



Center for Sustainable Landscapes
and Communities
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS: NEIGHBORHOOD & COMMUNITY LEADERS 2021 SUMMARY REPORT



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Executive Summary

Event Summary

In November 2021, workshop partners hosted an online gathering of residents who are highly motivated to support their communities' wildfire preparedness, and who live in high wildfire-risk areas in and around Boulder County. This 2-hour online workshop included presentations from guest speakers Sarah McCaffrey and Alison Lerch who shared their expertise working with communities around wildfire perceptions and preparedness. This workshop was an opportunity for engaged residents across multiple geographic locations to discuss challenges around neighborhood wildfire preparedness, and to share their communities' strengths, innovative strategies, and resources with each other.

Key Findings

Key themes were discovered from a pre- and post- workshop questionnaire and in-workshop small group discussion.

Common Challenges & Strengths included:

- **Challenges:** Residents have gaps in home hardening and defensible space knowledge & this can conflict with their other priorities (e.g pollinator vegetation). Also, local HOAs and other associations (internal community organizations) require more support and time for residents to plan, educate and connect with others specifically about wildfire risk.
- **Strength:** Communities are seeing shifts in resident tenure and age that can shake up the status quo and contribute to the rise in wildfire risk awareness seen overall.

Large Differences Across Urban & Rural Contexts included:

- **Urban** areas may experience more individualism and challenges associated with nonpermanent renters and absentee owners but may also experience more general organized structures, like HOAs, that can be leveraged for efficient wildfire preparedness communication and motivation.
- **Rural** areas experience more distrust with land management and insurance agencies (agencies external to the community), but may counteract this with local non-profit and community wildfire-focused groups (internally organized wildfire groups) making large community impacts.

Key Participant Recommendations

1. There was strong interest in ways to build internal community organization, communications, and workforce labor.
2. Urban leaders proposed recommendations for more collaborations with local agencies and partners to co-create outreach material and trainings, and to build more support to motivate landlords and renters to conduct wildfire mitigation on their properties.
3. Rural leaders proposed recommendations for improved external community agency transparency and community involvement, and discovering new ways to build collective funding for home wildfire mitigation and fire districts.

Event Description



In November 2021, The Boulder Watershed Collective and The Center for Sustainable Landscapes and Communities (CSLC) hosted an online gathering of residents who are highly motivated to support their communities' wildfire preparedness and adaptation, and who live in high fire-risk areas in and around Boulder County. Through this kick-off event, we explored the following two goals:

- 1. Connect Community Strengths & Challenges to Resources & Next Steps.** The workshop intended to inspire leaders to catalyze coordinated action within their own communities by sharing strengths and challenges that they encounter. From the conversations, our team gained insight into gaps in resources to help us provide better support to community leaders.
- 2. Explore the desire for a cross-boundary wildfire learning network.** The workshop intended to allow established or interested leaders the opportunity to meet each other and wildfire practitioners within and across community boundaries. Through conversations, our team explored the potential for a local wildfire learning network across urban and rural contexts; a network that shares knowledge, innovative strategies, and resources.

Challenges This Project Addresses

Wildfire home, neighborhood and community preparedness requires collective action, especially for those living in and along wildland areas. Engagement opportunities that are more interactive, personalized, and come from a trusted, local source have a powerful influence on this preparedness. This event focused on uplifting and supporting local leadership, their ideas and lived experiences as one way to accelerate community-led initiatives for wildfire preparedness.

Participants & Presenters

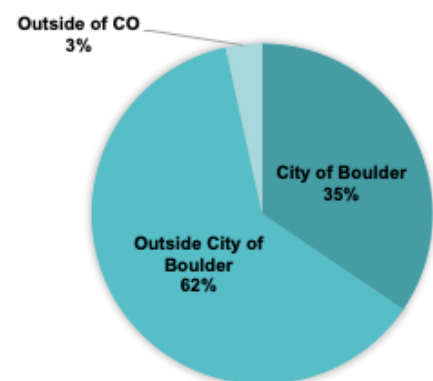


We are so grateful to our presenters and community participants who inspired new ideas! We had **18 community leaders** at this workshop who represented **9 distinct neighborhoods or communities** across Boulder, Gilpin, and Jefferson Counties. Overall, this report represents the entire **29 participants across 15 neighborhoods/communities** who provided written or verbal descriptions of their community strengths and challenges.

A special thanks to our two guest speakers:

- Sarah McCaffrey – Research Forester, USFS
- Alison Lerch – Wildfire Mitigation Program Admin, CO Department of Natural Resources

PARTICIPANT % BY IN OR OUTSIDE CITY OF BOULDER

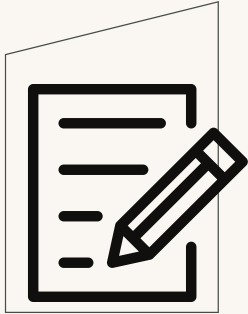


Neighborhoods & Communities Represented:

- Chautauqua
- Coal Creek Canyon
- Devil's Thumb Neigh.
- Four Mile Canyon
- Gold Hill
- Hartford/Yale Neigh.
- Jamestown
- Magnolia
- Newlands Neigh.
- Seven Hills
- Shanahan Ridge Neigh.
- Sugar Loaf
- Sunshine
- University Hill Neigh.

