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Fire Management in Cultural and Natural Landscapes, Nature Conservation and Forestry in Temperate-Boreal Eurasia:

Introduction to a Symposium and its Follow-up

Background and Rationale

In large parts of temperate-boreal Eurasia the use of fire, including historic swidden (shifting) agriculture, and other disturbances by land cultivation have contributed to shape landscape patterns of high ecological and cultural diversity and value, e.g. heathlands, open grasslands and meadows. In the eastern Euro-Siberian biota, e.g. in the light taiga, natural fire contributed to the shaping of open and stress-resilient forest ecosystems. The rapid socio-economic changes in the past four decades and the recently increasing trend of rural exodus all over Eurasia, however, have resulted in abandonment of traditional land-use methods. With the elimination of these disturbances by cultivation, including traditional burning practices, large areas of Europe are converting to fallow lands, a process that is associated with ecological succession towards brush cover and forest, and an overall loss of open habitats. Besides the loss of valuable biodiversity the abandoned lands constitute an increase of wildfire hazard – a trend that is revealed by a growing number of extremely severe fire disasters. Similarly, the exclusion of fire in natural ecosystems such as northern boreal and sub-boreal coniferous forests in Eurasia has resulted in changing vegetation composition and an increase of wildfire hazard, notably in Central-Eastern Eurasia. Changing paradigms in ecology and nature conservation currently have led to reconsideration of fire-exclusion policies in certain sectors of land / landscape management, nature conservation and forestry.

The Symposium

Between 25 and 27 January 2008 the Symposium on “Fire Management in Cultural and Natural Landscapes, Nature Conservation and Forestry in Temperate-Boreal Eurasia” was held in Freiburg, Germany, at the Fire Ecology Research Group / Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Max Planck Institute for Chemistry, c/o Freiburg University / United Nations University, Freiburg, Germany.[1] The symposium was an activity of the Eurasian Fire in Nature Conservation Network (EFNCN)[2]. The EFNCN, which has been founded in 2000, is facilitated by the GFMC. The Symposium was organized in close association with the EU FIRE PARADOX project, the EU LIFE Project “Rohrhardsberg, Obere Elz und Wilde Gutach”, the EU Leonardo da Vinci project “EuroFire”, the UNECE Team of Specialists on Forest Fire, the UNISDR Regional Baltic Wildland Fire Network and the United Nations University (UNU).

The symposium provided a platform for the exchange of data, expertise, and views of institutions and individuals who are actively applying or conducting research in prescribed burning for the purpose of nature conservation (biodiversity management, habitat management), land and landscape management, and forestry, notably in forest fire management. As the EFNCN is operating at the science-management and science-policy interfaces, members of institutions representing land

[1] http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/programmes/natcon/EFNCN-meetings-1-2008.html
[2] http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/programmes/natcon/natcon.htm

managers and land owners, public services, e.g. fire services, had been invited to attend to discuss and share views on the recent developments in the use of prescribed fire.

Overall, the symposium supported the advancement of the use of prescribed fire in Eurasia with exclusive emphasis on the Euro-Siberian ecoregion, particularly by considering the involvement of local communities in land and fire management. The papers presented in this issue of IFFN have been finalized for publication after the symposium. A short symposium report is provided. After the Symposium the participants agreed on the "White Paper on the Use of Prescribed Fire in Land Management, Nature Conservation and Forestry in Temperate-Boreal Eurasia".

Symposium participants at a prescribed burning plot in the Kaiserstuhl viticulture area near Freiburg.