

Community Wildfire Liaison Programs: What Makes Them Successful

Judith Downing
Emergency Management Specialist
Public Information Officer
National Incident Management Organization
Fire and Aviation Management
USDA Forest Service



Overview

- Problem we want to solve.
- Lessons learned – The French Fire.
- What are Community Liaisons?
- Two successful, enduring examples.
- Community Liaisons and Forest Service values.
- Envisioning what could be.
- What are your thoughts?



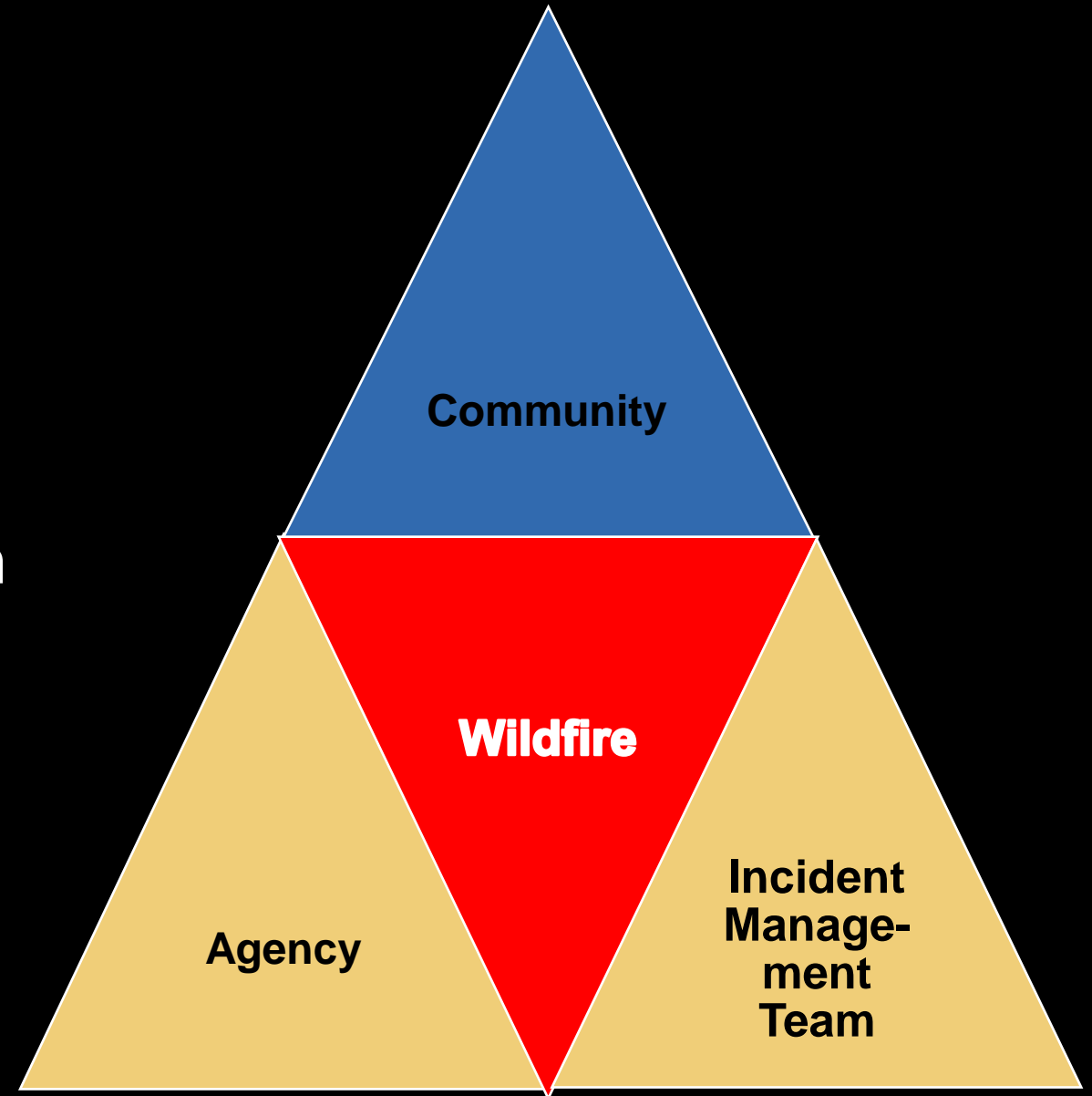
The Community Fire Liaison Triangle

The Problem

- Incorporate community values, concerns and knowledge into incident management during a wildfire.
- Provide stakeholders with the information they need to cope with wildfire threats

