

A Synopsis of the 2012 National Prescribed Fire Use Survey Report

A Collaborative Effort of the National Association of State Foresters and Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils

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ABSTRACT

Annual wildfire activity has been tracked for decades. Much less is known about prescribed fire activities. How much and where prescribed fire occurs year to year, and to what degree it meets resource needs is poorly understood. A national evaluation that specifically focuses on the scale at which prescribed fire occurs, what programs support prescribed fire, and identifies factors that limit prescribed fire use is nonexistent. These are all relevant questions necessary to make informed policy and programmatic decisions. To gain a better understanding of prescribed fire use, the National Association of State Foresters and the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils collaborated in early 2012 to conduct a national prescribed fire use survey of all state agencies responsible for prescribed fire activities.



Stephen J. Pyne

From the Forward: A revolution in thinking about fire begun in the 1960s has sought to promote fire, make fire institutions serve land use, and validate a civil society for fire. It has culminated in a rechartering of rights and responsibilities under a "national cohesive strategy" released on the centennial of the Weeks Act.



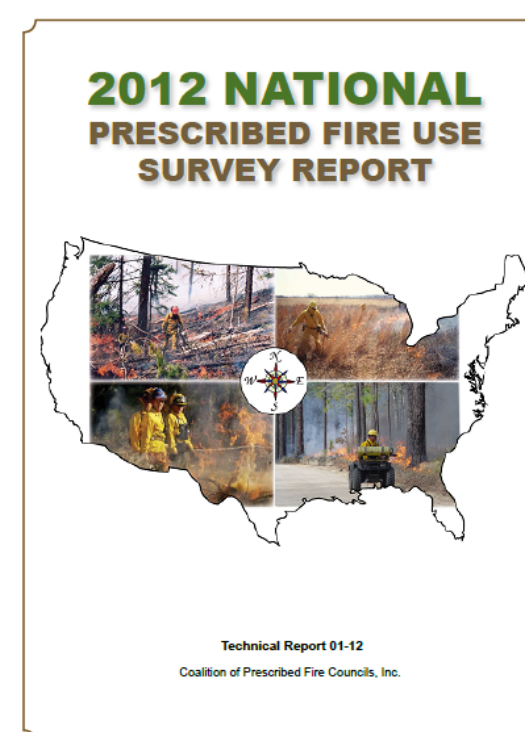
Mark Melvin

Although the land's need for fire continues, the ecological imperative for fire is no longer understood and goes largely ignored by the public. Restoring this human and fire link in the 21st century is essential to maintain forest health and more importantly, to provide public health and safety.

FIRE IS CRITICAL TO 60% OF THE U.S. LANDSCAPE

INTRODUCTION

Science has demonstrated that low-intensity surface fires were historically a critical ecological process in as much as 60 percent of North American landscapes. Today it is widely agreed that prescribed fire is essential for conservation and for mitigating the effects of wildfire. To get a better understanding of how fire is currently being used and to identify challenges for its continued use, the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) and the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils partnered to conduct a national prescribed fire use survey. The results were published in the *2012 National Prescribed Fire Use Survey Report*, and highlights are summarized in this poster.



WHAT IS THE STATE OF Rx FIRE IN U.S.?

PURPOSE

The purpose of this survey was to identify the current state of prescribed fire in the U.S., and to disseminate the findings to help set the direction and vision of programs across the country. It is hoped that the survey will aid fire managers, prescribed fire councils, agencies and policymakers to better understand prescribed fire use and to address common national interests and identify regional differences.

SURVEYED ALL 50 STATES

METHODOLOGY

The report is based on the best 2011 information available from state forestry agencies. The data identify challenges at a national scale, and help distinguish regional and state differences and similarities.

