



## **Welcome Address to the Forest Fire Management Conference**

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Dear Participants of the Conference,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to greet you in the capital of the Far East Federal District at the International Conference on Forest Fire Management organized by the Ministry of Natural Resources jointly with the World Bank.

I would like to extend appreciation to the specialists of the Russian forest sector, the executive authorities of the Subjects of the Russian Federation, scientists and experts from the USA, Canada, Germany, i.e. to all who responded and is taking part in the Conference, to those who are not indifferent to the destiny of Russia's forests.

This Federal District is among the Districts with the highest forest fire incidence rates in the Russian Federation. The annual number of forest fires keeps on growing. For eight months of the current year alone, 3,575 fires have occurred with their total area exceeding one million hectares.

Fire inflicts enormous losses on the regional economy, natural wealth, and is a factor threatening the economic security of the country and having dangerous effects on human health.

Several joint meetings were held by the Office of the Authorized Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Far East Federal District with the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation, and the regional executive authorities: in 2002, such meetings were held in Magadan and Vladivostok, and this year – in Khabarovsk in the framework of the Interagency Commission. The implemented activities included management and control measures to ensure timely financing of preparatory operations, interagency coordination of effort during the preparation to the fire season and in the course of fire fighting. In Russia, the first Regional Forest Fire Centre was established in Khabarovsk. Its goal is to prevent and fight forest fires and to coordinate activities of the authorities and forest services, and to maneuver resources among the regions in the Federal District.

Today, it may be noted that our joint efforts produce certain benefits.

Forest fire operations have come to be better financed. In spite of adverse weather conditions and increased number of fires, the total area of burned land dwindled by 2.7 %, and the burned area of forested land decreased by 22 % in the Far East Federal District. This year, the average area of a fire got reduced by 27.5 % compared to the previous year.

However, I deem that there is yet a lot to work ahead of us, and among other things, there is a need to address institutional issues in order to refine the mechanism of coordinating the efforts of all the authorities, services and agencies to prevent and fight forest fires.

I am absolutely sure that the Conference recommendations will be usefully applied under the Sustainable Forestry Pilot Project and the GEF Project as well as for the development of a National Forest Fire Strategy.

I wish successful work to the Conference participants. Thank you for attention