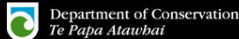



Less wildfires in Northland!

A community relations and public engagement programme
2007-2010

Sioux Campbell, Northland Conservancy
Carla Wilson, EveBay Research

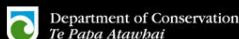


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Uniquely Northland!

- Waitangi, Zane Grey, kauri trees, Poor Knights Islands, Cape Reinga ...and ...
- The second most deprived region in NZ on the deprivation scale;
- Big gaps between rich and poor;
- Isolated communities;
- By national average, less educated, less likely to have professional occupations, earn less and have less access to telecommunications systems ...



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And too many arson and careless wildfires!



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Confronting the issue/s

- Originally contracted as a consultant to develop the programme – now part-time staff;
- Conscious of the multi-agency nature of rural firefighting, but not necessarily collaborative effort in community relations approaches;
- Need to “sell” a change programme and achieve buy-in across Northland;
- Aware of low existing knowledge base about motivation etc

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Brief background

- First time a documented, planned strategic approach had been taken;
- Lead by Department of Conservation, with support from the NZ Fire Service and growing contributions to specific aspects from members of the Northland regional rural fire committee;
- Growing interest in our approach from other parts of NZ.



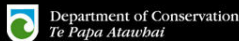
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Goal and objectives

The incidence and severity of wildfires in Northland is reduced. People understand the consequences of wildfires and participate in preventing them.

Several SMART objectives are aligned with this goal – some of these need re-writing with three years' programme experience behind us. The latter objectives, relating to understanding and participation, are where work most needs to be progressed.




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The value of research

- Little obviously available at the time of developing the programme;
- Used relevant overseas material and the knowledge and experiences of local people involved in rural fire management;
- Work within the programme revealed research sources and opportunities;
- New path for DOC – not an area which had been targeted for social research before;
- Developed new alliances with researchers such as Lisa (SCION);
- Started discovering other recent research such as into FAIP efficacy;
- Opportunities to participate in others' research.



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Researching what?

- Overseas information provided some common motivators for arson but – PR and public engagement theory raise the importance of local relevance in finding lasting local outcomes;
- We wanted to find out (a) why people in Northland deliberately light wildfires (b) why other people are careless about wildfires and (c) what might be most effective in supporting change.

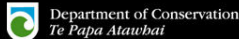


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Meantime -

- FRST and Rural Fire Research Advisory Committee's research into fire danger communications;
- Questions about communication method efficacy included Northland NZFS annual monitor;
- Feedback from schools via our contract advocate, DOC staff and other management agency representatives;
- Regular discussion and inclusion at NRRFC meetings;
- 2007-2008 FAIP assessments (Sparking Up and Old Flame) - University of Auckland;
- Anecdotal feedback on messaging effectiveness;
- Carla's phase one and pending phase two research commissioned by DOC Northland .



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Why start wildfires?

- Arrogant, idiots or just unlucky?
- Reasons for wildfires
- Barriers to reducing wildfires
- Possible future approaches



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The experiences of people who carelessly start wildfires

“We need to get out the message that there are consequences for your actions on property, life, your bank balance, stress and family. If you could get someone to say ‘this happened to me’ it would be very powerful”.



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Other aspects

- Develop Northland-specific resources – bi-lingual fact sheets, radio advertising, schools kit and DVD, DOC blog (see DOC website www.doc.govt.nz/region/threats/fire);
- Distribute and promote the resources;
- Employ a wildfires reduction advocate to work with schools in target communities;
- Listen to communities to seek feedback;
- Talk to landowners and residents in target communities;
- **Be strong** in using key messages – show we mean the consequences. Media exposure during fires is a good opportunity;
- Use RMA opportunities to improve infrastructure on fire prevention (defensible space, water access etc);
- Active engagement with the suite of wildfire management agencies in the region – gain consistency of messaging and approaches;
- Seeking greater engagement from the police.




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Constraints and bonuses

- Money
- Staff time
- Working collaboratively can be both...
- Conservator's influence
- Influence of other PRFAs
- From DOC perspective – reduction in 1k fire margins



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What next?

- Finding out more about “why” will help us tailor approaches more accurately;
- Ongoing, sustained effort required in target communities;
- Importance of consequences **being understood and felt**, consistently;
- Importance of treating this as a serious social, not just environmental, issue.



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