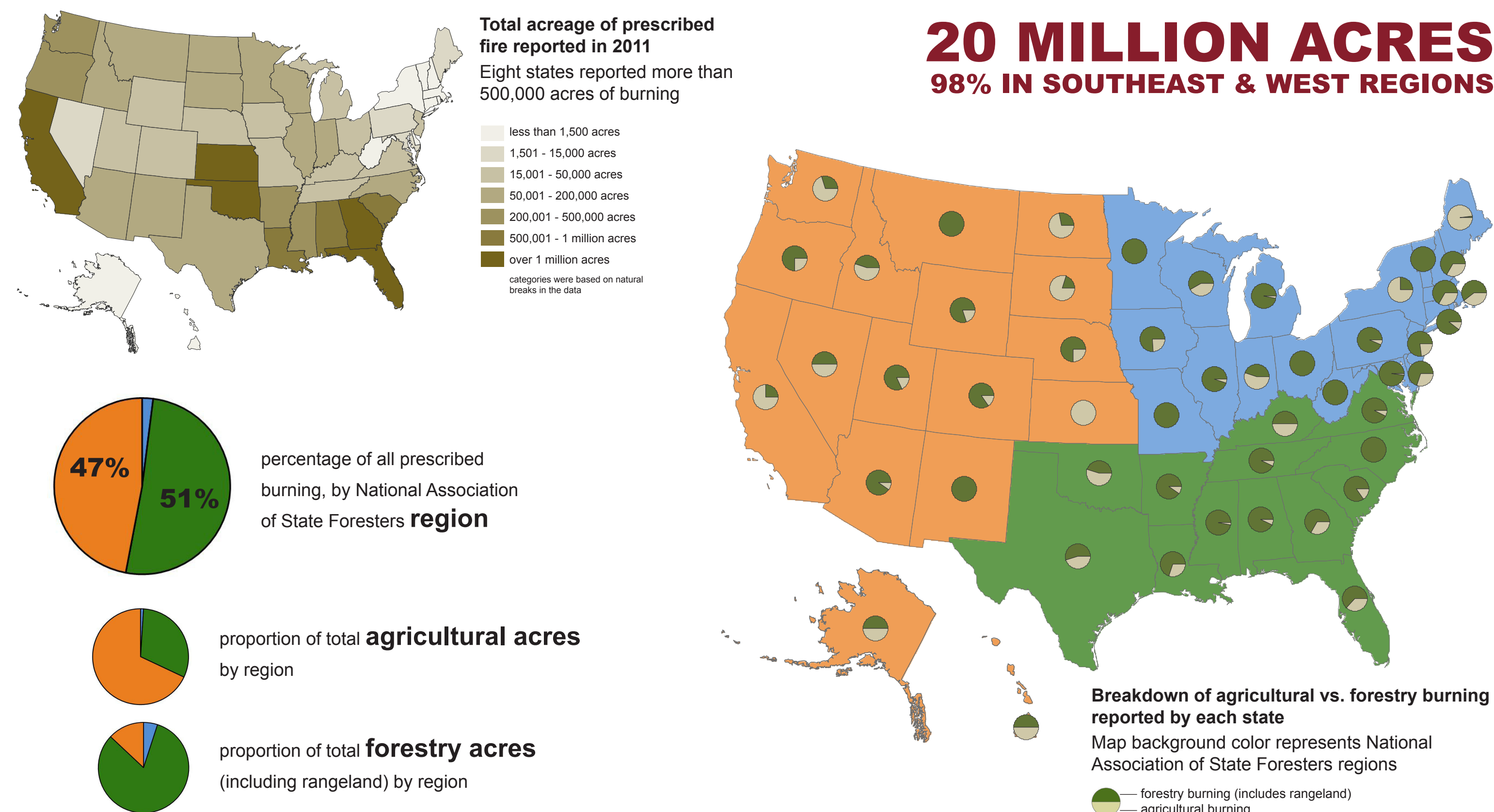
In early 2012, state forestry agencies were sent a questionnaire that focused on prescribed fire activity, state-level programs and factors that limit prescribed fire use. Follow-up contact ensured that 100 percent participation was achieved. Although record keeping procedures vary among states, this survey is the most comprehensive of its kind.