A Solution

- Community Fire Liaison Programs are systems that enable
 - Planned communication pathways
 - A continuous rolling dialog for collaboration



The French Fire

- Community in Crisis – Not getting information they need.
- Informal networks are there.
- Re-engaging the Community.
- Informing the Networks – Listening to the Networks.
- The Agency and the Community collaborate again.



<https://www.visaliatimesdelta.com/story/news/2021/08/20/French-fire-lake-Isabella-exhibiting-extreme-fire-behavior/8218842002> Original from INCIWEB, a US government site. Use permitted.

Lessons Learned (Again) From the French Fire

- People are linked together in a web of social interactions
- Information dissemination is not enough.
- Be aware! Evacuations tend to shred these informal networks.
- Protect the networks! Inform the networks!



<https://www.tempe.gov/Home/ShowDocument?id=84698> Scroll down to "Biomimicry and You." page 15.

TWO SUCCESSFUL ENDURING COMMUNITY LIAISON PROGRAMS

**SALMON RIVER BASIN
COMMUNITY LIAISON—13 YEARS**



Photograph by Al Storey

**NORTHEAST NEVADA RANCHERS
COMMUNITY LIAISON—24 YEARS**



Photograph by BLM, Elko, Nevada

SALMON RIVER BASIN COMMUNITY LIAISON

- **Why was it started?**
- **What was it supposed to accomplish?**
- **When is it used?**
- **Why does it work**
- **What are the benefits?**
- **Why has it lasted so long?**

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

Patty Grantham, Forest Supervisor

NORTHEAST NEVADA RANCHERS COMMUNITY LIAISON

- **Why was it started?**
- **What was it supposed to accomplish?**
- **When is it used?**
- **Why does it work**
- **What are the benefits?**
- **Why has it lasted so long?**

“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, Nevada.

How the Community Liaison Program Matches Forest Service Values

USDA Forest Service Values

To advance our mission and serve our purpose:

- **Balance** the short and long term needs of people and nature by **working in collaboration** with communities and our partners.
- **Deliver** world-class science, technology, and land management.
- **Provide access** to resources and experiences that promote economic, ecological, and social vitality.
- **Connect people** to the land and one another.

What People are Saying About The Community Liaison Program

"If there is a large wildfire near a community, you want to work with these types of people"

Patty Grantham Forest Supervisor

"These types of programs provide partners opportunities to express what is most important to them."

Jay Kurth Incident Commander
NIMO Team 1

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

Kathy McBroom
Salmon River Fire Safe Council

"This program has paid off with many dividends"

Dylan Rader
Assistant Fire Management Officer

"The residents show up, they want to be involved..."

