

AFRIFIRENET CIRCULAR

31 December 2002

Dear colleagues,

General

I initially planned to send this circular earlier, but decided to hold it back because I wanted to advise you about the new “Wildland Fire Training Center Africa”, which is now available on the web. During the very last hours of 2002 I can now advise you that this training information is now available for all AfriFireNet members as well as other interested parties. More about this issue later in this circular.

In Southern Africa the 2002 (winter) fire season ended at a rather mild note, with significantly less major wildfires experienced than during September/October 2001. However, at the time of writing, many SADC countries are in the grip of a very serious drought, and millions of people face starvation. From a fire management point of view, this lack of seasonal rain will no doubt create less burnable fuel addition. On the other hand, if this (El Niño) trend continues, fuel levels may be relatively-speaking low during the beginning of the 2003 fire season, but the increased moisture stress may trigger more live fuels to cure or die-back, and in this way cause another type of increased fire hazard. This is what the poor guys around Sydney in Australia recently experienced, with a fire season starting much earlier as a result of a poor rainfall season (over there during the winter, similar as in the Western Cape of South Africa). As you might have noticed in the international news, end October to early December 2002 saw the poor Aussies experience extreme fire weather, which is normally not experienced before January.

The GFMC Global Network, and AfriFireNet membership, is still growing, and we are now investigating further links with other networks so our web can spread even wider. We are also trying hard to get our French-speaking colleagues on the West coast of Africa on board the AfriFireNet. I will keep you posted on further developments. Further links with other related networks/institutions will spread our web even wider, and make communications even more effective.

ILC/3rd IWFC and 4th ICFRR

A further meeting of the International Liaison Committee, in preparation of the 3rd International Wildland Fire Conference and Summit - to be held in Sydney, Australia, 3-7 October 2003 – was held in Luso, Portugal, during November 2002. Both Johann Goldammer (the GFMC Director and coordinator of the Global Wildland Fire Network) and myself attended this meeting.

It is important to note that we are now also planning a further Wildland Fire Conference and Summit in Africa during 2004. This regional event will be organized through the FAO, in partnership with the GFMC and AfriFireNet and aims to bring together the African and the international wildland fire. As the FAO will move ahead in preparing the conference we must plan to have as many African representatives to attend this meeting as possible. We also put it very clearly to the ILC members that participation of many potential participants from African countries, at both the Sydney Conference/Summit as well as the planned African summit, will only materialize if substantial financial assistance can be provided to meet traveling and accommodation expenses of those people. The amount of this financial assistance eventually approved, will depend mainly on the sponsorship that can be provided, but during the ILC meeting it was clearly spelled out that this issue must form a high priority on the agenda. Finance for African participants will just have to be found. All ILC members (from eleven countries around the world) were in agreement of the high priority this request should receive.

Knowing that many of you will want to participate in these venues – or know of suitable people in your particular countries who should be there: We will keep you posted on further developments in this respect.

The 4th International Conference on Forest Fire Research was also held in Luso (straight after the ILC meeting), and this was attended by a substantial number of participants who are either involved directly in fire research in Africa, and are conducting research projects in Africa from abroad. The numbers of papers delivered on research work in Africa more than tripled since the 3rd ICFRR in 1998! As soon as I can find the time, I am going to request the chairman from the ICFRR if he has any objections if some selected papers are put on our web. Then the authors will be asked for approval as well, and we could add some very useful material to the AfriFireNet website.

Wildland Fire Training Center Africa

Thanks to the very hard work of Alex Held and Johann Goldammer at GFMC, the AfriFireNet Training website has arrived and is now operational! This activity (within the UN-ISDR and AfriFireNet) is now available to all of you. Please visit:

<http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/Africa/WFTCA.htm> to find out what exciting training venues we have laid on for all involved in fire on the African continent south of the Sahara for 2003. There is more detail to follow about these courses, but please take special note of the “International GFMC/ISDR Training Course in Integrated Fire Management for Fire Managers in Sub-Sahara Africa”, which is to be held in Nelspruit, South Africa, 12 – 30 May 2003. You will find all the detail about this course on the website mentioned above. This will indeed be the most comprehensive fire management course ever to be presented in Africa, and various specialists will assist in presenting this course, which has been tailored for Africa. Please advise us soonest if you (or some of your colleagues) are interested in this course, and who will require financial assistance to attend. We are still negotiating financial backing for this venue, and will advise you as soon as we know what will be the outcome of this.

More short courses will be added to the list already provided on the web, particular for the second half of 2003. More detail of specific courses will be added to the web as it becomes available.

Fire in Sub-Sahara Africa Handbook

All the chapters have now passed the sub-final editing stage, and the Table of Contents has been set. Thanks to all the contributors! Many of these gentlemen/ladies are AfriFireNet members, and it will indeed be a proud moment if we can advise you all when the book is available, and on the web. When? This will now depend on the speed of the final editing/printing process. I promise: I will advise AfriFireNet members the moment it is out. Official Launch: Any proposals??

A happy new year to all of you, and I am looking forward to a mountain of fire-related activities through the AfriFireNet.

Best regards,

Neels