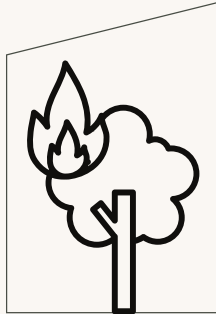
Potential Uses of This Report

This report will be circulated among all workshop participants, and will be shared with our City and County wildfire partners. Specific ways this report may be of use:



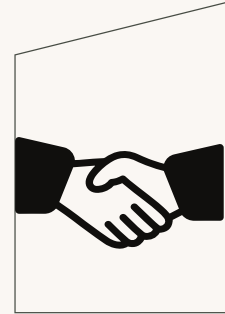
Supporting Grant Proposals

The trends found within and across community boundaries may support the rich anecdotes included in proposals for grant funding to support community wildfire risk reduction projects.



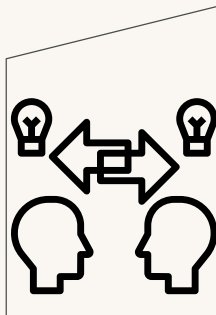
Updating Community Wildfire Protection Plans

These trends may highlight current challenges to be addressed through updated CWPPs (e.g. how to engage a quickly shifting rental market and HOAs).



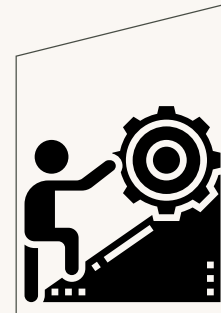
Discovering New Partnerships

This report highlights opportunities for new partnerships and leveraging of resources across communities. (e.g. organizing community clean up days with equipment rentals across multiple communities).



Informing Fire District & Leader's Outreach

Discovering innovative, concrete ways to conduct outreach in communities around wildfire preparedness that are inspired by current local challenges (e.g. setting up neighborhood watches for campfire safety).



Informing Local Practitioners of Challenges & Needs in Your Area

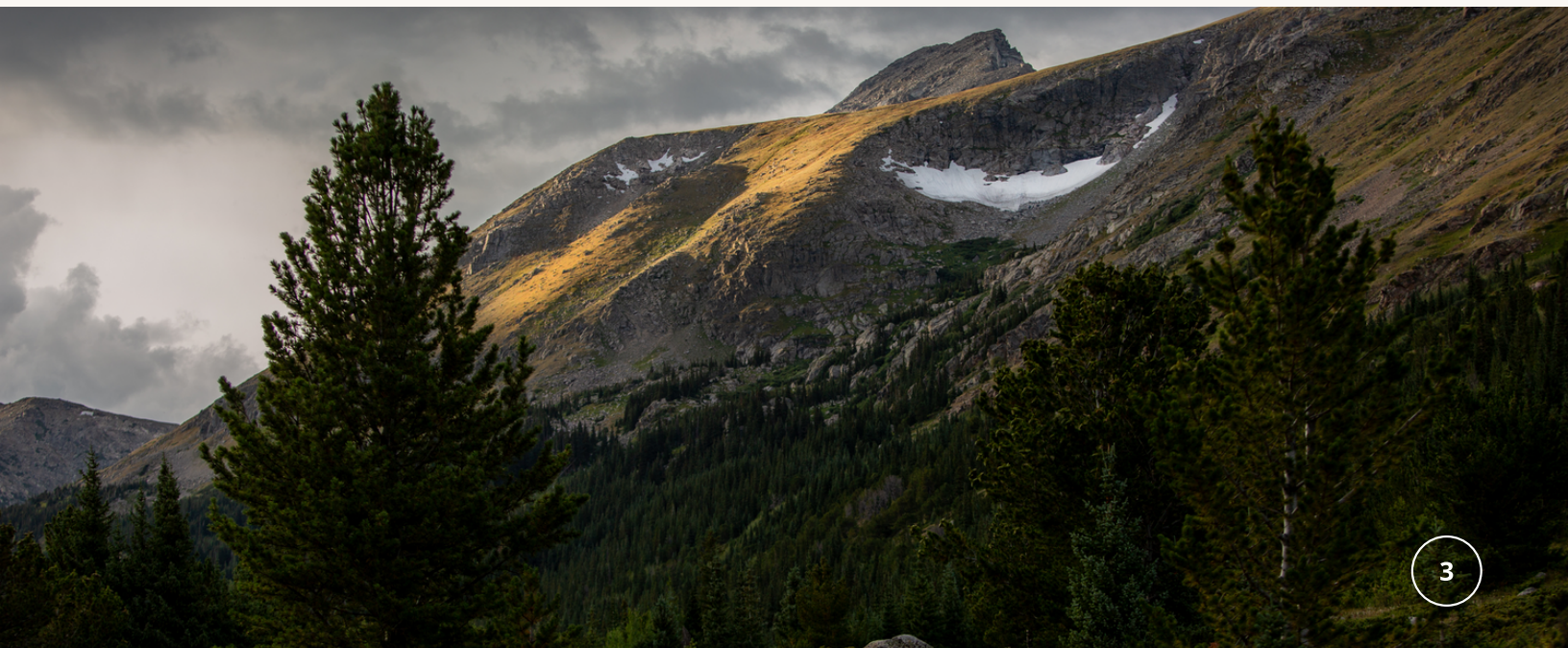
This report aims to describe common trends found within and across community boundaries that help local practitioners identify new partnerships with leaders (e.g. setting up a Fire Adapted Communities' Neighborhood Ambassador Program) and provide communities with effective resources.

Methods

Community leaders provided our team with written (pre and post workshop short answer questionnaires) and in-workshop small group discussions on their communities' strengths, challenges and recommendations that directly or peripherally related to wildfire preparedness. Our team organized this descriptive information into the following repeated themes we heard using common social science practices (i.e. iterative inductive codebook development). As seen below, these themes applied across large scales of influence, from home actions to forest management practices.