Acres and Objectives State foresters were asked to report on all federal, state and private prescribed burning activity within the state in 2011. For the purpose of this survey, forestry and agricultural acreages were reported separately; rangeland burning was included in forestry. NASF geographic regions were used to make all regional comparisons and are consistent with those used in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

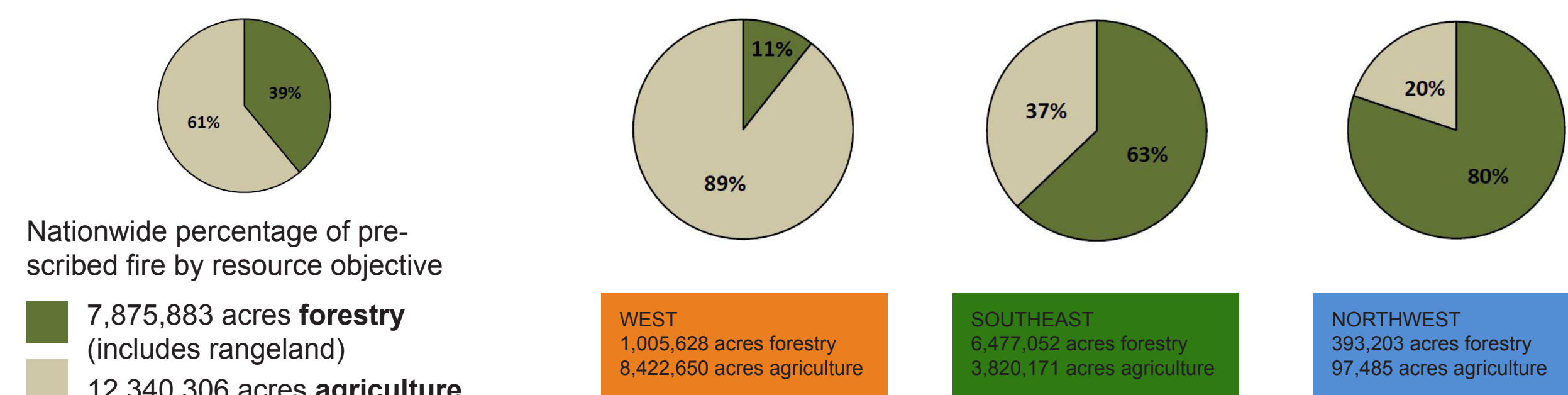
Impediments To get a fresh look at current challenges to prescribed fire implementation, state agencies were asked to list the three top impediments that limit prescribed responses. The question was posed without suggestion or further interpretation to avoid inadvertently guiding responses.

RESULTS

The survey revealed that about 20 million acres were treated with prescribed fire across the country in 2011. Of that figure, approximately 7.9 million acres were forestry-related and 12.3 million were agricultural. Nationally 98 percent of all prescribed fire activity occurred in the Southeast and West (51 and 47 percent respectively).



