



Defence of Villages, Farms and Other Rural Assets against Wildfires

Guidelines for Rural Populations, Local Communities and Municipality Leaders in the Balkan Region



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The authors of GFMC (Johann Georg Goldammer, Ioannis Mitsopoulos, Oyunsanaa Byambasuren and Pete Sheldon) received valuable inputs by a group of contributing experts:

- Nikola Nikolov, Regional Fire Monitoring Center, FY Republic of Macedonia
- Sergiy Zibtsev, Regional Eastern European Fire Monitoring Center, Ukraine
- Alex Dimitrakopoulos, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
- Gavriil Xanthopoulos, Hellenic Agriculture Organization DEMETER, Greece
- Ertugul Bilgili, Karadeniz Technical University, Turkey
- Andrey Eritsov, Aerial Forest Fire Center *Avialesookhrana*, Russian Federation
- Chrisilios Chrysiliou, Cyprus Civil Defence, Cyprus
- Goran Videc, Ministry of Regional Development, Forestry and Water Management, Forestry Directorate, Croatia
- Milt Statheropoulos, European Center for Forest Fires, Greece
- Sofia Karma, European Center for Forest Fires, Greece

Photos and Illustrations were provided by Nikolas Giakoumidis (Athens, Greece), Gavriil Xanthopoulos (Athens, Greece), Manina Dourali (Groovy Graphics X @2011, Athens, Greece). The

opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

Preface

In some regions of Europe rural settlements (villages, towns, scattered farmsteads) and other rural assets (agricultural fields / crops, infrastructures and other values at risk) are increasingly endangered by wildfires. This trend is driven by the consequences of land-use change, regional climate change and particularly by the rural exodus, which has resulted in the weakening of rural work force and self-protection ability, and increasing wildfire hazard on abandoned lands.

Vice-versa, increasing industrialization and concentration of populations in some areas exert a high pressure on natural resources for land use change, which is reflected by the high frequency of arson and 'unknown'-cause fires in the wildlands. The intermix of human settlements with natural ecosystems and the fires burning at the interface between wildlands and rural settlements in many places create severe problems, which have become a major issue of political debate and confrontation.

Recent major wildfire disasters in Europe reveal that government authorities and civil society, notably rural communities, are not sufficiently prepared to prevent and reduce the risk of wildfires, to defend rural communities and rural assets at risk, and to protect human health and altogether human security against the adverse direct and indirect impacts and consequences of wildfires.

Guidelines are needed that will provide information to local inhabitants (farmers, community leaders, local fire service units, volunteer firefighters and village defence committees) with state-of-the-art information on wildfire damage prevention measures, and pragmatic measures for the defence of settlements and rural assets threatened by wildfires. With such guidelines local communities will be capacitated to apply all fire safety regulations for protecting the structures of the community (clearing vegetation, provide extra sources of water, application of appropriate building codes and use of appropriate materials, etc.) and for the protection of rural populations against the adverse effects of vegetation fire smoke pollution on human health and security. Also, the problem of fires burning on terrain altered by human activities, such as fires affecting dispersed, sometimes abandoned structures, waste deposits / garbage dumps and otherwise contaminated lands, needs to be addressed due to the highly toxic emissions generated by co-burning of natural vegetation and technical / chemical produce.

In addition, the threats arising from fires burning on territories contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO) need to be addressed since some forest and non-forest lands in Balkan region are contaminated by land mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) stemming from recent conflicts.

In order to enhance the capabilities of local rural communities to defend themselves against wildfires a set of guidelines was developed in order to:

- Provide a practical technical document designed as a support tool for the protection of people and local rural communities in the Balkan region from wildfires
- Serve as a starting point and basis for the exchange of expertise and concepts within the Council of Europe / UNECE member states to continuously expand capacities in rural fire management.

The guidelines were prepared with the support from the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) set up by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The collaborating centers are the European Forest Fire Center (Athens), the Global Fire Monitoring Center (Germany), the Regional Southeast Europe / Caucasus Fire Monitoring Center (Skopje) and the Eastern European Fire Monitoring Center (Kiev). Members of the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire and the UNISDR Regional Eurasian and SE Europe / Caucasus Wildland Fire Networks contributed to the development of the guidelines.

The guidelines are divided into three sections:

- Part 1: Guidelines for Municipality Leaders
- Part 2: Guidelines for Local Community and Population
- Part 3: Fire Management Training Materials for Rural Fire Services and Local Communities based on the EuroFire Standards

In February 2013 the concept of the guidelines was tested in a field campaign on Chios Island, Greece, organized by GFMC and Maria Tsakos Foundation. The aim of the field campaign was to investigate the exposure, experiences and views of local population before, during and after wildfires. The investigation involved interviews with 118 local residents in areas affected by the large wildfire of August 2012. The results of the field campaign can be obtained upon request directed to GFMC.

Online Publication of the Guidelines

In the on version the guidelines include the EuroFire Competency Standards and Training materials, which are targeted for capacity building in fire management for local communities, fire services and volunteers. Apart of the base version in English the special web page for the guidelines:

- http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/Manag/CBFiM_11.htm

includes the versions in the language for the use in

- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Croatia
- Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Greece
- Montenegro
- Serbia



The EuroFire Competency Standards and Training Materials, which were developed by the GFMC, are available in 14 languages for the use in over 60 countries:

<http://www.euro-fire.eu/>

