



Recommendations from Major Conferences and Networking Mechanisms Addressing the International Dimension of Wildland Fires and Cooperative Efforts in Fire Management within the UNECE, Asia and APEC Regions

Under the impression of the increasing impacts of climatic and socio-economic changes in the Northern Hemisphere on the recurrence and severity of dry spells and forest fires, governments of Eurasian, Asia-Pacific and American countries launched a number of initiative to address the forest fire problems between 2008 and 2010.

In early 2008 the first plans were developed by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and representatives of forest management authorities of Mongolia and the Russian Federation to develop schemes for cooperation in fire management in the Eurasian Region. In June 2008 the "First International Central Asian Wildland Fire Conference on Wildland Fires in Natural Ecosystems of the Central Asian Region: Ecology and Management Implications", supported by the GFMC and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), took place in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, and addressed the most pressing issues related to climate change and forest fires in Central Asia and called for enhancing transboundary cooperation in fire management.¹

In 2009 the first Pan-Asian Wildland Fire Consultation was held in South Korea, hosted by the Korean Forest Service and the Korean Forest Research Institute. The consultation recommended the foundation of the Pan-Asia Wildland Fire Network, which would operate under the auspices of the UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network and serve as a network cluster of the four Asian Regional Wildland Fire Networks (Northeast, Central, South and Southeast Asia) to implement inter-regional cooperation in fire management.²

In June 2010 the call for the first regional conference on cooperation in fire management was realized. The "International Conference on Cross-Border Forest Fires and Cooperation in Their Suppression" was held in June 2010 in Irkutsk, Russian Federation, with the participation of the neighbor countries People's Republic of China (PRC), Mongolia, Republic of Belarus, Ukraine and Republic of Kazakhstan, the partner countries Germany, Republic of Korea and the United States of America (USA), and international organizations. The conference recommended to give priority to realize pragmatic cooperation in fire management, notably in mutual assistance in fire emergency situations.³ The agreements made at the conference paid off several weeks later when conference parties were the first ones assisting Russia during the fire emergency in July / August 2010.⁴

In October 2010 the International Conference "Forest Fires: Management and International Cooperation in Preventing Forest Fires in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Region" was convened in Khabarovsk, Russian Federation, aimed to strengthen cooperation between the emergency services of the APEC member economies in order to express readiness of the region to reduce the risks of wildfire disasters. Eight APEC member economies and international experts concluded that the ongoing process of climate change and forest fires have become a growing problem globally and particularly in the APEC region, requiring the mobilization of the international community to devise measures for prevention and response.⁵

¹ See contribution in this issue of IFFN, and a complete set of documentation of the conference at: http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/CentralAsia_3.html

² See contribution in this issue of IFFN, and a complete set of documentation of the conference at: http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/Northeast-Asia/Northeastasia_7g.html

³ See contribution in this issue of IFFN, and a complete set of documentation of the conference at: http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/CentralAsia_6.html

⁴ See second contribution in this issue of IFFN

⁵ See contribution in this issue of IFFN, and a complete set of documentation of the conference at: <http://lesscentr.ru/en/en/index0.htm> and <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/APEC-Fire-Conference-2010-Recommendations-ENG.pdf>

In November 2010 the “International Meeting on Open Burning and the Arctic: Causes, Impacts, and Mitigation Approaches” brought together policymakers, scientists, activists, and academics from Russia, Europe and North America in St Petersburg, Russia, to discuss the causes and impacts of set fires in forests, peatlands, croplands, and steppe in Northern Eurasia and North America. Open burning in Northern Eurasia is a particularly important source of soot or black carbon (BC) in the Arctic, which is warming at nearly twice the rate of the rest of the planet. BC from these fires is likely an important warmer of the Arctic climate, particularly in spring when ice and snow are melting. These fires, often set intentionally on croplands, rangelands, steppe, and woodlands, can also have negative health, safety, and economic effects. Laws on burning vary widely from place to place, with gaps between laws, enforcement, and practice. The conclusions and recommendations of the meeting reveal that the environmental impacts of agricultural fires in temperate-boreal Eurasia are reaching far beyond the continent, have global significance.⁶

The following contributions in this issue of International Forest Fire News provide the recommendations of the five regional conferences held between 2008 and 2010. They reveal the connectedness of networks, discussion platforms and intergovernmental dialogues and relationships addressing transboundary issues on wildland fires and fire management in the Eurasian region.

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Figures 1 and 2. Left: Wildfire blow-ups in Nizhny Novgorod region on 26 July 2010, with smoke drifting towards the metropolitan area of Moscow and further North to the northern boreal and sub-arctic region. Sources: NASA MODIS image and GFMC report in this volume.⁷ Right: Neighboring countries had been affected by the Western Russian smoke plumes. While in 2006 the smoke from Russia’s peat fires drifted to West and North Europe, this image of 1 August 2010) shows the smoke plume from the greater Moscow region drifting to Ukraine – on a day when high fire-smoke alert had been declared in its capital Kiev. Source: MODIS Aqua scene (acquired on 1 August 2010, 250m resolution) interpreted and provided to the government of Ukraine by GFMC.

While fires burning in Western Russia had considerable effects on local populations and neighboring countries, the extended fires and the fire emissions in the largely unpopulated Northeast were largely unnoticed. Both the humanitarian and environmental impacts of fire smoke emissions, however, are calling for careful assessment and policy response.



Figure 3. On 25 July 2010 extended wildfires burning in the Northeast of Russia were depicted by the MODIS satellite sensor. Source and interpretation: NASA and GFMC.

⁶ See contribution in this issue of IFFN, and the website of the conference at: <http://www.fires-and-the-arctic.org>

⁷ See also daily GFMC Update on the Russian Federation (27 July 2010): http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GFMCnew/2010/07/27/20100727_ru.htm