface conflicts are common where urban development is expanding into natural areas. These local examples may help your participants explore the shortcomings and advantages of good communication.

## **PART II: Interface Communication Skills**

### **6. Getting To Know The Audience**

One of the most important things a communicator can do in preparation for an event is to find out about the audience. The more natural resource professionals understand who they are speaking with, the more effective the communication. Knowing about the audience will determine what words are chosen, how the message is crafted as well as the format, the examples, and the questions.

Unfortunately, many resource professionals either think they already know their audience, assume the next audience is just like the last, or are in too big a hurry to worry about it. This section has several subthemes and a fact sheet accompanies each:

- Who makes up the interface audience?
- Working with audiences who are different from you
- How to help people understand difficult ideas

#### **Who makes up the interface audience?**

Resource professionals often complain that new residents to the interface came from other parts of the country or a city and don't understand how the local ecosystem operates. These newcomers complain about deer eating their shrubbery, smoke on the horizon, manure spread on nearby fields, and the lack of police or fire services. This may characterize some new residents in many areas of the South. But this isn't everyone. A resource professional who assumes an ignorant Northerner will answer the doorbell may be surprised to find that a long-time Southerner lives there, one who actually knows the fire regime or the dates of deer hunting season.

Audiences across the South are quite varied. It is not the purpose of this document to provide the information resource professionals need. It is more important to suggest strategies your participants can use to learn about their audiences. To make the point that their assumptions may not be accurate, however, here are some examples of who live in the southern wildland-urban interface:

- In-depth interviews with 43 interface residents at risk of wildland fire in north central Florida in 2001 revealed that 56 percent had lived in their home from 3-10 years, 74 percent had lived in Florida for more than 10 years, and 21 percent were retired. Educational background was distributed as follows: 14 percent were high school graduates, 21 percent were college graduates and 23 percent held graduate degrees (Monroe and Bowers 2002).

- Research shows African Americans are less likely than Whites to participate in forest-based recreation, the exception being fishing. Recent work indicates that both ethnic groups have similar concern levels (Mohai and Bryant 1998) but that African Americans are still less likely to interact with nature. Even studies of rural residents show African Americans are less likely to recreate in forested areas and indicate less emotional attachment to wildlands (**Fact Sheet 4.6: Working with African American and Hispanic Communities**).
- Phone interviews with 675 randomly selected residents of rural and suburban Florida indicate that they lived in Florida for an average of 24 years. Twenty-four percent said they had worked in agricultural or natural resources professions at some time in their career. The educational background of these residents showed that 31 percent graduated from high school, 19 percent had two years of college, 15.5 percent graduated with a bachelor's degree, and 12 percent obtained a graduate degree.



Even in Florida's high turnover population, 79 percent of the suburban and rural residents in this survey understood that fire helps to renew a forest, 63 percent could correctly define prescribed fire, and nearly half of the respondents said they were likely to take action to protect their home from wildfire (Jacobson, Monroe, and Marynowski 2001).

- Recent studies of non-industrial forest landowners provide more clues about who lives in the wildland-urban interface. In Pennsylvania, Alabama, and the Tennessee Valley, those who own forested properties have very similar attitudes and preferences to those who live in urban areas. One cannot assume that forest owners are long-time residents of rural areas, that they use tools like prescribed fire or herbicides to manage their forest, or that they shun regulations that would limit their management options (Bliss et al. 1994, Bliss et al. 1997). In the eastern United States, when it comes to forest management, interface residents and forest owners are more similar than different (Egan and Luloff 2000). Use **Fact Sheet 2.1: Who are Interface Landowners?** to explore the characteristics of forest landowners.



These brief examples indicate that the interface has a mixture of residents. Some residents have lived in the area for a considerable amount of time. Some have high school degrees, while others have graduate degrees. They may or may not be knowledgeable about interface issues. Few assumptions can be made about this varied group. Just because they are newcomers does not mean they wish to preserve trees. Just because they understand the risk of fire does not mean they have reduced their risk.

Existing articles and data can only do so much to help resource professionals understand their audiences. Interviews, conversations, and focus groups are tools that can be used to confirm what they already know or add new insights into the changing demographics. **Fact Sheet 4.5: Tools for Understanding Audiences** provides a brief description of the commonly used tools in social science research and audience



assessments. Additional information can be obtained from communication and program development materials.