Generally, we used these themes to understand if large differences existed across urban and rural contexts based on **how frequently each theme was mentioned *relative to the total times a challenge or strength was discussed by rural or urban community leaders.*** For example, 'Needing More Knowledge' presented a challenge in both contexts. It was mentioned 13 out of 60 challenge mentions from urban residents (mentioned ~22% of the time), and mentioned 16 out of 74 challenge mentions from rural residents (~22% of the time). While rural mentions in this context were more frequent, this challenge was equally present in both contexts. In some instances, grouping all urban and rural locations into these two contexts missed the unique complexities of each neighborhood or community. In all regards, we attempted to find patterns across the contexts that represented more than one neighborhood or community. With more discussions with leaders, we hope to continue to understand and build off of these challenges and strengths to support and co-create strategies more unique to local contexts. For now, these trends should be viewed with the understanding that some *general* differences do potentially exist across rural and urban contexts as a good place to start.

Overall, we hope these findings will inspire our team, collaborators and community leaders to discover and act upon *place-based* recommendations that connect local challenges to unique community strengths and needed resources.



Key Findings Across Both Urban & Rural Contexts

Themes: Both Contexts

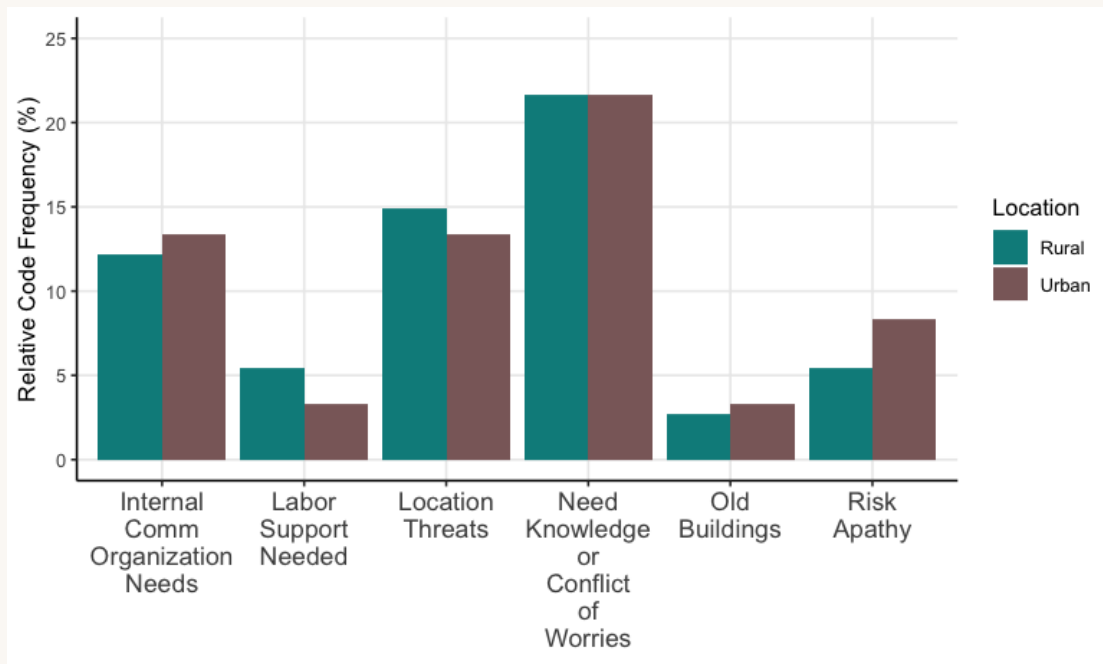
Common Challenges

- Apathy to Wildfire Risk
 - Community Organizational Needs
 - Labor Support Needed
 - Location Threats
 - More Knowledge/Know How Needed & Conflict of Worries
 - Old Buildings
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Common Strengths

- Diversity & Demographic Shifts
- Resident History/Knowledge
- Wildfire Risk Awareness & Acceptance

