The Role of the Expert in Transferring Complex Science to Forest Mangers: implications for workforce development

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It is well documented that new ideas are more readily adopted if they are simple to understand. However, much of the science developed to support natural resource planning and decisions is very complex and difficult to understand. This is especially true if results of different studies seem to contradict. Complex biological systems rarely follow simple pathways and most often can follow multiple paths to an outcome. Understanding the science and the uncertainty surrounding these projections can be difficult. It has been found that organizations possessing expertise to understand new ideas or innovations more readily evaluate and adopt innovations.

Public forest managers are being called upon to use the "best available" science to plan management actions and monitor the outcome of decisions. The science community is challenged to communicate complex science findings so the management community can evaluate and incorporate science in decisions and documenting the correct interpretation of science. In order to transfer new knowledge and knowledge tools from the science community to the user community effectively, we have found that the expertise of the user community is critical in understanding and using new knowledge.

A systematic approach has been designed and evaluated to transfer science into the forest management community of the U.S. Forest Service in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska Regions. This approach and the role of experts in successful knowledge transfer and adoption will be presented using case studies from these organizations.