

From Burning to Learning: Adaptive Governance to Wildfires in the North-West Province of South Africa

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ABSTRACTS Wild fires are a recurring natural hazard on the African continent. Although wildfires are necessary for ecological management and regeneration of certain species, the risk posed transcends into impacts on sustainable development and the protection of livelihoods. Better management of wildfires becomes necessary because changes within the environment are becoming more complex. Social and ecological systems are intertwined and the resulting “complex or mega-system” needs to be able to learn and adapt to change. Research over a two-year period in the North-West Province of South Africa considered the adaptation in management (systems), which took place between various role-players in multi-layered and polycentric institutions. Through a qualitative research design, the 2011 and 2012 wild fire seasons were investigated. The notion of adaptive governance was used as benchmark to determine which transformative actions took place. The prime objective of the research is to what extent has adaptive governance taken place during the 2011 and 2012 wild fire seasons in North-West Province, South Africa? The research found that role-players were able to adapt their management systems to include aspects such as information provision, dealing with conflict, induced legal compliance, provision of infrastructure and resources, and encouraged participation and adaptation. The paper recommends that emphasis on conflict management and resolution, applying nesting through various management levels, devised rules for wild fire management relevant with the ecological conditions, and the implementation of accountability mechanisms to be put in place.