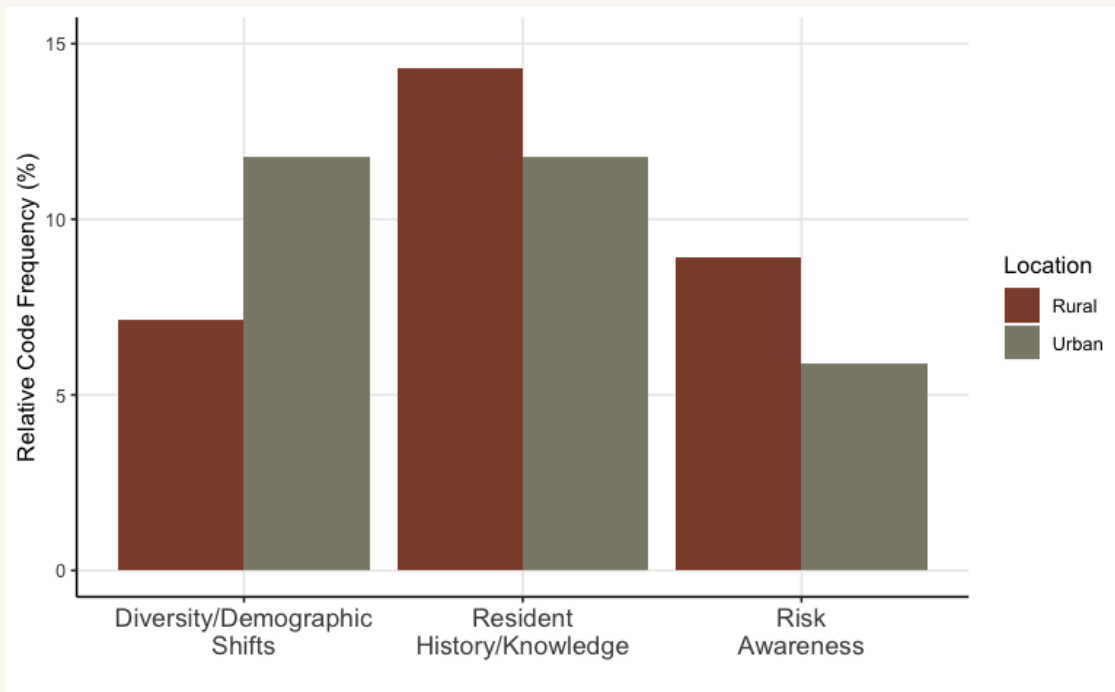




Discussion of Common Challenges

Overall, there were many common challenges shared across both urban and rural contexts (see figure above of non-statistically significant differences from Fisher's Exact Tests). Most notably, almost a quarter of the time when a challenge was mentioned, both groups discussed their communities' **gaps in knowledge or conflict of worries** relating to wildfire work. In many instances, residents discussed the sheer fact that home mitigation and defensible space just needed to happen in their communities. One leader described their neighbor's uncertainty on where to start and what to prioritize when creating a home ignition zone specialized to their home/property. They described their area's residents' desire to know "what can make my home safest *right now*?" Two urban leaders themselves wanted expert opinions on alternatives to common home materials (e.g. cedar fencing) that provided the entire range of functions and aesthetics of previous, fire-prone materials (e.g. containment of pets, privacy). Trying to optimize their time, budgets, and home projects outside of wildfire preparedness, leaders also mentioned their communities' finite pool of worries and capacity to commit to projects. For instance, while sustainability minded individuals are attracted to live in the area, conflicting actions like raking leaves which reduced potential wildfire impacts incidentally also decreased pollinator population habitat. This local and complex knowledge of ecosystems at times made inaction the best path. In a landscape where inaction is no longer an option, these challenges should be addressed with these nuances in mind.

As important, but not as frequently mentioned, was the acknowledgment that **internal community organization structures** required more support and time needed to plan, educate and authentically connect with neighbors about wildfire risk and mitigation in a strategic way. In one instance, an urban resident said "*I need guidance on what to do in order to communicate [wildfire mitigation] out to the neighborhood.*" In urban contexts, this theme also represented their communities' lack of any organizing body or streamlined communication system, both desperately needed. In rural contexts, this theme was often mentioned around supports needed to consistently move Community Wildfire Protection Plans forward, and to get the breadth of home mitigation and defensible work done in their entire area: "*Saws and Slaws can't reach every neighborhood with a chipper!*"



Discussion of Common Strengths

Beyond challenges, our team hoped to inspire conversations about the many ways that strengths, directly linked to wildfire preparedness or not, could creatively be leveraged to tackle challenges. Participants mentioned their communities' **resident history & knowledge**, such as their area's collective knowledge, experience and grit. These streams of knowledge encompassed their community's specialized knowledge, like municipal regulations and carpentry, as well as the general intelligence and degree of education they brought to their community. Mostly rural leaders discussed the strong work ethic and "*incredibly hardy...strong and tough and resourceful [folks]*" in their communities.

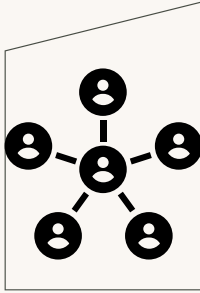
In both contexts, participants mentioned the **diversity and demographic shifts** of resident tenure and age as critical benefits. Some mentioned the nice "*blend of long-timers and newbies*" as their community transitioned from elder to younger populations; others described the passion and energy that young families and renters brought that revitalized an area and shook up community politics. Not surprisingly, there were strong wildfire preparedness challenges associated across both of these themes. When residents lived in areas longer and had more grit, this could sometimes be associated with not asking for economic help on larger wildfire preparedness projects and getting stuck in a "*doing nothing attitude towards fire danger*," in the eyes of two rural residents. On the other side, urban neighborhoods had difficulties harnessing the passions of younger residents toward collective wildfire protection (described in 'Urban Challenges' section below).

Discussions of **risk awareness** often corresponded with words like "more acceptance," "increasingly aware," and "increased public awareness." These ideas in the eyes of some rural and urban leaders demonstrated the important shifts that are taking place over time. Increased risk awareness has impacted acceptance of the need for both home wildfire mitigation and larger scale forest restoration and mitigation projects.

Recommendations For Both Contexts

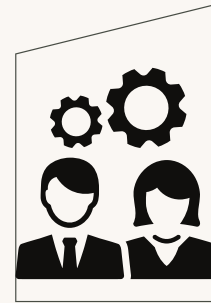
Recommendations from Workshop Participants

Based directly on the workshop participant's own ideas, the following specific recommendations overlapped urban and rural contexts. While a continuous cross boundary wildfire learning network was not sought after, there was a strong interest in ways to build internal community organization, communications, and workforce labor.



Build Internal Community Organization & Communications

- Host one time workshops on **how to grow community wildfire groups** presented by community leaders from other areas with success stories.
- Find and continue to **use communication platforms at smaller micro-neighborhood scales**, including talking to neighbors about ways they could share information quickly (e.g. text/phone tree, Neighborlink) for swapping labor for pay or home evacuation communications.
- **Host regular/seasonal events** like block party or BBQ 1-2 times a year with a guest speaker to learn more about home mitigation and fuel reduction projects and forest ecology nearby, and to grow an area's community wildfire network.
- **Focus neighborhood campaigns around common improvements** like providing neighbors with alternatives to certain materials (replacement of cedar fencing), price ranges and contractors, or discussing money saved on firewood.
- **Leverage internal structures already formed** like engaging HOA members, established sustainability groups, or people engaged in community gardens or Bee Safe pledgers in collective wildfire mitigation work.



