



UNITED NATIONS



**UN-ISDR
Wildland Fire Advisory Group**
and
Global Wildland Fire Network

Coordinator and Secretariat:

Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Freiburg, Germany

Recommendations of the First Meeting

Directed to the FAO and UNFF Ministerial Meetings on Forests
(Rome, March 2005 - New York, May 2005)

and the

UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR)
(Kobe, Japan, 18-22 January 2005)

4 December 2004, GFMC, Freiburg, Germany
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UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network
First Meeting, GFMC, Freiburg, Germany, 3-4 December 2004

Recommendations of the First Meeting in support of

**The Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord
(International Accord on Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management)**

Directed to the FAO and UNFF Ministerial Meetings on Forests
(Rome, March 2005 - New York, May 2005)

and the

UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR)
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Introduction

On 3-4 December 2004 the Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) met at the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Freiburg, Germany. The objective of the conference was to evaluate the current status of wildland fires globally, to evaluate the consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks held in 2004 and to prepare recommendations to support the Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord (International Accord on Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management), directed to the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Forests (Rome, March 2004), the UNFF Ministerial Meeting on Forests (New York, May 2005) and the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan, 18-22 January 2005).

Rationale

Over the past decade, many regions of the world have witnessed a growing trend of excessive fire application in land-use systems and land-use change, and an increasing occurrence of wildfires of extreme severities. Some of the effects of wildland fires cross borders, for example smoke pollution and its impacts on human health and safety, loss of biodiversity or site degradation at landscape level leading to desertification or flooding. The depletion of terrestrial carbon by fires burning under extreme conditions in some vegetation types, including organic terrain in peatland biomes, is one of the driving agents of disturbance of global biogeochemical cycles, notably the global carbon cycle. This trend is stirring the international community to address the problem collectively and collaboratively. The consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks in 2004 recommended to develop informal partnerships, joint projects and formal agreements between government and non-governmental institutions that are essential to enable nations to develop sustainable fire management capabilities. The Wildland Fire Advisory Group proposes the development of an International Wildland Fire Accord.

An increasing frequency and destructive force of unwanted wildfires worldwide -- including the excessive use of fire in the conversion of forests into other land uses in the tropical countries -- is affecting human lives, health and well-being, economic assets, property, biodiversity, water resources, soil, atmosphere and climate. Agricultural expansion in some parts of the world is resulting in increased vulnerability of ecosystems; likewise urban encroachment in wildlands is resulting in increased vulnerability of human populations to fire, notably at the rural-urban interface.

Conversely, the role of fire in the natural dynamics and maintenance of many ecosystems as well as the need to use prescribed fire in the maintenance of some wildlands, agricultural and pastoral systems is recognized to maintain habitats for biodiversity, and enhance agricultural productivity and pastoral carrying capacity.

The reason for changing fire regimes is due to increase in population pressure in many countries and associated socio-economic conflicts in some rural areas. In other countries the influence of society has altered historic fire cycles leading to a dangerous and difficult build-up of vegetation fuels on our lands.

The effects of climate variability and climate change are producing periods of extreme drought, resulting in an increase in the severity of fires in some boreal, temperate, sub-tropical and tropical ecosystems, in particular in wetlands.

The need is recognized to formally acknowledge the accountabilities which land management agencies must have in control and management of fire on those lands that include a legislative mandate, that fire is a legitimate land management tool, and that combat fire agencies have a supporting role not a lead role.

In recent years, a number of international conferences and fora have highlighted a need for an international strategy and action to manage wildland fire. For example, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD 2002) and the International Wildland Fire Summit (Sydney 2003) recommended the development of a strategy to strengthen international cooperation in wildland fire management. The UNFF Resolution 3/2 called countries to develop forest fire management strategies and in this context, consider regional and international cooperation.

The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) and its Wildland Fire Advisory Group are working to assist and strengthen the efforts of United Nations bodies, other international organizations, and non-governmental organizations, to reduce the negative impacts of wildland fires. Similarly, the UN-ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN), the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and the FAO are working systematically to increase the intra- and inter-regional cooperation in wildland fire management in the world. Consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks in 2004 revealed that the majority of countries worldwide is ready to establish and strengthen regional and international dialogues on cooperation and exchange of information, research and wildland fire management, including through agreements.

