



EDITORIAL

The Global Wildland Fire Network and the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Forest: Towards an International Agreement on Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management

By end of 2003 the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) concluded that there is a need for coordinated international and UN-interagency action to reduce the negative consequences of forest fires and other vegetation fires (wildland fires) on the environment and humanity. Based on the outcomes of work of the Working Group on Wildland Fire, which was operational under the Task Force between 2001 and 2003, as well as the recommendations of the International Wildland Fire Summit (Sydney, Australia, 8 October 2003)¹, it was decided to create the Global Wildland Fire Network. This decision was made under the impression of an escalating occurrence and impacts of wildfires and fire application in land-use change in most vegetation zones. The increase of vulnerability of humans to the effects of wildfires, the secondary disasters triggered by extreme weather events on sites depleted of vegetation cover due to high-severity wildfires (e.g., landslides and floods), and the transboundary effects of wildland fire emissions on the atmosphere, human health and human security require a coordinated international response.

The ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network is operating through Regional Wildland Fire Networks in which cooperative efforts of countries at bilateral and multilateral levels are promoted. Cooperation in wildland fire management includes a variety of activities ranging from establishing and operating joint, standardized or coordinated systems for early warning and monitoring of wildland fire, capacity building, definition of common terminologies and standards, or sharing of fire suppression resources – to name a few examples of potential fields of cooperation.

The international dialogue between the Regional Wildland Fire Networks, the United Nations, other international organizations and civil society is facilitated by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC). The GFMC is also serving as coordinator and secretariat of the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group. That group is a follow-up arrangement of the former Working Group on Wildland Fire and is serving as an advisory body to the UN. The Regional Wildland Fire Networks are represented in the Advisory Group.

After the International Wildland Fire Summit a series of consultations were held in the regions where networks were active or in the phase of being established. Background and strategic recommendations coming out of these consultations are covered in detail in this special issue of IFFN. Altogether the wildland fire experts throughout the world confirmed the need of enhanced international cooperation in wildland fire management.

After the last consultation in Central Asia a meeting of the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group was held at the GFMC (3-4 December 2004). By evaluating the statements and declarations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks the Advisory Group came up with a set of recommendations directed to the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Forest (March 2005), the Ministerial Segment of the United Nations Forum on Forest (UNFF) (May 2005) and the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (January 2005). For the implementation of a catalogue of priority actions the Wildland Fire Advisory Group and the Global Wildland Fire Network recommend the development of an international agreement on wildland fire management.

¹ IFFN No. 29 – a special issue covering the International Wildland Fire Summit



This special issue of ECE/FAO International Forest Fire News has been prepared specifically for the delegates participating at the ministerial meetings convened by FAO and UNFF. It is hoped that the inputs of a large number of national and international experts representing government agencies, civil society, academia and UN agencies and programmes will be considered by the ministers. What is needed is a pragmatic and efficient international programme that will make a difference, regardless of a more or less formal or binding character. The political support by a resolution of the UN General Assembly would be a first encouraging step to confirm and consolidate the ongoing process and spirit of cooperation.

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