Build Labor Workforce, Expertise & Motivation for Home Mitigation

- Leaders work with **local fire departments to have conversations** with smaller neighborhood units to answer questions from residents on what HIZ they are doing/plan to do, what they see overall as home assessment needs in that area, and how they can receive help from citizenry.
- **Provide broad communication of internal organizations already doing great work** (like Saws and Slaws) to concentrate their efforts to *share* resources and time across multiple private landowners at once.
- **Organize local workforce groups for collective neighborhood/community work**, such as organizing collective grant writing or funds for local Youth Corps, sustainability or student groups (fraternities), or communal clean up days - **like May 7th Wildfire Community Preparedness Day**.
- **Amplify complementary values work** by knowing smaller community values (like gardening, pets, saving water) and leveraging those strategies to overlap with wildfire mitigation work (e.g. create xeroscapes to save water).

Key Findings - Urban Contexts

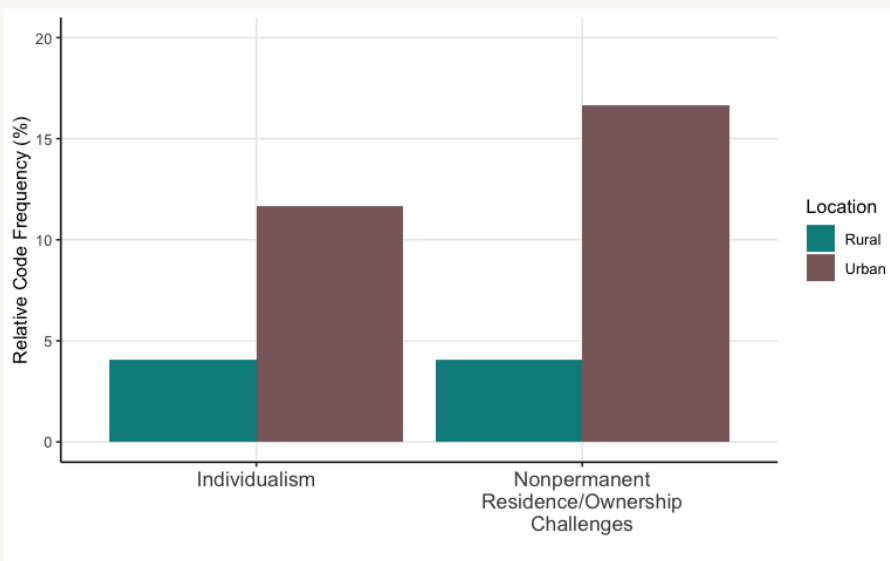
Themes: Urban Contexts

Challenges

- Individualism/Non-cohesion in Community
- Nonpermanent Resident/Ownership Challenges

Strengths

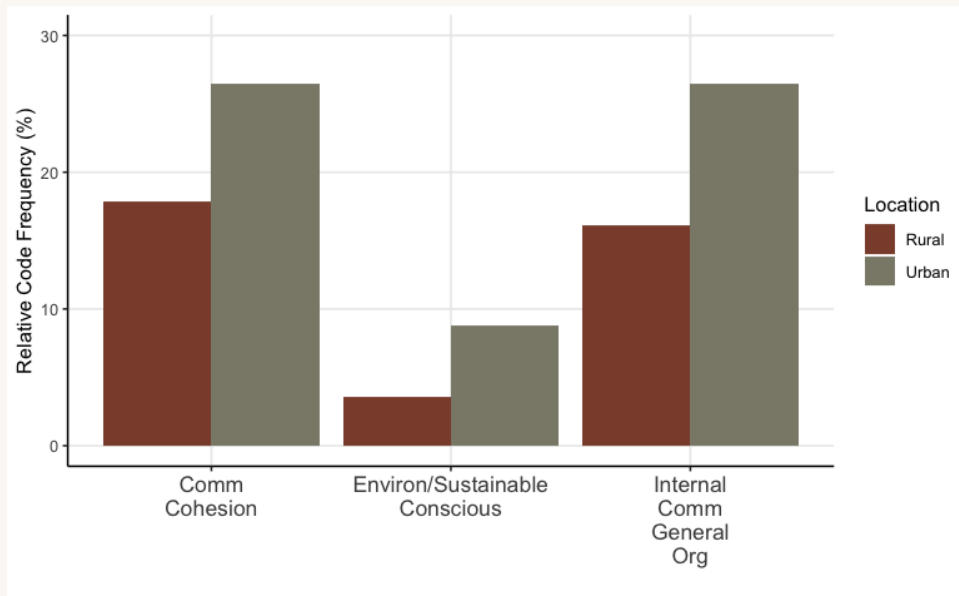
- Community Cohesion
- Environmental & Sustainability Consciousness
- General Community Organizing Bodies & Communications



Discussion of Urban Challenges

Although both **Individualism** and **Nonpermanent Resident & Ownership** challenges were not *statistically* more likely to be mentioned by urban residents more, these themes were *moderately* more likely to be mentioned by urban residents (7-12% differences), indicating some potential differences. In both urban and rural contexts, leaders mentioned how the Covid pandemic and social distancing measures have interrupted their communities' social cohesion in general.