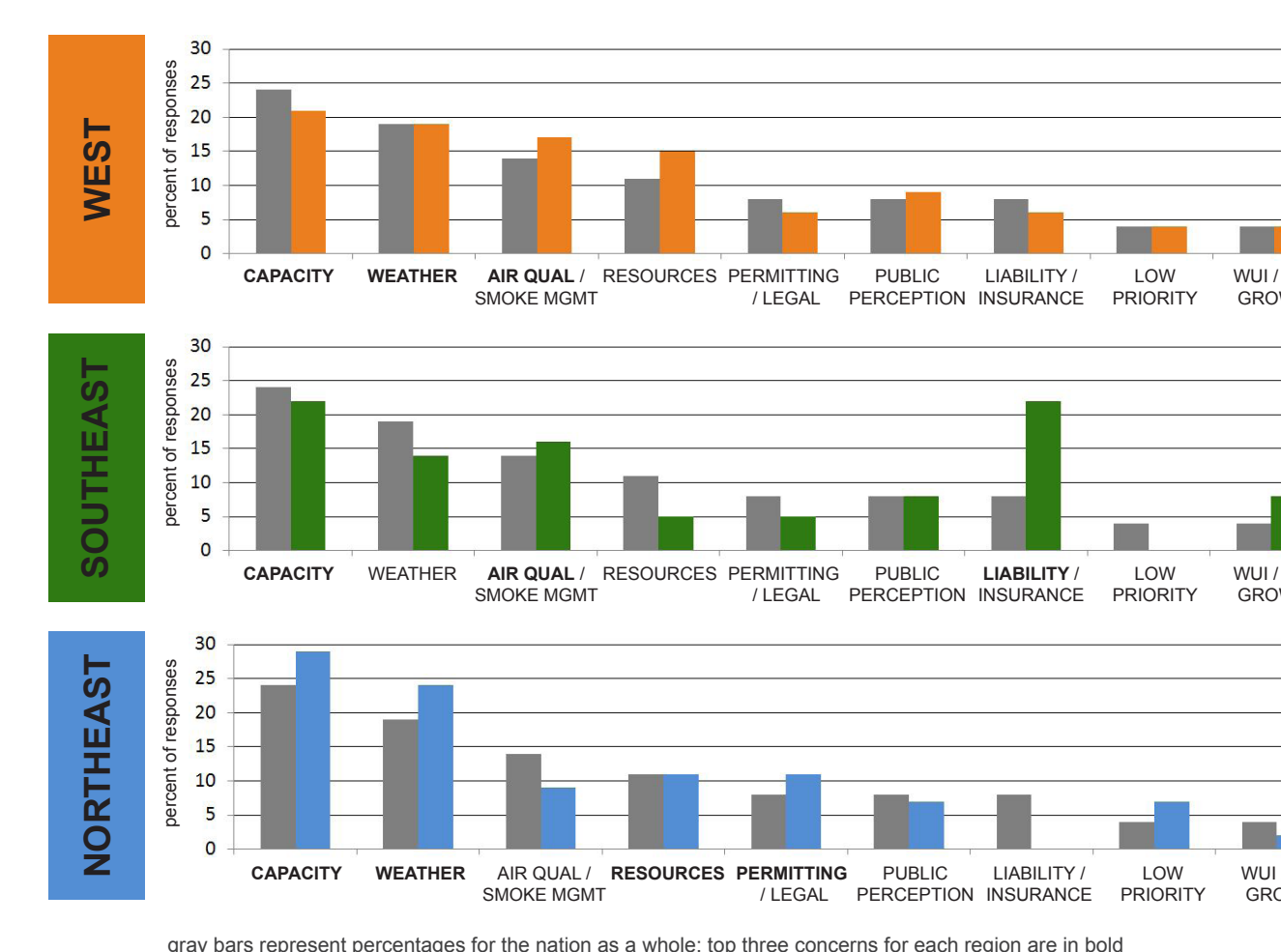
WEST HAS MORE AGRICULTURAL FIRE, NORTHEAST & SOUTHEAST, FORESTRY



PRIMARY IMPEDIMENT: CAPACITY

Factors that limit capacity topped the list of impediments to prescribed fire nationally, as well as within each region. These included lack of trained prescribed fire managers, training opportunities, private contractors and partnerships.

Capacity Concerns	Limited personnel, training, private contractors, partnerships
Weather Concerns	Narrow burn windows, drought, available burn days
Air Quality / Smoke Mgmt	Visibility, nuisance, emission impacts
Resource Concerns	Limited funding, high implementation costs
Public Perception	Lack of public understanding / acceptance
Liability / Insurance	Landowner liability, insurance availability and cost
Permitting / Legal	State law, burn bans, local restrictions, NEPA process
WUI / Population Growth	Urbanization, influx of new residents
Low Priority	Agency or landowner priority, too difficult



DISCUSSION

Among the report's conclusions is that:

"The most successful prescribed fire programs, no matter the location or level of difficulty, are the result of collaboration. The most successful collaboratives work as seamless partnerships, void of any dominating group or individual interest, focusing on the goals at hand. They do not recognize barriers to meet objectives; they find ways to succeed. Most importantly, through careful planning and implementation, the modern day prescribed fire manager is willing to accept the associated risks of prescribed fire use because of its necessity for the resource being managed. The challenges are many, but if prescribed fire is to remain a viable resource management tool into the future, it will require the combined problem-solving efforts of the entire fire community."

