PhD Graduate Research Assistantship in Collaborative Local Governance of Wildfire Risk

The School of Environment and Natural Resources at The Ohio State University invites applications for a funded PhD position to support an interdisciplinary study on wildfire risk governance as part of the NSF-funded project “Cognitive, social, and institutional dynamics of decision-making in complex hazard-prone environments.” The PhD researcher will work primarily with Matt Hamilton and Eric Toman at Ohio State, but will also engage with collaborators at Colorado State University (Jon Salerno and Tony Cheng), the University of Michigan (Paige Fischer), and Portland State University (Max Nielsen-Pincus).

Recent years have demonstrated the substantial threat that wildfires pose to communities across the U.S. This project evaluates how local-level wildfire protection planning processes shape social interaction and consequently the implementation of risk mitigation measures at both local and regional scales. These local planning processes confront a range of challenges that relate to the need to coordinate risk mitigation efforts at multiple spatial and administrative scales (e.g., spanning public and private lands) and to promote cooperation among diverse stakeholder groups with distinct goals for managing wildfire-prone landscapes (e.g., fire suppression, timber production, protection for threatened species). This project improves understanding of how risk governance networks affect policy learning in collaborative planning processes and the scope of decisions they produce, how social processes (such as learning, cooperation, and competition) affect the implementation of those decisions, and how interdependent decision-making processes affect the efficiency of risk mitigation at regional scales. Understanding the interplay among cognitive, social, and policy processes is critical for reducing the vulnerability of communities to wildfire.

Key Responsibilities & Opportunities:
- Work with faculty advisors Hamilton and Toman, as well as collaborators at other universities, to co-manage fieldwork in Colorado.
- Train and supervise undergraduate research assistants.
- Develop peer-reviewed journal articles, academic presentations, and outreach materials.

Required Qualifications:
- Masters degree in natural resource management, geography, public policy, regional planning, environmental studies, sociology, psychology, political science, or related field.
- Demonstrated social science research experience (qualitative and quantitative)
- Interest in wildland fire and forest management
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills
- Commitment to interdisciplinary research
Desired Qualifications:

- Expertise in social network analysis
- Document coding/natural language processing experience

Starting Date: The starting date for the assistantship is August 15, 2021.

To apply, send the following information by email to Matt Hamilton (hamilton.1323@osu.edu) and Eric Toman (toman.10@osu.edu): 1) a cover letter outlining your research interests and experience, 2) a detailed CV, and 3) contact information for at least 2 academic referees. Members of under-represented groups are encouraged to apply. We will begin reviewing applications on November 2.