But more distinctly in urban contexts, there seemed to be strong links across individualism, apathy to wildfire risk/work and the actual challenges they face with **landlords/absentee owners, renters and businesses**. Four leaders described the difficulty in communicating with landlords/absentee owners, and business, such as accessing them in the first place, and feeling at a loss for how to stress the urgent need for collective home mitigation and defensible space work in their area. In these instances, they saw that individuals who did not live there permanently had little incentive to prioritize this upkeep. Similarly, those neighborhoods near the University of Colorado had yearly renter turnover, making it very challenging to distribute welcome baskets and wildfire education, or to find ways to incentivize seasonal upkeep (e.g. leaves raked, gutters cleaned). This education seemed especially important for these renters who often had unsafe, fire prone behaviors (i.e. unsafe use of fireworks near these dense forests) in the eyes of four leaders.



Discussion of Urban Strengths

Similarly as seen with urban challenges above, the three strengths themes of **Community Cohesion**, **Environmental and Sustainable Conscious Residents**, and **General Internal Community Organizations** were not statistically more frequently mentioned by urban leaders, but were *slightly* more likely to be mentioned more in urban contexts.

Interestingly, **Community Cohesion** and **General Internal Community Organization** appeared as both a strength and challenge for urban neighborhoods. All of the same urban neighborhoods that experienced individualism (mentioned ~12% of the time) also expressed a sense of community cohesion, like comradery, kindness, helpfulness, hosting events etc (mentioned 26% of the time). Individualism was a challenge often relating to nonpermanent renters or landlords in urban areas. Instead, community cohesion was a strength relating to pockets or some percentage of their community that deeply took care of each other and shared the same goals. These were more likely to be residents who have built trust over a long time and/or from shared past experiences. *"People are very community minded... and c[a]me together in flood situations."*

Just as frequently mentioned was non-wildfire specific **General Internal Community Organizations** in urban areas (mentioned 26% of the time). This is in contrast to **Internal Community WILDFIRE Organizations** which was more of a strength in rural contexts (see Rural Strengths below). While more support for organized bodies and the establishment of wildfire focused groups was desired, five urban leaders did describe established organized bodies best set up to distribute common communications/education and make collective management decisions (HOA's, neighborhood associations). In one neighborhood, this association was linked with university groups that *"have a regular working group to discuss issues (fireworks, parties etc)."*

A small amount of the time (~9%), urban residents mentioned their residents being **Environmentally or Sustainability Conscious**, outside of wildfire or forest health knowledge. In one instance, a champion mentioned how *"this can be leveraged [for wildfire preparedness work]...using our collective management decisions"* and organized HOA body for impacting decisions like landscaping and water systems.

Recommendations - Urban Contexts

Recommendations from Urban Workshop Participants

Almost exclusively urban leaders proposed recommendations for more collaborations with agencies and partners to co-create localized materials and trainings for leaders and residents and support systems to motivate landlords and renters.



Co-create Materials, Checklists & Trainings Localized to Specific Neighborhoods

- Leaders work with **local and state agencies (CSFS) to create urban focused catalogue/list** specific to each neighborhood on top 5 home mitigation and defensible space priorities for that area (e.g. landscape changes, fire-proof fencing), possibly connecting this work with the City's Curbside Assessment Program. **Important to have leader input on this list to find cross section of priorities with other community values and disseminating it.**
- Leaders work with **local and state agencies to provide follow-up workshops/trainings and information sessions** complementing the area's specific priority lists and level of effectiveness of each strategy (what's the most bang for your buck?)
- Leaders work with **professionals to organize and watch for high wildfire risk situations and behaviors during high fire seasons** (e.g. "neighborhood watchers" trained by police department)
- Have local agencies **host city neighborhood-to-neighborhood conversations & trainings**, like Fire Adapted Communities' Neighborhood Ambassador Program.



Build Landlord & Renter Motivators for Home Mitigation & Defensible Space

- Work with **established internal organizing bodies**, like HOA's and fraternities, to create formal policies and/or welcome packets on responsibilities and behaviors as a renter and landlord.
- Leaders work with agencies to explore the strategies of other areas, like California, on how to **create community cohesion and shared community wildfire goals with yearly renters, landlords, and local businesses** (e.g. University offering credit for implementing defensible space in student neighborhoods and rental properties).
- City implement more required **or incentivized partnerships and trainings for real estate professionals and landlords**, like Fire Adapted Colorado's 'State of Colorado's Department of Regulatory Agencies, Division of Real Estate for continuing education (CE) credits for taking a Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) workshop.

