

# Social Science Insights for Public Engagement



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# *Beware the 'imagined public'*

*Overall findings do not  
support many of the  
Conventional Wisdoms  
or Narratives about  
public response to fire  
management*

- *Sampling Bias*
- *Confirmation Bias*

# Sample of False Narratives

- That the problem is people don't understand the fire risk.  
*Actually, they do understand the risk, but risk perception is complicated.*
- Smokey has taught the public to think all fire is bad.  
*In fact, the vast majority of people recognize fire can have a beneficial ecological role and ~80% think prescribed fire is an acceptable management tool.*



# Sample of False Narratives

- That residents who live in fire prone areas are not taking responsibility for reducing the fire risk on their property.  
*Studies routinely show that well over 2/3 are engaged in some type of fire mitigation.*
- That new residents are less aware and/or active in relation to fire mitigation.  
*These residents are actually often more proactive than longer term residents.*
- That part-time residents are less likely to understand the fire risk than permanent residents.  
*They understand the risk, limited time appears to be the main barrier to action.*



# Three Overall Influential Dynamics: *Knowledge*

- Greater knowledge of a practice associated with higher acceptance/action
  - Ecological benefits particularly important
    - Concern about negative outcomes (smoke, escape) can influence.....but decrease with increased knowledge of ecological benefits
  - Whether or not local knowledge and context are taken into account can influence response




# Three Influential Dynamics: *Trust*

Trust in treatment implementer or information provider predicts acceptance

- Key trust components:
  - Competence
  - Transparency

# TRUST

A Planning Guide for  
Wildfire Agencies & Practitioners



Agency-Stakeholder Trust: An international collaboration drawing on research and management experience in Australia, Canada and the United States

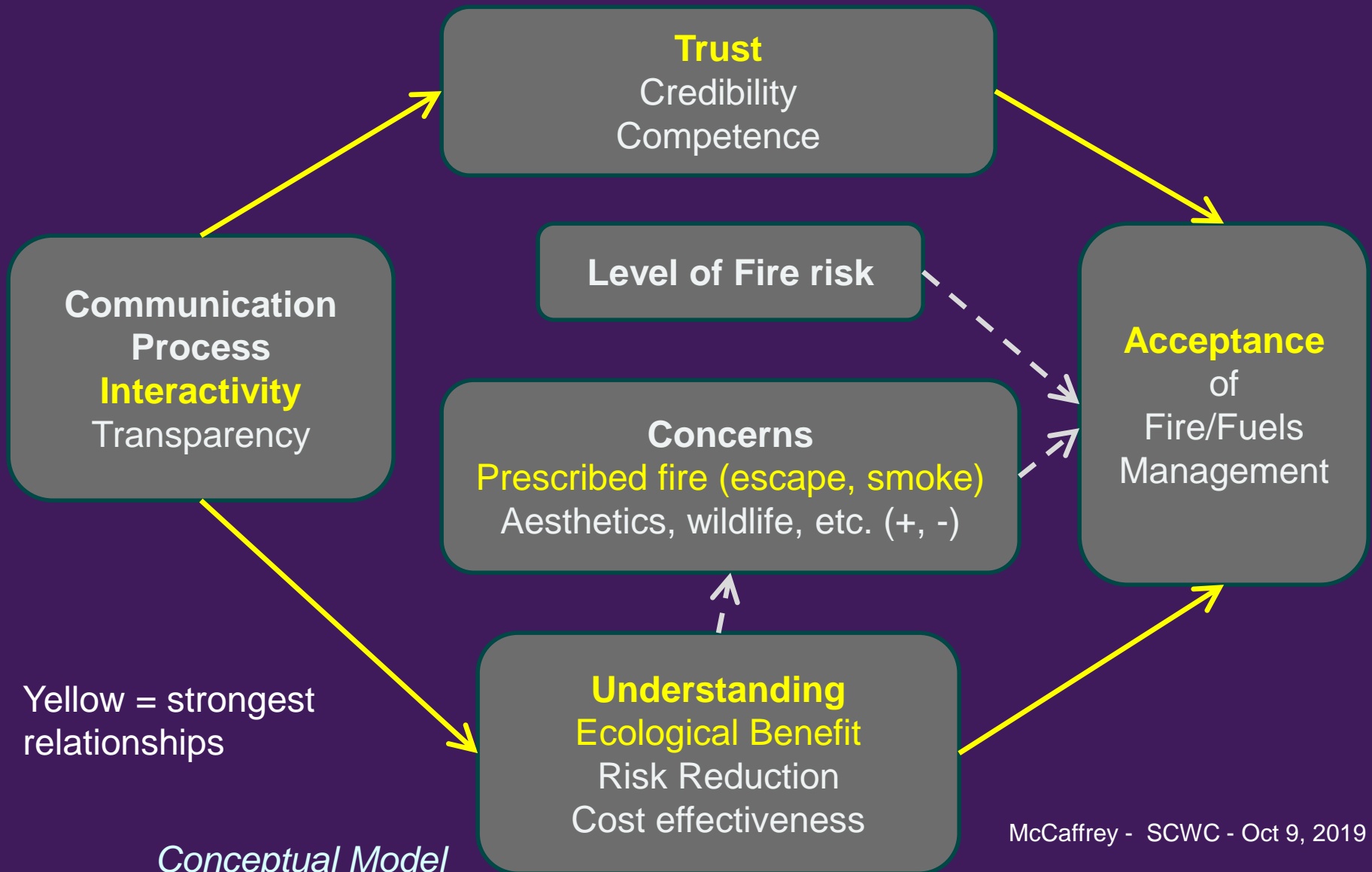
# Three Influential Dynamics: *Interactive Communication*

