

6th International Wildland Fire Conference

Regional Statement of the North American Region – An Input Paper to the Conference Statement

13 October 2015

General Fire Assessment

Fire and land management is being increasingly challenged around the world by a changing wildland fire environment. The reasons for this include increasing wildland fuel loads under the previous fire exclusion policy, expanding wildland-urban interface, increasing human-caused fires as population increases with greater access to wilderness areas, and climate change-altered fire regimes that are characterized by longer fire seasons, higher fire intensities, greater severity of fire impacts, and increased lightning fires. Additionally, all of this is occurring at a time of rapidly increasing fire management costs, and aging equipment and infrastructure.

The international fire community recognizes that a key fire management strategy in addressing the increased difficulty for managing fire is by enhancing international cooperation. Due to the similarity in wildland fire problems and evolving fire management programs within the Americas, the relative proximity of American countries in a global context, and fire season differences between northern and southern hemispheres, there is a collective advantage to sharing fire knowledge, expertise, information/intelligence, and resources between countries and regions within the American continents. Developing a strategy based on these factors to increase international fire management cooperation between North America, Central America and the Caribbean, and South America will benefit all participating countries.

Since the 5th IWFC, the North American Forest Commission-Fire Management Working Group (NAFC-FMWG) has held annual meetings in Los Angeles (USA), Valle de Bravo (Mexico), and Halifax (Canada) to discuss current North American fire issues, research and technology transfer activities, fire management cooperation, and further opportunities for international collaboration. Representatives from the Central American and Australasian regions also participated in these meetings.

In 2012, the Forest Fire Management Group (FFMG) of Australia and New Zealand participated in a study tour of North American fire management and research agencies. More recently, the NAFC-FMWG participated in a study tour of Australia and New Zealand. On May 1-2, 2014 an International Symposium on bushfire management was held in Canberra, Australia to facilitate participation by the study tour members. The FFMG convened the symposium bringing together senior bushfire managers and researchers from the USA, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand and Australia. The symposium focused on the current state of knowledge, both scientifically and operationally, the identification of emerging issues in bushfire management, as well as ensuring the development of bushfire management networks on a global basis, and to identify areas for improvement and collaborative research and development interests.

The North America study tour group recommended such symposiums continue in a similar format in the future. They offer opportunities to focus efforts globally as practitioners from the participating agencies work together to lead our wildland fire community into the future. The FMWG believes that increased engagement between operational fire experts and scientists globally, would be most beneficial for all parties concerned.

The North American Forest Commission-Fire Management Working Group has recently developed a draft International Fire Strategy to promote increased international fire management cooperation and technology transfer in the Americas and globally. The objective is to support enhanced international cooperation in training, information and resource-sharing, and science and technology; and to build high-level support by senior decision-makers through fire management strategy and policy development to maintain long-term program continuity. The NAFC-FMWG will further develop the International Fire Strategy with representatives from Central and South American regions during the next annual meeting (November 2015, Phoenix, Arizona, USA).

Conclusions

Increased international collaboration within North America continues to be the priority of the NAFC-FMWG, as well as increased international cooperation within the Americas and globally. Both of these priorities will be supported through development of the new NAFC-FMWG International Fire Strategy, resulting in greater collaboration in training, science and technology exchange, and information and resource-sharing.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the NAFC-FMWG and FMWG of Australia and New Zealand continue its close cooperation and communication through study tours and participation at annual meetings. We further recommend a 2nd International Symposium be sponsored by FMWG during the 2016 Australia/New Zealand study tour of North America. The NAFC-FMWG also recommends continued expansion and coordination of international training, exchange of fire management expertise, and science and technology.