6.2 Imagery to Support Your Message

We live in a visual world and smart use of images and graphics can greatly increase the impact of your materials. Images are not simply for decoration. A picture can increase the impact of your message in many ways, and thinking carefully about what purpose you want an image to serve can help you select the best image for the job.

1. Pictures can be great attention-getters. Generally speaking, images that are relevant and specific to your audience and their environment work better than generic landscape pictures or clip art. Similarly, close-up pictures that show people’s faces get the audience’s attention better than wide-angle shots of groups or scenery. Images that are somewhat unexpected or surprising also cause people to look twice and attend to your message, if only out of curiosity. And it goes without saying that vivid, high-quality images have a positive impact on the attractiveness and credibility of your message, while blurry or distorted images do the opposite.

2. **Pictures and graphics can help communicate your message or support your argument.** Sometimes, a picture or a smart graphic can really drive home a point faster and more powerfully than a thousand words. For example, this picture of a controlled burn is a nice contrast to the news images of massive wildfires, and can help landowners who are afraid of prescribed fires to see that they aren’t so scary.

![Controlled Burn](https://www.flickr.com/photos/usfs_pnwrs/36449810445/sizes/l)

3. **Pictures can also help to evoke a mood that enhances your argument.** Consider the two images below. The first one would be a good candidate for a flier that seeks to tap into landowners’ community spirit. The second would be better for a flier that seeks to motivate landowners by evoking pride in their individual landholding.

![Community Spirit](https://www.flickr.com/photos/louisvilleusace/8071976003/sizes/l)

![Individual Pride](https://www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/39968670233/sizes/l)

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4. **Pictures can help you connect with your target audience** by demonstrating that you understand their needs and their lives, and that you’re speaking directly to them. The easiest way to do this is to use visuals that feature something that you know audience members value, something that makes them go: “I want that.” Another option is to feature people or environments that look familiar, so landowners can see themselves and their lives reflected in your materials.

![Image of people and turkeys]

Images are not just for decoration—they can help you get attention, bolster your arguments, evoke emotions, and help your audience know that you understand them and their lives, thereby making them more likely to listen to you. Make sure to think carefully about each image you include and how it is contributing to the effectiveness of your materials.

**FREE STOCK PHOTOS**

As much as possible, try to use real photographs from your landscape and community in your materials. They are much more likely to ring true and signal inclusion and relevance to your audience. Until you build up a nice photo library, online stock photo libraries can meet your needs. Websites such as [Flickr](https://www.flickr.com), [SCX](https://www.scx.com), [Pixabay](https://pixabay.com), [Shutterstock](https://www.shutterstock.com), [Bugwood.org](https://www.bugwood.org), [ForestryImages.org](https://www.forestryimages.org), and the [Forest History Society’s photo database](https://www.fs.fed.us/history/photo/) are good sources for images of people and landscapes. For more forestry-specific images, try [Bugwood.org](https://www.bugwood.org), [ForestryImages.org](https://www.forestryimages.org), and the [Forest History Society’s photo database](https://www.fs.fed.us/history/photo/). Always check licenses to see how you can use an image and how the source should be cited. Images licensed through Creative Commons are usually available for use without a charge, and their website provides detailed information about what is required to use the image—restrictions often require that credit is given to the photographer or organization posting the image. There are also plenty of no-restriction public domain images, covered under the Creative Commons Zero (CC0) license.

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