It is also helpful to know *how* people get information about the wildland-urban interface. Knowing if the newspaper or conversations at the neighborhood T-ball game are sources of trustworthy information can help a resource agency deliver information more effectively. Knowing the coordinators of the homeowner associations can help with the distribution of flyers and information. In general, mass media (TV, radio, newspaper, Internet) are best used to raise awareness, and personal media (workshops, programs, demonstrations, conversations at events) are most effective at helping someone adopt a new idea (Rogers 1995). **Exercise 4.8: Knowing the Community** gives your participants a chance to discover what they know, don't know, and might be able to find out about the audiences they work with. You can use this exercise to help participants share what they already know and realize what other pieces of information are available to them.



The beginning of a workshop or presentation provides a good opportunity to confirm that the assumptions the resource professional has about the audience are indeed accurate. It is important to understand some demographic information and basic values regardless of the interface issue that is being addressed. **Fact Sheet 4.2: Starting an Informal Presentation** suggests several ways to achieve this goal.



Once natural resource professionals know about their audiences, they need to use that information in the development of their programs! If one subdivision is predominantly elderly, a natural resource professional might connect a Scout Troop with the homeowners association to provide labor for vegetation removal. If the audience is Hispanic and the resource manager is not, it might be helpful to first contact Hispanic community leaders to introduce the concept and obtain support for presenting the issue to the residents. If most of the residents have young children, consider advertising natural resource messages through the local day care services or providing information in a coloring book. **Exercise 4.5: Connecting Prose to People** gives participants an opportunity to imagine how programs and messages could be crafted for particular audiences.



Exercises in **Module 2** and **Module 3** also give participants opportunities to communicate messages to interface residents and community leaders (**Exercise 2.2: Creating a Department of Interface Resources**, **Exercise 2.3: Advertising Interface Services**, **Exercise 2.5: Firewise Conversations**, **Exercise 2.7: Promoting Forest Health**, **Exercise 2.8: Wild Stories**, **Exercise 2.13: Juggling Multiple Objectives**, **Exercise 3.3 Creating a Statement**, **Exercise 3.7: Guiding Neighborhood Policy**, and **Exercise 3.8: Role-Playing Development Decisions**).



## Working with audiences who are different from you

If natural resource professionals recognize that racial, ethnic, or cultural differences separate them from residents in their region, they may wish to understand those differences better in order to communicate effectively. **Fact Sheet 4.6: Working with African American and Hispanic Communities** provides an excellent introduction to research findings that relate to African-American and Hispanic perceptions, values,



and concerns. **Case Study 22: Working with Diverse Stakeholders in Newbirth, South Carolina** introduces a conflict between a predominantly poor black community and the middle-class white newcomers with a nearby national forest caught in the middle (see note on page 11).



Not all differences are related to skin color or economic status. Differences between foresters and school teachers can even be enough to trip up program planners as demonstrated by the following story (*Box 2*).

### **Box 2: Know What Motivates Your Audience**

Several years ago a local Society of American Foresters chapter decided to offer its services to local teachers. A classroom visit from a forester and a video on forestry careers seemed to be a good combination to offer. The materials were too complicated for younger students, and the foresters were concerned that middle school teachers did not have enough flexibility in the day to accommodate a speaker. So they sent letters to every 5th grade teacher in the vicinity inviting them to a free dinner and evening presentation that would introduce the program.

Disappointingly, only three teachers (and one boyfriend) showed up. Trying to salvage something from the evening, the organizer asked the teachers what might have attracted greater participation. “Invite the 4th grade teachers, because they study Florida resources” was the immediate response. In their rush to think through what was best for their program, these foresters forgot the first lesson of communication: know your audience. It doesn’t matter what’s good for foresters if the program doesn’t meet the needs of teachers. With state curriculum standards it is a fairly simple process to determine which grades cover the topics of interest. Checking with a few teachers and administrators would have been helpful.

Resource professionals may also give presentations to community leaders, decision makers, and elected officials. How does one get to know this audience? To get an idea of the type, style, and tone of successful presentations, encourage participants to brainstorm the types of questions they could ask and to whom they might pose them.

### **How to help people understand difficult ideas**

The likely existence of misconceptions is another aspect of getting to know the audience that has important implications for communication in the interface. **Fact Sheet 4.7: Addressing Misconceptions about Wildland-Urban Interface Issues** provides more detail and several examples of misconceptions that could hamper understanding. Providing information may not lead to successful communication if misconceptions prevent people from believing the speaker (Berliner 1987). In these situations, the speaker must first acknowledge and validate the misconception and carefully offer a



new way of explaining events. Dunwoody (2003) suggests the following steps to help overcome misconceptions:

1. Acknowledge the plausibility of the individual's existing belief, e.g., "I can see how you might think that. . . ."
2. Provide easily understood examples to demonstrate that the belief is not always valid.
3. Introduce the theory intended to replace the belief.
4. Provide examples that demonstrate the successful operation of the new theory.