Key Findings - Rural Contexts

indicates statistically significantly more mentions

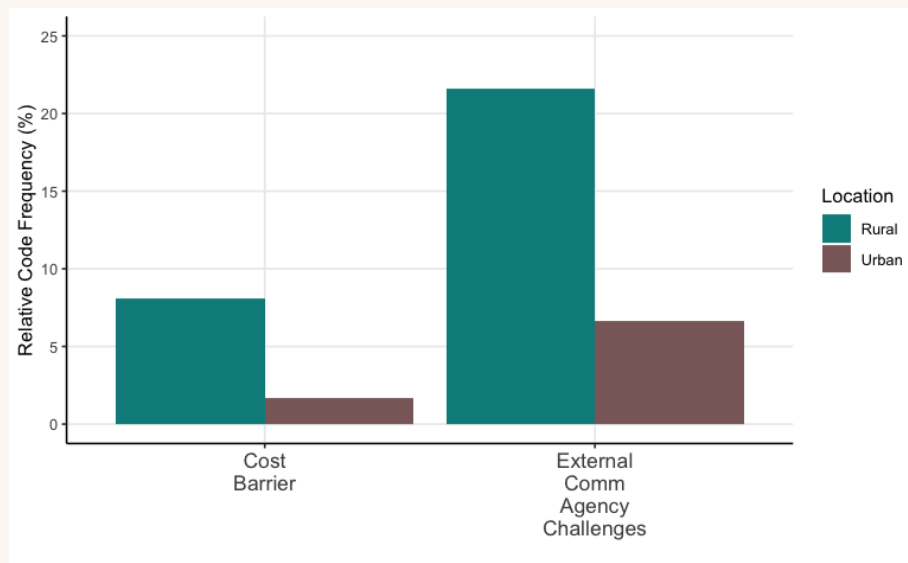
Themes: Rural Contexts

Challenges - Rural

- Cost Barrier
- External Community Land Agency & Insurance Challenges **

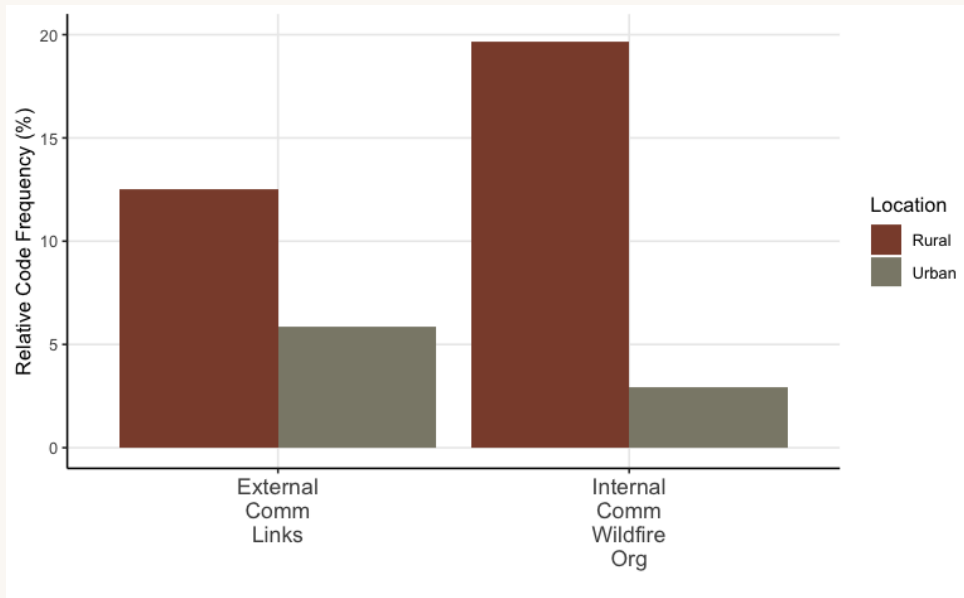
Strengths - Rural

- Connections to Entities Outside of Community
- Wildfire Organizing Bodies & Active Wildfire Work **



Discussion of Rural Challenges

Uniquely specific in rural contexts, rural leaders much more frequently discussed trust, communications, and transparency challenges dealing with **Agencies External to their Community** (statistically significant across rural v urban comparisons: Fisher's Exact Test p-value < 0.05; Rural = 16 counts, Urban = 4 counts). Dominantly, rural leaders described their frustrations with one-way communication of large scale forest and water projects, where they felt unheard by agencies who did not seem to include or consider the locals' environmental knowledge, community needs and full project cycle solutions. "[There were] large slash piles [left]. Locals can use [this] wood for firewood, but it is not distributed to the locals." This included this leader's perception that external agencies conducted little to no monitoring of project outcomes, and they witnessed poor project follow through of outcomes (like slash piles being cleaned up). Overall, this often resulted in loss of trust with these public agencies; they felt their local common environments were testbeds for management strategies which could otherwise have been a potential, shared strategy. "Prescribed fire has occurred with public participation (weather monitoring and photography) in the past, but since it was not well monitored after the burn and the fire reignited, the community is concerned... Prescribed burns are good in principle, but require much better monitoring to prevent break-outs." In two instances, this challenge also represented frustrations with insurance agencies' inconsistent insurance conditions, and locals' preference to work with internal wildfire bodies than receive disorganized federal tax credits for home mitigation work.



Discussion of Rural Strengths

More unique to rural contexts, leaders much more frequently mentioned **Internal Community Wildfire Organization** as a strength in their communities (e.g. structured wildfire groups and/or organized wildfire home mitigation and defensible space work) (statistically significant across rural v urban comparisons: Fisher's Exact Test p-value < 0.05; Rural = 11 counts, Urban = 1 count). Across all rural contexts, leaders mentioned their communities' support and desire for these established wildfire associations. In three instances, these groups had/would soon receive 501(c)3/4 official status. This internal inertia allowed leaders a platform "to provide forest health and fire mitigation assistance to our residents," to write and receive large grants, and have decision making power over larger scale forest mitigation project priorities. One rural leader also mentioned that there has been a "history of good participation in community mitigation events," with overall seemingly good resident support for internally organized mitigation.

In contrast to these strong internal links, rural residents were *slightly* more likely to mention **Links to Entities Outside of Their Community**. This represented any mention of collaborations, connections, opposition, support, certifications and/or media/awards that they or others were a part of outside their community. In most instances, leaders described internally organized groups they formed or were a part of that collectively collaborated with other rural areas (e.g. the InterMountain Alliance), or provided community comments to public land management decisions linked to the decisions of external agencies. Therefore, this strength was often referenced in conjunction with internal community organizations, where internal groups (rather than individuals) collaborated or voiced statements about external groups' impact in their area.

