



Regional Session V: Eurasia, Southeast Europe / Caucasus and Central Asia
“Enhancing International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management”

11 May 2011, 15:50 – 18:10

Conclusions and Recommendations

Rationale

Within the last decade temperate-boreal Eurasia has experienced several wildfire episodes that have resulted in severe environmental damages, high economic losses and considerable humanitarian problems. This has prompted the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), under which the UNISDR Regional Wildland Fire Networks of Eurasia, Southeast Europe / Caucasus and Central Asia are working, to address recent socio-economic, political and land-use changes, as well as climate change, that are affecting fire regimes of temperate-boreal Eurasia. The UNECE region, which is extending from Western Europe to Asia's Far East and spanning over more than 180 degrees longitude, is bearing a large variety of ecosystems and land-use systems. While specific causes and underlying reasons of extreme wildfires may be quite different throughout the region – there are many fire-related issues in common. For instance, in the Western Eurasian part of the region many neighboring countries are sharing similar natural, cultural and social conditions that are determining the occurrence and impacts of wildfires.

Besides changes that are evidently understood by the public there are hazards and risks that have been perceived only recently due to a better scientific understanding of the multiple impacts of fires, notably in the context of climate change and human health, but also with regards to an increasing vulnerability of society to direct and secondary effects of fire, e.g. fires burning at the interface of residential and industrial areas, or in terrain contaminated by industrial deposits or armed conflicts. Land-use change and heritages of former land use constitute a major driver of changing fire regimes in cultural landscapes of Eurasia.

In summary, policy makers of UNECE member states are confronted with the following facts and trends affecting occurrence and impacts of wildland fires in the region:

- Consequences of rural abandonment and urbanization on agriculture, pastoralism, forestry and thus on wildfire hazard;
- Rural exodus affecting availability of the rural work force, including availability of rural firefighters;
- Re-privatization of formerly nationalized forests resulting in vacuums of forest management and forest fire management in smallholder forest estates;
- Weakened governance over forestry and decreased fire management capabilities in many Eastern European and Central Asian countries as a consequence of the transition of national economies, resulting in uncontrolled or illegal forest use and increase of related wildfires;
- Increasing problems of wildfires affecting the perimeters of metropolitan areas, settlements and developments dispersedly located in wildlands;
- Concerns about the impacts of radiatively active trace gases and particle emissions from vegetation fires affecting the functioning of the atmosphere and of ecosystem, e.g. the consequences of the transport of fire-emitted black carbon to the arctic environment;
- Vulnerability of society to fire-generated air pollution, including new scientific insights in the impact of fire emissions on human health;
- Resulting needs for the development of standards for reducing gas and particle emissions from fossil fuel, biofuel and other open burning that are affecting human health;

- Resulting controversial views on the acceptance of prescribed burning as a source of pyrogenic pollutants;
- Secondary problems associated with wildfires, notable on territories contaminated by radioactivity and remnants from armed conflicts (e.g., unexploded ordnance, land mines, uranium-depleted ammunition);
- Consequences of climate change on cultural fire regimes and ecosystem vulnerability, e.g. transformation of former fire-excluded or -protected ecosystems or land-use systems such as peat bogs and other organic terrain, or high-altitude mountain ecosystems, such as in the European Alps.

There is an increasing perception by the public and by policy makers to review and adopt innovative integrated fire management solutions and to exploit of the results of successfully completed international fire research projects in Eurasia for developing adequate public policies affecting fire management and operational fire management.