You might ask your participants to think about the concepts they have difficulty communicating to residents and community leaders. Perhaps there are misconceptions that are interfering with the acceptance of new information. It is not easy to identify misconceptions or come up with good explanations that will convince people to think in new ways. If this is a concern for your participants, you might spend some time role-playing problem situations to tease out the misconception, and then work together to develop analogies and examples that may help overcome the problems. The table in **Fact Sheet 4.7** provides several examples of typical, problematic communication and what the root misconception might be. **Exercise 2.6: Firewise Conversations** provides an opportunity to challenge misconceptions about firewise practices.



## 7. Building Support for Change

The motivation for much of the communication work in the wildland-urban interface is the need for change. In these cases, something is not ideal and your agency wants to improve it. When that "something" is a conflict, specialized communication skills are needed. If the "something" is a behavior, an action, or habit, social marketing provides a set of tools that can help. This theme has two subsections, each with fact sheets, exercises, and case studies:

- Communicating to resolve conflicts
- Communicating to change behavior

### Communicating to resolve conflicts

It isn't easy to be in the middle of a conflict. Misunderstandings abound, feelings are hurt, and in some cases there seems to be no right answer to untangle the mess. One solution to avoiding conflict is to build partnerships with the community, and particularly with those who have different opinions, long before a conflict exists. A National Forest supervisor in Alabama regularly meets with a community advisory council that keeps open one avenue for the public to express concerns and get information. Such community networking is also a good strategy after a conflict has occurred to help repair the damage and prevent future misunderstandings (*Box 3*).

The book *Making Collaboration Work* by Julia Wondolleck and Steve Yaffee (2000) is an excellent source of ideas and strategies from resource agencies across the United States. **Fact Sheet 4.8: Communication Challenges—When People Will Not Agree** offers some suggestions for working through disagreements.



### Box 3: Conflict in the Keys

Increasing resident populations in the Florida Keys led to several challenges to managing the National Key Deer Wildlife Refuge. For example, a new school was proposed on prime habitat for Key deer. The refuge opposed the original site and recommended an alternate. The alternate site, however, had a wetland that required a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which was reviewed by another branch of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. That office recommended denial of the permit, and the press quickly made the agency look foolish for refusing a permit for their recommended site at the expense of children's education. The school board eventually acknowledged it didn't have the money to build a new school, but the agency's credibility was damaged. In retrospect, the agency recognized that it reacted defensively to the public and media and did not properly communicate the scientific basis for its decisions. The agency learned to listen to the public more often.

A new project leader arrived in the Keys and launched new communication and outreach strategies. He wrote guest editorials in the local paper, made himself available for TV and radio interviews, joined and spoke to the Chamber of Commerce, and established a "friends of" group to help increase awareness of the refuge. He also established new procedures for internal consultation between branches to create a more seamless agency. These efforts have not ended controversy (in fact, a recent proposal for ecotourism taxi tours attracted 150 people at public hearings), but they have established a relationship of dialogue and greater trust among the residents. Local attitudes have shifted toward preserving the natural resources on the islands and the Service is a partner in that effort.

Source: NCTC 2004.

Your participants may have experiences with disagreements and conflicts, and it may be quite useful to use those as a basis for group discussion about conflict resolution strategies. If not, **Exercise 4.9: Working with Conflicts** offers four scenarios and suggests that participants discuss strategies that might help resolve them. Three case studies are also provided that speak to resource management conflicts: **Case Study 1: The Challenge of Controversial Resource Issues: Southern Pine Beetle**, **Case Study 4: Deer Debate in Hilton Head, South Carolina**, and **Case Study 12: Mediating for Change in Martin County, Florida**. Remember to use the supplementary materials mentioned in the note on page 11.



When resource professionals find themselves in the midst of a conflict, however, **Fact Sheet 4.9: Reducing Conflict** offers tips for working toward a resolution. The success of alternative dispute resolution in solving difficult conflicts indicates that opposing parties can seek common ground, find compromise, and maintain their



interests through the sometimes tedious process of communication (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000).



**Presentation 4.3** provides a set of slides that can help you present information about resource conflicts. Ask the participants what types of conflicts they have resolved and which tips they would suggest to others. Ask groups to discuss what most concerns them about conflicts and develop strategies that they can use to help reduce both their fears and the possibilities of conflict.