Recommendations - Rural Contexts

Recommendations from Rural Workshop Participants

Predominantly rural leaders proposed recommendations that could result in improved external community agency transparency and community involvement and discovering new and creative ways to build avenues for collective funding for home wildfire mitigation and fire districts.



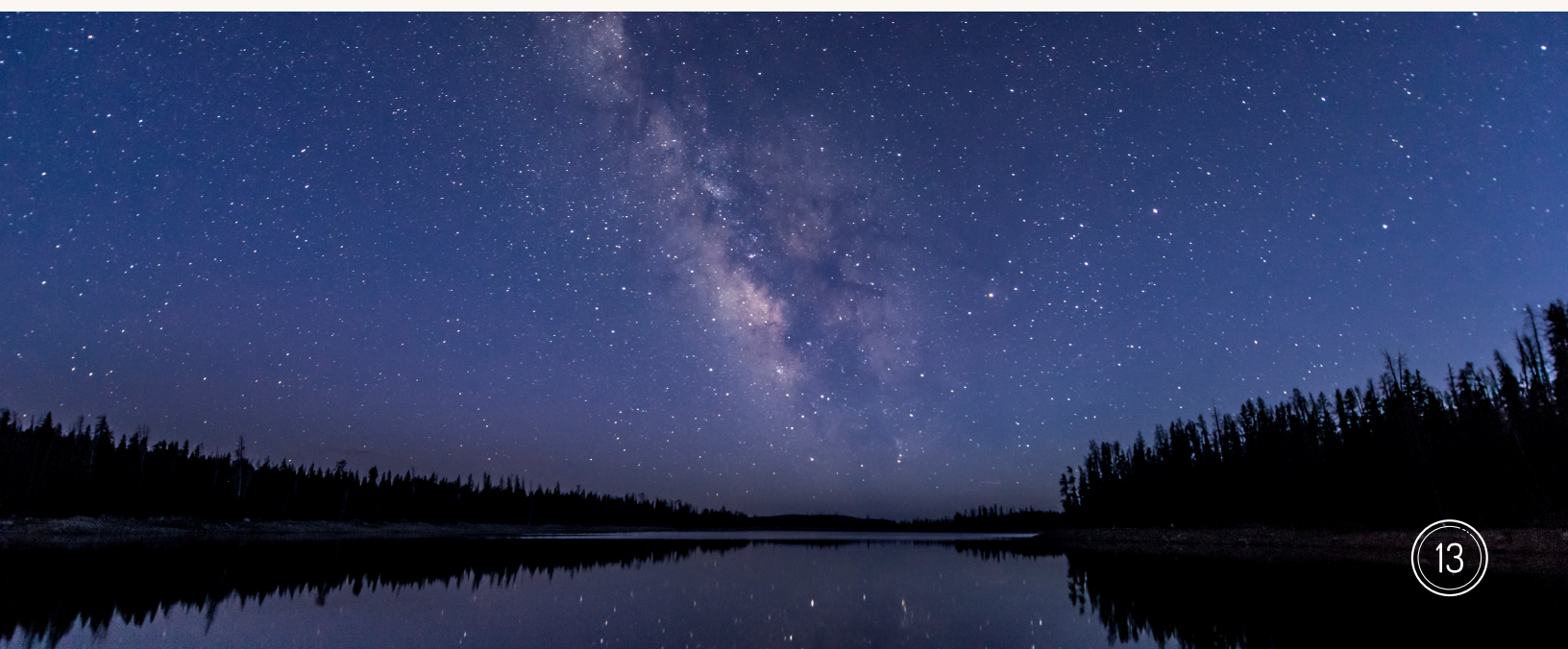
Improve External Agency Transparency & Community Involvement

- Leaders work with agencies, or trusted groups who work with agencies, to **discuss best ways to disseminate project goals and updates** specific to those communities.
- Leaders work with agencies, or trusted groups who work with agencies, to **establish dual monitoring efforts of ecosystem change and risks** (real and perceived) to local communities.



Build Avenues for Collective Funding

- Leaders work with **smaller insurance providers, like USAA, to establish collective incentives** for community initiatives.
- During the Gross Dam Reservoir expansion, find **creative opportunities to receive community funds for firefighter resources and mitigation** as part of project costs.



Workshop Presenter Resources

Video of full [Workshop Presentations](#) on November 6th, 2021

Sarah McCaffrey, Research Forester, USFS

- Sarah McCaffrey's [presentation slides](#) (PDF)
- [Video of more detailed version of Sarah McCaffrey's presentation](#)
- Sarah McCaffrey's paper on '[Research perspectives on the public and fire management: a synthesis of current social science on eight essential questions](#)'
- [Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety](#) - research on the most rigorous urban and suburban actions that make a difference for home survival.

Collective Community Engagement Strategies

- Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net)'s [Wildfire Preparedness Day Menu of Ideas](#) - *sampler style menu of projects to engage and meet the needs of your community to prepare for wildfire.*

Local & State Wildfire Agencies

- [Colorado State Forest Service](#) - *a service and outreach agency out of Colorado State University to provide technical forestry assistance, wildfire mitigation expertise and outreach and education to help landowners and communities achieve their forest management goals.*
- [Fire Adapted Colorado](#) - *a collective voice and representative organization for Colorado that provides educational and networking opportunities for communities, groups and individual stakeholders focused on reducing the negative impacts of wildfires in the state.*
- [Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative](#) - *a collaborative of federal, state, local government agencies, non-profits, universities, and watershed coalitions to work across land ownerships to increase the scale and pace of forest restoration by bringing fire back into our watershed management toolbox.*

Partners & Funders



Center for Sustainable Landscapes
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