

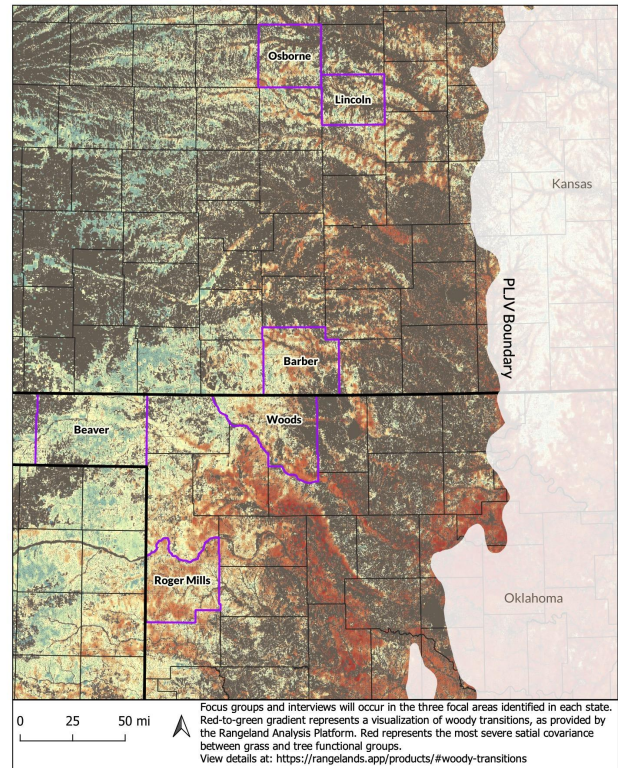


Social Science & Communications to Inform Brush Management NRCS National Conservation Innovation Grant

Project Description

The scale and speed of woody plant encroachment in the western Great Plains demands the development of innovative approaches to brush management and prevention. The goal of this project is to develop an effective outreach model by integrating social science insights into targeted strategic communications that increase brush management and prescribed fire on rangelands; the model will be piloted within three focus areas each in Kansas and Oklahoma. Over three years, we will collect social science information about brush management needs and barriers to participation in management activities, create and evaluate targeted communication messages and products that address those barriers and aim to increase participation in management actions, and work with agencies, conservation programs and local partners to deliver these communication messages to producers through targeted marketing communications campaigns and producer-focused outreach events. The social science insights and communication products can then be adapted and used by partners across the region.

Figure 1. Social Science Focal Areas



Project Location

Project activities will be centered in six conservation districts in Kansas (Osborne, Lincoln, and Barber Counties) and Oklahoma (Roger Mills, Woods, and Beaver Counties). Once the social science is complete, strategic messages will be incorporated into regular outreach events hosted by partners. These events have a broad reach, and we anticipate that they will draw participants from neighboring counties as well.

Project Objectives

Objective 1. Summarize Knowledge. Summarize the social science literature surrounding producer adoption, decision-making, and barriers related to brush management and prescribed fire, make it accessible online, and provide the summary to agencies and other partners throughout the region. This literature review will help us and partners understand what is known about the connections between cognitions and behavior and define which barriers and motivations we will examine as part of Objective 2.

Objective 2. Identify Barriers through Social Science. Work with producers through 12 key informant interviews and six focus groups to identify motivational, financial, and logistical barriers to using brush management and

prescribed fire across a gradient of woody plant encroachment (light, medium, and heavy). The interviews will identify the barriers and motivations that we will further examine through focus groups. Interviews will also provide farm-level indicators of encroachment and insights into the visual cues producers use to decide how to manage invasive woody plants. Results from this phase will be used to develop communication messages and products that increase management activities.

Objective 3. Develop Targeted Messages. Use social science results from the literature review and interviews to develop messages to increase participation in brush management and prescribed fire. These messages will cover topics that help producers know when and how to engage in management at each level of encroachment. The messages will be reviewed by experts to ensure accuracy about management practices.

Objective 4. Validate Messages. Test draft messages in the focus groups, refine the messages and test them again with focus group participants through a combination of remote methods and in-person meetings. The final messages will be used to develop a communications guide which will be shared with conservation agencies and partners to incorporate into their communications and outreach to promote brush management and prescribed fire.

Objective 5. Implement and Evaluate Communications Campaign. Develop, implement and evaluate two marketing communications campaigns in Kansas and Oklahoma. The campaigns will include two state-specific websites, producer success stories in local publications, and producer outreach events – all designed to drive engagement in brush management and prescribed fire. The website will also connect producers to local conservation partners and programs. The campaigns will be rolled out in our focal areas and involve local conservation districts and other partners.

Partners

While the following partners are contributing to this project as part of the grant, the partnership will continue to grow.

- Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, Barber Conservation District, Lincoln Conservation District, and Osborne Conservation District
- Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, Beaver Conservation District, Upper Washita Conservation District, and Woods Conservation District
- Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
- Kansas State University
- Oklahoma State University
- Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition
- Kansas Prescribed Fire Council
- Ducks Unlimited

More Information

Please contact PLJV Social Science Specialist Ryan Roberts at 315.368.7095 or ryan.roberts@pljv.org for more information on the project.