## Communicating to change behavior

This entire module covers strategies for presenting information to make it more likely that people will accept information, understand their role and responsibility, make wise decisions, and want to participate in improving their interface environment. There will be cases, however, where information is not enough to change behavior. In those circumstances, it helps to have a framework to think about behavior and a set of additional tools to add to the communication toolbox. **Presentation 4.4** helps you present information about social marketing tools.



Programs that achieve changes in behavior are often more complicated to develop and implement than an evening presentation at a neighborhood association (McKenzie-Mohr and Smith 1999). But the evening presentation can be one element of a larger program that builds momentum to create a new norm, one that increases citizens' responsibility for solutions to interface challenges.

Some people consider social marketing tools to be too manipulative; they prefer to present information and let people decide what to do. But social marketing strategies can also be more efficient communication techniques—understanding an audience so well and using what they care about to engage them in working on a solution (*Box 4*). By understanding the barriers they face and developing a program to reduce them, social marketing campaigns make it easier for people to develop new behaviors. Social marketing uses the common-sense tools of prompts or reminders and persuasive materials to help communicate effectively. But it also uses the powerful strategies of commitment and modeling to make it more likely that people will want to adopt the new action.

### Box 4: Encouraging Family Members to Conduct Landscape Cleanup

Recognizing the time constraints on many families who live in the interface, the Texas Forest Service (TFS) and FireCAP created a booklet that gives each family member a role in a weekend project to reduce the risk of wildfire. Youngsters pick up sticks and sweep clippings, older youth stack limbs and mow weeds, parents wield chainsaws and trim lower limbs, while less-able adults watch out for safety problems, prepare snacks, and provide lots of water. The tasks give everyone a role and describe the preparation process as something that is quite doable. For more information on the FireSmart Family Wildfire Preparedness guide, contact TFS at 512-321-2467.

Social marketing tools are not appropriate in every situation. In the face of a community conflict, for example, people need to wrestle with uncertainty and figure out a solution they can live with. In a crisis, however, people are generally willing to pitch in and try to help resolve the problem. Water conservation and energy conservation campaigns have been very successful at obtaining immediate behavior change (*Box 5*). Some commonly used social marketing tools and strategies are described in **Fact Sheet 4.10: Social Marketing Tools**. You may wish to identify a local social marketing expert to present this section. Colleges with a business school or advertising program may have such a person.

**Exercise 4.10: Understanding Social Marketing** focuses on three social marketing techniques: prompts, modeling, and commitment. If you use this exercise, it may be helpful to introduce social marketing ideas through **Presentation 4.4** or **Fact Sheet 4.10**. The activity asks small groups to use various bits of information about the three techniques and identify which might be the most useful in achieving behavior change for the three situations.



### Box 5: Clean Marinas

Florida's Clean Marina program designates marinas and boatyards that incorporate best management practices to protect water quality. A clear connection between clean marinas and economic profitability establishes a strong incentive for marina owners to consider voluntarily improving their environmental quality. Federal grants for sewage pump-out facilities prompted the Department of Environmental Protection to design a holistic program that addresses water, air quality, waste, and land concerns. The marina business community participated in a statewide process to identify best practices and design the program. A workshop informs marina owners what they must do to achieve the Clean Marina designation and participate in the grant program. They also sign a pledge card committing to a reduction of pollutants from local waterways. They conduct an assessment of their facilities with provided worksheets and reference materials and have access to supporting mentors if they have questions. A third party visit will confirm that the marina has adopted the Best Management Practices leading to designation, and recognition as a Clean Marina is given in an awards ceremony with a press release. The marina is then authorized to use the Clean Marina logo on letterhead and advertisements, fly the flag, and hang the plaque. The flag acts as a prompt to marina users to dispose of waste appropriately.

*Source: Florida DEP 2004.*

The following communication techniques can help achieve new behaviors in the wildland-urban interface:

- Recognize and reduce barriers.
- Use all the reasons that support your goal, not just the environmental ones.

- Engage groups of people in learning and doing.
- Use community leadership to establish a new norm.
- Develop models to demonstrate the results of the new behavior.
- Develop prompts to remind people.
- Ask people to make a commitment to support the program or change behavior.

## 8. Planning a Program



Communication programs do not spontaneously happen on their own. They require planning and organization. If your agency has a process to guide communication efforts, encourage participants to use it in **Exercise 4.11: Event Planning**. If such a process does not exist, offer **Fact Sheet 4.11: Planning a Communication Program** as a model. **Presentation 4.5** can help you introduce this outreach planning process. These steps represent the basic process used by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS 1997).

