

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

NATIONAL COHESIVE WILDLAND FIRE STRATEGY

Podcast: Cohesive Strategy with Mary Jacobs, Assistant Sierra Vista City Manager, Representing National League of Cities

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Narrator, Gary Chancey: Welcome to In Brief podcast reporting progress toward a National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy. In this podcast, we hear Mary Jacobs, Assistant City Manager for the city of Sierra Vista in Arizona who represents the National League of Cities for the Wildland Fire Executive Council. She shares how the Cohesive Strategy might be implemented within cities and towns.

JACOBS: Wildland fire really has a lot more impact on cities and towns across the United States than people may think. First of all, 80% or more of the country's population live in incorporated cities and towns.

So, wildland fire can really disrupt local economies, our social system, tourism. It also affects watersheds. Certainly, that – I have found that to be the case here in our area. We're going to see effects from the Monument fire for years, flooding and impacts on properties that folks just didn't expect when they built their homes.

I've learned through my participation in this process just very simple things like what the wildland-urban interface is, and why we, as city leaders, need to care about how we allow building within that wildland-urban interface.

Gary: Mary talked about how successful implementation of the Cohesive Strategy will depend on the efforts of cities and local government.

JACOBS: There are a lot of the issues that have been identified that have to do with local government and local government planning, not just the participation of our firefighters in response, but we are seeing the extension of construction, new homes in the wildland-urban interface. And people are forgetting – including our local government leaders, they're forgetting that just because we allow building within the wildland-urban interface, does not mean that wildland fire is not going to occur. And there are resource issues associated with trying to respond to a significant wildland fire.

Cities and towns have great practice in collaboration, and focusing or allowing just a focus at the federal level for addressing wildland fire is really not going to see the ultimate solution happen.

So, by participating in the ultimate solution, by being a voice at the table, there's a lot more potential – in fact, I think a great potential for the solutions to actually be implemented by everyone, because it means that there will be real buy-in. And I've participated in processes in the past, just in my local communities that I've served in, where things are done by the government with no buy-in by the local community, and they may work for a while, but ultimately, they'll fail. And we can't let that happen in this case. There's just too much at stake.

Gary: Local government leaders need fire education to help them address their wildland fire management issues.

JACOBS: Cities and towns will need to pay attention when the Cohesive Strategy is finally elevated and approved here in very short order. There has been a lot of participation at the local government level. We have, really, some amazing people that have been discussing issues at every level of government, and there is a real consensus about what needs to be done.

But I think the most important thing is, really, the education of our local government leaders. We have elected officials at the city and town level that want to do the right thing, and using the information that's going to come out of the Cohesive Strategy to educate them on why they need to care about implementing this strategy, why it is so important to their local community in terms of their economy and tourism and that sort of thing. That is going to be a real great start, and certainly this information is just one way to begin that conversation.

Gary: Property owner actions are essential to success in the wildland-urban interface. Local government has an important role in encouraging Fire Adapted Communities.

JACOBS: The use of one's property needs to be balanced, it needs to be balanced with not only the safety of the residents who might construct their home in the wildland-urban interface, but also, with the expectations of what people who might choose to experience when they want to live in the woods. You know, a lot of people love to live in the woods.

And that's great, but they can't live in the woods and expect that somehow, nothing is ever going to happen to their property, that they have some responsibility. And I think it starts with local government to set those rules, set those parameters on how property

should be constructed, if it should be constructed in the wildland-urban interface for the safety of the entire community.

Gary: That concludes our interview with Mary Jacobs, representing the National league of Cities. Other national, state and local agency and non-government organization perspectives can be heard at www.forestsandrangelands.gov under Cohesive Strategy Podcasts.