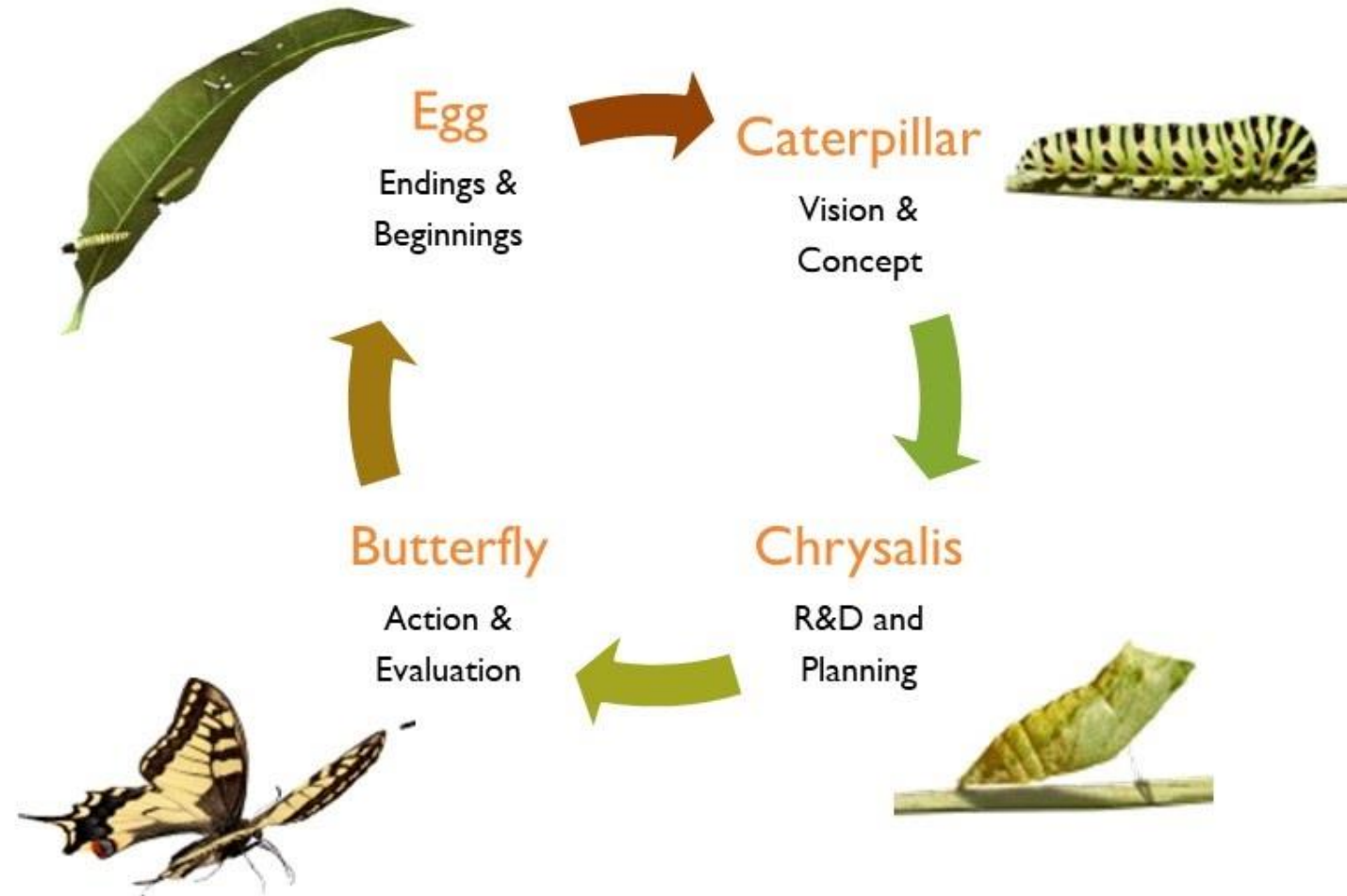
Patty Grantham Forest Supervisor

"It has really opened up lines of communication"

Joshua Nicholes
District Ranger



Partnership Network Life Cycle



What's Next?

Envisioning What Might Be: Community Wildland Fire Liaisons

- Rapidly and Widely Adopted
- Expansion
- Widespread Engagement
- Meaningful Engagement
- Become the Pathway for Dialog
- Collaboratives Strengthen and Endure Over Time
- Continuous Learning
- More Than Fire Suppression
- Increase Community Resilience

What Do You Think?

Group Reflection



https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/images/st_business_opps-150.jpg

1. How can we create a shared vision for a national Collaborative Community Liaison program?
2. What might promote their acceptance and use among agencies and community members?
3. Thinking as an Agency Administrator, what might be some benefits and risks of adopting this program?
4. Other examples of community liaison programs that we could learn from?

Collaborative Community Liaisons

Thank you to all the
Community Liaisons,
Agencies, Organizations,
and Incident Management
Teams, who had the good
ideas and did all the work.



Author's personal photographs.
Photograph by Jay Nichols.