These issues will be addressed in the planned / upcoming “UNECE/FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management”, which will be organized by the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire through its Coordinator – the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Germany, and supported by the Council of Europe as a contribution to the “UN International Year of Forests”.¹

The participants of the Regional Session are acknowledging and referring to ongoing and proposed initiatives that are addressing specific thematic issues. These initiatives should be supported by members of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks (Eurasia, SE Europe/Caucasus, Central Asia, Euro-Alpine), e.g.:

- Promotion of the application of prescribed fire in nature conservation, forestry and landscape management, with encouraging progress of countries cooperating under the “Eurasian Fire in Nature Conservation Network”, the International Peatland Fire Network and similar initiatives;
- Exploitation of the results of successfully completed international fire research projects for developing adequate public policies affecting fire management and operational fire management, e.g. the latest accomplished multi-national “Fire Paradox” project, or the ongoing development of the multinational Alpine Forest Fire Warning System (ALPF FIRS);
- Introduction and further development of competency-based fire management training standards for achieving qualifications for fire fighters, foresters and land managers, e.g. the “EuroFire Competency Standards” (an initiative of the International Association of Fire and Rescue Services (CTIF) and GFMC to enhance fire management capabilities of the fire services);
- Application and further development of existing and development of new bilateral agreements on reciprocal transboundary assistance in wildfire emergencies all over the ECE region;
- Endeavor to enhance governance of UNECE member states to provide and receive assistance in wildfire (and other environmental) emergency situations by setting up standards, protocols and agreements, in cooperation with procedures evolving under the lead of the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit and the UN Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies, e.g., the proposed creation of an Environmental Emergencies Center (EEC);
- Follow up of the recommendations of regional groups, projects and programmes, or earlier regional conferences to enhance international cooperation in fire management in the UNECE region and adjoining regions, e.g. recommendations from projects supported by the Council of Europe through the Euro-Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), and the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) addressing wildland fire, human security and peace in the EECCA region; and the outcomes of the International Conference on Cross-Boundary Fire Management (Irkutsk, Russia, 2010) and the APEC Conference on Forest Fire Management and International Cooperation in Fire Emergencies of the Asia Pacific (Khabarovsk, Russia, 2010).

¹ “Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management” (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe – UNECE region), planned for the week 16-20 January 2012 (at the United Nations, Palais des Nations, Geneva) by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire, and supported by the Council of Europe.

Recommendations

Considering the active dialogue taking place in the UNECE Region the recommendations of the Regional Session do not intend to duplicate statements and thus concentrate on the following general and concrete recommendations:

General

Representatives of the regional networks and participants of the regional session underscore the need to

- Enhance applied research on integrated fire management, notably on
 - Use of prescribed fire in forestry, conservation and landscape management
 - Development of adaptive fire policies and management in response to global change (climate change, socio-economic changes, and land-use change)
 - Integrate fire management in the frame of natural resources / land management, including use of plant biomass as a renewable and sustainable source for energy production
- Increase fire management efforts on terrain contaminated by radioactivity, unexploded ordnance, land mines and chemical deposits, notably in the regions affected by the nuclear fallout of the Chernobyl power plant failure in 1986.
- Increase efforts on securing peat bog / wetland ecosystems to become affected by fire
- Increase effort to reduce unnecessary burning on croplands, fallow and other lands to reduce the negative impact of greenhouse gas and black carbon emissions on the regional, arctic and global environment
- Development of capacities in rural fire management to address possible vacuums concerning the responsibility and capabilities for fire management in the agricultural / rural domain
- Promote the establishment of volunteer groups to assist state authorities in fire management and to take over responsibilities at community level
- Support nations and the established Regional SE Europe / Caucasus Fire Monitoring Center and upcoming regional or sub-regional centers with Earth Observation data

Specific

Encouraged by ongoing processes and commitments by national bodies and international organizations:

- By welcoming the initiative of the government of Turkey to open its Fire Management Training Center in Antalya for regional training it is recommended to the UNECE member states and international organizations to support this effort by financial means and active participation in integrated fire management training courses (including fire prevention, community involvement, ground and aerial firefighting) at regional level
- By acknowledging and building on the recommendations of the Irkutsk and Khabarovsk conferences on transboundary cooperation in fire management (2010) and the recommendations of the 5th International Wildland Fire it is recommended that UNECE member states and representatives actively participate in the preparation of the "UNECE/FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management" (2012) aimed at developing a proposal for a regional agreement on cooperation in wildland fire management