

6th International Wildland Fire Conference

Regional Statement of the Central Asia Region – An Input Paper to the Conference Statement

13 October 2015

General Fire Assessment

Specific wildland fire problems of the region

Over the past few decades the Central Asian countries have witnessed a growing number of average size wildfires in forest and non-forest ecosystems (steppe ecosystems), predominantly caused by people, but also by lightning in sparsely populated areas. In conjunction with unsustainable land-use practices, climatic extremes such as extended droughts (as a consequence of regional climate change) and exploitation of natural resources, these fires have caused considerable environmental and economic damages and some have had transboundary impacts, for example, through smoke pollution, loss of biodiversity or forest degradation at the landscape level. The interaction between anthropogenic environmental disturbances and wildland fire demonstrates a new dimension of fire problems that may become of increasing importance with the expanding population and shrinking natural resources – a challenge to environmental management and particularly to wildland fire management.

Wildfires if not well managed might pose immediate risk to the sustainability of forest and non-forest ecosystems, threaten biodiversity and the recreational, scenic, environmental and cultural value of forests. Populations of surrounding areas are becoming seriously affected by injuries, death, and losses in properties. Fire smoke pollution has repeatedly affected the health of urban and rural populations. Post-fire secondary disasters such as water regime changes, landslides, mudflows or floods are additional threats to human populations, especially in mountainous terrain.

Main advances achieved since the last International Wildland Fire Conference (reference to the recommendations of the 5th IWFC and the results of activities between the 5th and the 6th IWFCs (i.e., between 2011 and 2015).

First steps to enhance fire management capacities of Mongolia and Central Asian countries have been initiated by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) in 2004. In 2004, the first international conference "*Forest Fire Management and International Cooperation in Fire Emergencies in the Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans and Adjoining Regions of the Near East and Central Asia*" was held in Turkey¹, followed by the "*Regional Central Asian Forest Congress: "Forest Policy: Problems and Solutions"*" in Kyrgyzstan in the same year.² In the resolution of the Congress, the forest services of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan endorsed the participation in the Global Wildland Fire Network and the development of an international wildland fire accord. Subsequently, the **Regional Central Asia Wildland Fire Network**³ was established as one of the 14 regional networks within the Global Wildland Fire Network.⁴ Since then, a number of activities have been done in the region:

- The *First International Central Asian Wildland Fire Conference "Wildland Fires in Natural Ecosystems of the Central Asian Region: Ecology and Management Implications"*⁵ was organized with the support of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) on 2-6 June 2008 in Mongolia and addressed the most pressing issues in Mongolia and neighbouring countries. The Conference also enabled consultation among the agencies and other stakeholders involved in fire management, and a demonstration of advanced techniques in fire management.

¹ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/Antalya-Declaration.pdf>

² In the resolution of the congress the forest services of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan endorsed the participation in the Global Wildland Fire Network and the development of an international wildland fire accord:

<http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/Resolution-Central-Asia-Eng-GFMC-final.pdf>

³ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/CentralAsia.html>

⁴ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/globalNet.html>

⁵ http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/CentralAsia_3.html

- In 2010, Mongolia attended the “*International Conference on Cross-Border Forest Fires and Cooperation in their Suppression*” which was hosted by the government of the Russian Federation with support by the GFMC in Irkutsk, Russian Federation, in which principles of transboundary cooperation in fire management in the Eurasian region were agreed upon.⁶
- In 2012 and 2013, representatives of the Central Asian states attended the First and Second “*International Fire Management Week*”, in Krasnoyarsk Krai⁷ and also in November 2013 the “*International Congress and Trade Fair on Forest Fire and Climate Change: Challenges for Fire Management in Natural and Cultural Landscapes of Eurasia*” in Novosibirsk, Russian Federation.⁸
- In October 2013, the “*UNISDR Pan-Asia Wildland Fire Network Secretariat Foundation Meeting*” was held in Seoul, Korea, in which participants from the four Regional Wildland Fire Networks of the Asian region discussed ways to enhance international cooperation in fire management in the Asian countries.
- Participation of the Central Asian fire management delegations in the “*UNECE/FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management*” (United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, September 2013), was an important step to learn / share experiences on cooperation of transboundary fire management activities from the other regions.
- In March 2014, a new and detailed glossary “*English-Mongolian-Russian Fire Management Terminology*”⁹ has been produced by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) together with fire specialists of the National Emergency Management Agency and the University of Law Enforcement of Mongolia, and Russian fire specialists.
- In September 2014, the Mongolian-Russian Government “*Agreement on Transboundary Fire Management Cooperation*” was signed during the official visit of the Russian delegation to Mongolia headed by the President of Russia Vladimir Putin. This event was followed by a cross-boundary firefighting exercise in the summer of 2014 with a follow-up bilateral consultation in Ulan-Ude in spring 2015.

After the conference, the “*Meeting on Forest and Steppe Fires in Mongolia: An Inter-Agency Meeting to Define the Way Ahead*”¹⁰ was organized in Ulaanbaatar on 11 September 2008; the Round Table meetings were held (2009, 2014, 2015¹¹) with the participation of all stakeholders in fire management in Mongolia and discussed current wildland fire situations and future steps. As it stated in the 5th International Wildland Fire Conference held in 2011 in South Africa,¹² fire management is complex and requires coordination of participating agencies and other stakeholders. To overcome these issues an establishment of a unit of competence in fire research and management in Mongolia was identified as an urgent issue, therefore, the Regional Central Asia Fire Management Resource Center (RCAFMRC) was established with the long-standing support of the GFMC and financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) through the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The RCAFMRC is functioning as the Coordinator of Regional Central Asia Wildland Fire Network and Secretariat of the National Committee on Forest and Steppe Fire Protection of Mongolia. The RCAFMRC has been mandated by the Government of Mongolia to serve as secretariat of the National Coordination Committee on Forest and Steppe Fire Protection (NCCFSFP).

In September 2015, Regional Central Asia Fire Management training was organized by the GFMC and RCAFMRC through the OSCE with the financial support of the SDC. In this training fire managers and policy makers participated from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Gaps / shortcomings in wildland fire science, management and policies

⁶ http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/CentralAsia_6.html

⁷ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/BalticRegion/KrasnoyarskFireManagementWeek.html>

⁸ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/BalticRegion/NovosibirskCongress.html>

⁹ http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/latestnews/recent_pub.htm

¹⁰ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/Mongolia-NEMA-MNE-Interagency-Fire-Meeting-11-September-2008.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/MongoliaFireManagementWeek2015.html>

¹² <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/southafrica-2011/03-Wildfire-2011-Recommendations-Regional-Session-III.pdf>

Common challenges in wildland fire science, management and policies in Central Asia are, insufficient professional firefighting capacity, limited public initiatives, insufficient budgets, insufficient training and awareness activities, and limited bilateral or regional trainings on fire management.

Proposals for solutions / action to be taken

Financial resources for fire management are limited. Financial constraints and transboundary implications of destructive wildfires necessitate co-operation at all levels. This includes the sharing of scientific, technical and human resources at national and international levels, capacity building of personnel responsible for fire management at landscape level, entering into formal agreements within and between countries that share common natural resources and common wildfire risks, and the participation of civil society, notably local rural communities and dwellers.

Conclusions

Altogether, the problem of vegetation fires in Mongolia and in the Central Asian countries are complex and cannot be addressed on a single sectoral level. To overcome the limited capacity in fire management, there is a need to strengthen human and technical resources of agencies and local communities that deal with fire prevention and response. In order to increase the country's fire management capability, a systematic and realistic approach to overcome the shortcomings is required.

Recommendations

Enhance the cooperation of similar disaster prevention organizations of the region; introduce advanced approaches, techniques and equipment and nourish cooperation in the future.