- Most effective means of fostering changes in behavior or norms
  - *Especially important for complex topics – allows for questions, clarification*
- Increases Understanding
- Builds Trust



# Fire/Fuels Management Public Acceptance Model

(Prescribed Fire)



Yellow = strongest relationships

*Conceptual Model*  
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# In sum....

- Assess your notion of 'imagined public' with empirical reality
- Interactions and social networks matter
- Communication is key – constant and transparent
- Knowing planning/thinking behind decisions is important to public
- Listening and taking local context into account is important

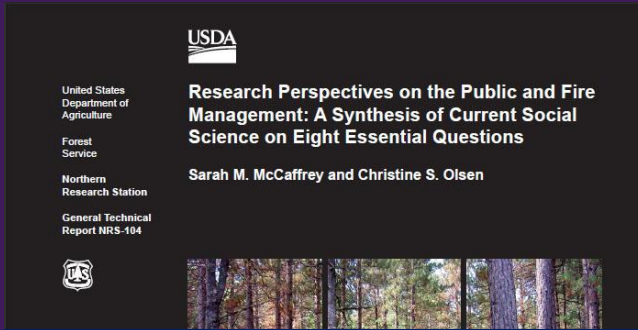
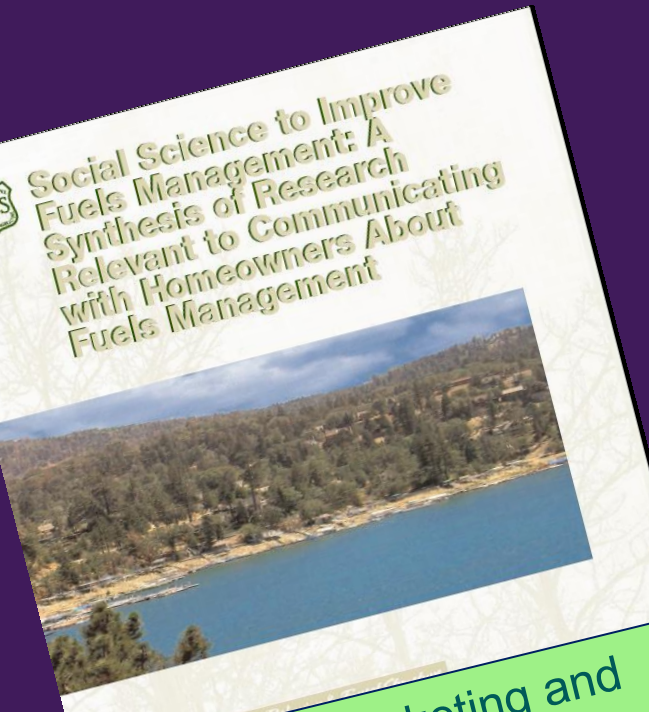


# Advice?

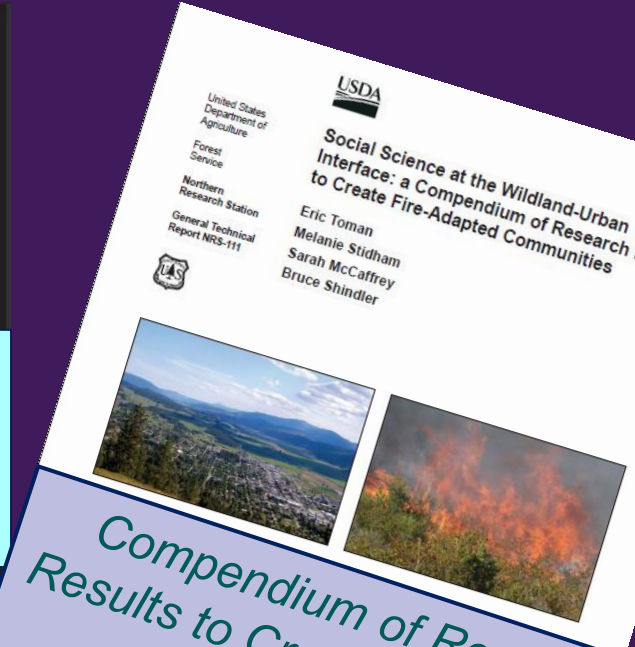
- Tell us who you are, what you do, and why you are doing it
- Thank you for the work you do
- Thank you for asking us what we think
- Use science
- Listen to local views – both agency and citizens



# GTR-NRS-104



Over 60 studies  
Eight Essential Questions  
GTR-NRS-104



Compendium of Research  
Results to Create Fire-Adapted  
Communities  
GTR-NRS-111

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Social Marketing and  
Natural Hazards Research  
Insights for Communicating  
with Homeowners  
GTR-NC-267

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