The act of planning a program is a good culminating exercise for a training program on communications. It could also culminate a training program on forest management or policy, if participants have the skills to comfortably and successfully work on preparing a presentation, designing an exhibit, or orchestrating a festival to promote forest management or policy decisions.

The model in **Fact Sheet 4.11** walks readers through many of the ideas presented in this module: know your audience, pick a theme that is relevant and important to your agency (the sender), build partnerships with others, and develop messages that are relevant to the audience and that move them toward your objective (providing information or prompting action).

This plan is not so different from what anyone would do if they took the time to think about it. Much of it is common sense. Still, it helps to have a road map to know where you are going, and it helps to check it occasionally to keep you on the road.



Two examples of program development are provided in **Case Study 9: Karst Habitat Restoration in Arkansas** and **Case Study 13: A Multi-Agency Initiative: Water Education in Kentucky**. These can be used to help participants understand the program development process (*see note on page 11*).

A plan may include the mass media as an element in a communication program, event, or campaign. The media may be used to announce an event (as in a press release to the newspaper in advance of a presentation to the League of Women Voters) or it may be the heart and soul of a campaign (e.g., billboards and TV spots announcing prescribed fire awareness week). The pervasiveness of mass media is a compelling reason for resource professionals to consider working with a local journalist or making Public Service Announcements for radio and TV.

Encourage your participants to establish good relationships with the local media. Journalists can be important allies in all agency communication efforts. Local weekly

papers may be much easier to work with than daily papers from large cities, though both need stories with a local flavor to sell papers. Resource professionals can read the papers and find out which reporter covers natural resource issues in the community. Ask if any of the participants met with reporters to provide some background information and help make sense of the issues. One successful strategy is to invite a reporter to join resource professionals in the field for a day. Most journalists do not have a science background and they need to be taught, just like the residents. Remind participants to return calls as soon as possible to help reporters meet their deadlines. They may only need a clarification or a quote. If a resource professional is being interviewed, he or she should think carefully about what to say. It helps to have a few, clear, short sentences on hand that readily communicate the purpose of the program—and to repeat these sentences several times to make sure the reporter gets it right. Eventually, the editors may trust your agency to write short articles, program announcements, and reports.

## Summary

A communication program can be as simple as delivering a presentation to a neighborhood group, as stressful as speaking to the elected community leaders, or as complicated as coordinating a statewide campaign. Resource professionals may work with people who contact them or may drum up business by contacting local groups and offering services. A strategy may include training people who will work with children, families, or residents. Regardless of the scale and scope of the communication effort, these themes represent the basics of designing successful and effective communication programs. Given the pressing need to communicate in the wildland-urban interface, the additional aspects of understanding the audience, working through conflicts, and encouraging behavior change should be included in any professional development program.

A variety of resources are available to assist communication planning. Find additional resources to answer specific communication questions. Resources on communication abound for developing a presentation, a slide show, or a poster. Your participants can find training courses offered through the Cooperative Extension Service and the National Conservation Training Center, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This module is not meant to cover everything participants need to know to be a communications star, just those concepts that make communication in the interface particularly tricky.

Communication is a two-way street. The tips and guidelines provided here should help resource agencies and their staff listen to concerns, engage people in discussion, respond to concerns, present information with an attitude of helpful partnership, and build ownership among audiences for resolving problems. It is through these partnerships that wildland-urban interface issues should be addressed.

## Suggested Readings

*Communication Skills for Conservation Professionals* by Susan K. Jacobson, 1999. Washington, DC: Island Press.

*Conservation Education and Outreach Techniques* by Susan K. Jacobson, Mallory McDuff, and Martha C. Monroe, forthcoming Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.

*Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing* by Douglas McKenzie-Mohr and William Smith, 1999. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers Doug's website: [www.cbsm.com](http://www.cbsm.com) provides case studies, explanations, and reports of social marketing success.

*Community Culture and the Environment: A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place* by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2002. EPA 842-B-01-003, Washington, DC. It is available from the National Center for Environmental Publications and Information at (513) 489-8190; (800) 490-9198; P.O. Box 42419, Cincinnati, OH 45242; and [ncepiwo@one.net](mailto:ncepiwo@one.net).

*Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resource Management*, by Julia M. Wondolleck and Steven L. Yaffee, 2000. Washington, DC: Island Press.

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