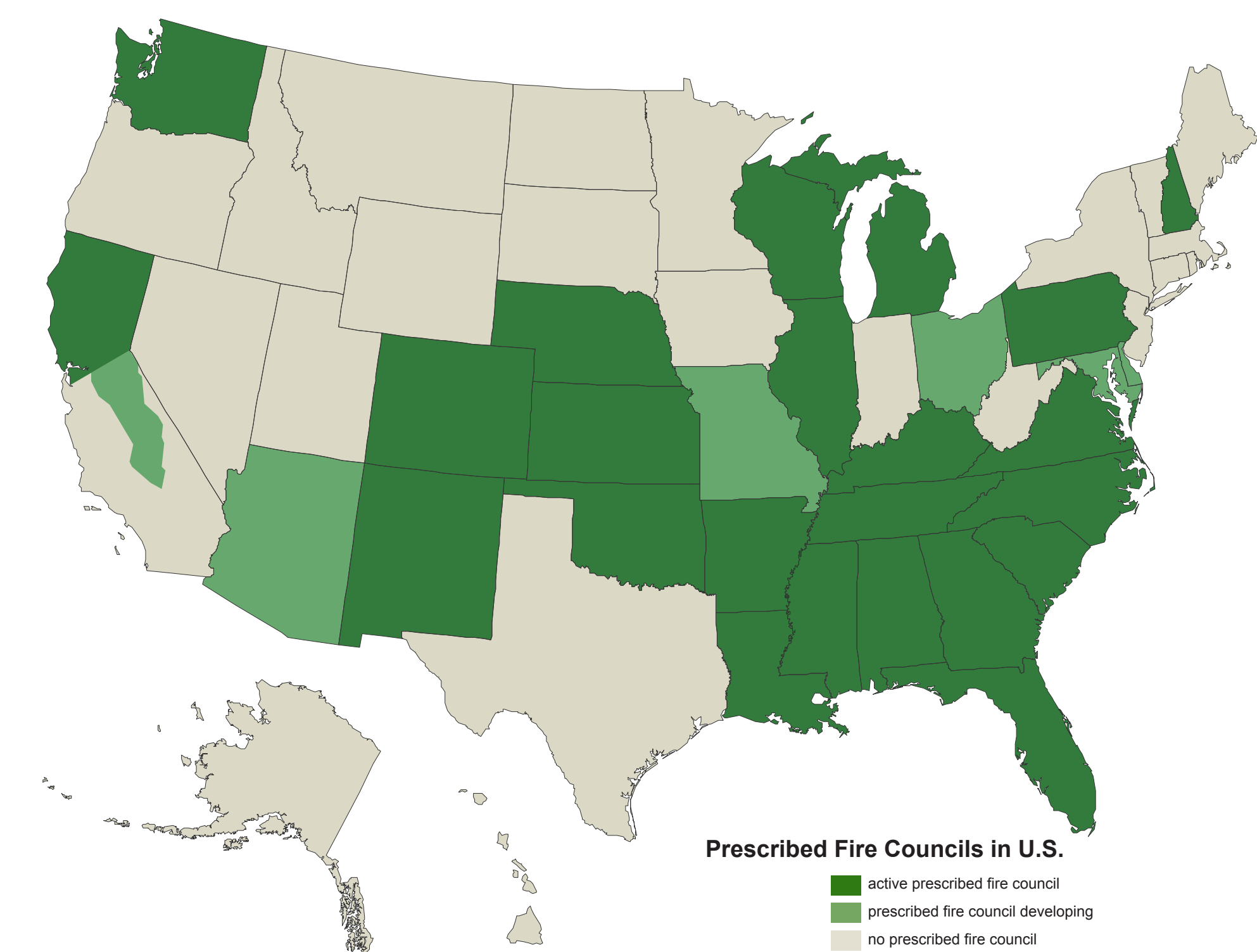
COLLABORATION IS KEY

NATIONAL COALITION OF PRESCRIBED FIRE COUNCILS

The National Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils was founded by a diverse group of public and private leaders in 2007 to address the new and increasingly complex challenges that twenty-first century prescribed fire managers face: Concerns about public safety and health, ecological stewardship, liability, public education, and air quality regulation are greater than any one agency or state can address. In 2009, the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils, Inc. was formally developed into a non-profit corporation.

MISSION

The Coalition's core mission is to promote the appropriate use of prescribed fire for enhancing public safety, managing resources, and sustaining environment quality. In addition, the Coalition encourages and facilitates the organization of prescribed fire councils in states that do not yet have active councils.



Twenty-three states (and British Columbia) now have prescribed fire councils, and another six councils are under development. The National Coalition is working to encourage councils in all 50 states.

For more information on the National Coalition, or to find a council near you, visit:

www.prescribedfire.net

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The mission of the National Association of State Foresters is to represent State and Territorial Forester interests by influencing federal policy and leading efforts to promote healthy and sustainable trees and forests.



The mission of the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils is to promote the appropriate use of prescribed fire for enhancing public safety, managing resources, and sustaining environment quality.