International cooperation is urgently required to share resources in overcoming current gaps and shortages in:

- Consistent information and statistics about fires, their causes and their effects
- Applied research in social sciences and humanities, and innovations in appropriate technology
- Integration of social, economic, environmental considerations and institutions in developing tangible policies and practices related to fire
- Fire becoming an integral component of land, resource, and forest management
- Balanced approaches and solutions, including mitigation, prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery
- Community-based approaches to fire management
- Skills and knowledge of rural people in fire management
- Training in the appropriate use of fire (for example, prescribed burning or the use of fire at the interface of critical risk)
- Long-term visions or plans with tangible short-term and medium-term milestones
- Compatible approaches, e.g., global implementation of the Incident Command System (ICS) and the International Wildland Fire Agreements Template
- Operational satellite-based remote sensing system for the detection, monitoring and impact assessment of wildland fires

Proposed Action – National, Regional and International

Summarizing the outcomes of the international consultations held in accordance with the GFMC-ISDR-FAO “Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord” the Wildland Fire Advisory Group recommends to governments, international organizations and non-government organizations, including the academic sector, the following action plan for cooperation on wildland fire management:

- Implement national and regional strategies that recognize the importance of forests in alleviating poverty and increasing food security
- Elevate the priority of sustainable forest management on national political agendas
- Elevate the priority of sustainable forest management on the agendas of development assistance agencies and international organizations
- Develop and implement national laws and policies that promote integrated approaches to agriculture, forest management, fire management, economic development, social and human resources development, and environmental protection
- Develop long-term strategic approaches to fire, rather than only reacting to emergencies and recognize the beneficial use of fire as an ecosystem and resource management tool

- Strengthen the capacities of organizations responsible for managing fire in each country
 - Develop and implement national and regional fire research programs
 - Develop an effective communication strategy which delineates that fire is an essential natural process, that land management agencies are committed to a balanced fire programme that will reduce risks on the one hand and realise benefits of fire on the other hand
 - Strengthen formal and informal education programs in forest fire management
 - Establish national centres for monitoring wildland fires
 - Implement community-based policies and approaches to fire management, involving civil society, indigenous communities, farmers and forest workers in fire preparedness, prevention and response, as a fundamental principle to gain local commitment for the protection of ecosystems and integrated fire management, and incorporate them as national policies
 - Implement and consolidate the Incident Command System in countries to strengthen the capabilities of their organizations and to facilitate efficient multilateral cooperation in fire emergencies
 - Build partnerships among federal and state agencies, tribal governments, fire departments, communities and that land owners, and promote public education necessary to the success of fire management programmes
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- Develop and standardize fire statistics that include common criteria for classification of vegetation types affected by fire
 - Recognize the need for applying economic evaluation of environmental damages caused by fires, as well as damages avoided by preventing or suppressing fires, as a planning and management tool
 - Request the European Space Agency and other space agencies to establish a satellite system for operational detection, monitoring and impact assessment of wildland fires
 - Prioritise research on global carbon strategies and the implications of the Kyoto Protocol on wildland fire management
 - In addition to existing funding agencies such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), create national and regional financing mechanisms for fire management, including private mechanisms
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- Support the efforts of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) in formulating appropriate policies to promote sustainable forest management, including on wildland fire management, and to implement these policies through, inter alia, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)
 - Endorse the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network and recommend official recognition of Regional Wildland Fire Networks under the auspices of the United Nations ISDR, FAO, and GFMC, among others
 - Instrumentalize the networks as effective platforms for dialogue and communication to achieve a level of mutual cooperation and synergy within regions, between regions, as well as between the Rio conventions UNCCD, UNCBD, and UNFCCC.
 - Support the Regional Wildland Fire Networks and the Secretariat of the Global Wildland Fire Network with appropriate funding to ensure efficient outreach activities and desired political impacts
 - Support agreements on cooperation in integrated fire management between institutions within countries, as well as between countries in each region, and between regions
 - Promote the development of an international accord for cooperation in the prevention and management of wildland fire (for example an International Wildland Fire Accord)

Recommendations to the Ministerial Meetings

Based on this action plan, the Wildland Fire Advisory Group specifically requests the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO), the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Forests and the UNFF Ministerial Segment to

- Consider the recommendations emanating from the regional and global consultations that took place in 2004
- Support the Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord developed by UN-ISDR / FAO / GFMC
- Consider the recommended action plan concerning a coordinated effort in international cooperation in wildland fire management as a basis for a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations.