



The Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC)

The Global Landscape Fire Framework

Towards Development of an International Instrument

Introduction
27 February 2023

Background

Globally, wildfires and excessive application of fire in land use and land-use change are an unprecedented and growing threat to communities and to natural and cultural landscapes.

The problem is increasing due to the consequences of social, economic and ecological changes (land-use change, demographic change, ecosystem degradation) and the climate crisis. This is impacting the sustainability of natural and cultural landscapes, including their ecosystem services, human health and security, and the loss of public and private assets, including critical infrastructures.

The increasing occurrence and duration of droughts in all continents have resulted in wildfires of high severities, which are difficult and often impossible to control and lead to ecosystem degradation with subsequent secondary damages such as loss of topsoil, floods, erosion or landslides, resulting in the loss of stability, biodiversity and productivity of natural and cultural landscapes.

Rationale for Action

Current risk governance and institutional arrangements in many countries are inadequate to cope with this growing trend, notably due to the prevailing paradigm of addressing the problem through individual and disconnected services and actions in fire prevention or suppression. Unified and integral planning must reframe, ensure and strengthen societal, environmental and economic resilience to landscape fires by addressing coherent, cohesive and coordinated cross-sectoral approaches in risk governance and ownership, stakeholder dialogue, socio-economic innovation in rural landscapes, favoring nature-based solutions, and strengthening local action towards creating resilient ecosystems and communities.

By addressing these areas of concern and the priority actions to be taken, there is a need to build and strengthen governance in fire management of natural, cultural and urban-industrial landscapes through harmonized and coordinated international cooperation. Strengthening and streamlining the effectiveness and efficiency of international cooperation in landscape fire management at local, national, regional and international level will require an international instrument that would provide a consent-based legal doctrine regulating principles aimed at (i) reducing the negative impacts of landscape fires on the environment and humanity, and (ii) advancing the knowledge and application of the ecologically and environmentally benign role of natural fire in fire-dependent ecosystems, and sustainable application of fire in land-use systems.



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Development and Processing of the Instrument: Drafting, Consultations and the Way Ahead

Over the last three decades, the international community of fire management experts have been serving the science-policy-practitioners interface (SPPI) towards the advancement and application of science- and evidence-based best practices – considering traditional and advanced science-based knowledge and expertise – for enhancing governance in sustainable and integrated landscape fire management.

Since the late 1980s, scientific-technical conferences and consultations between the SPPI partners have called for the development of an international instrument that would address the accelerating global vulnerability of vegetation and society to wildfire. For this endeavor, the Government of Germany in 1998 supported the establishment of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) as a contribution to the UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) and further on, to the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015 and its successor instrument, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. Along with this process, a series of International Wildland Fire Conferences (IWFC) was initiated in 1989. In the outcomes of the last two IWFCs held in South Korea (2015) and in Brazil (2019) it was recommended to (i) acknowledge the role of Integrated Fire Management as an accountable contribution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, maintain or increase terrestrial carbon pools in all vegetation types and ensure ecosystem functioning, and (ii) that the Sustainable Development Goals, the goals of the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 would be strengthened by an appropriate United Nations instrument.

The most recent decision by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in partnership with UN Environment (UNEP), to set up the “Global Fire Management Hub” that will serve countries’ capacities to implement Integrated Fire Management constitute a key driver of this process.¹

By furthering these recommendations, the 8th International Wildland Fire Conference (Porto, Portugal, 16-19 May 2023) will be held under the framing theme “Governance Principles: Towards an International Framework”. In preparation of the conference, a document was drafted – entitled “*Landscape Fire Governance Framework – Guiding Principles for Adjusting Strategies, Policies, and Management to Global Change*”. These principles are derived from experiences in fire management from throughout the continents and shall be considered as legally non-binding guidance for the development of national policies.

Starting in February 2023, this document is being circulated to international organizations, governments and professional associations and networks. The recipients are encouraged to provide comments, consider active participation at IWFC-8 or express statements of support.

¹ Announced by FAO Senior Management at the XV World Forestry Congress and welcomed by FAO Members during the 26th session of the Committee on Forestry (<https://www.fao.org/3/nk728en/nk728en.pdf>, par. 20)



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The conference will support the call for the establishment of a United Nations (UN) mechanism or instrument to promote the implementation of a global integrated fire management programme that should have a key role in: (i) supporting governments to develop policies that promote Integrated Landscape Fire Management; (ii) strengthening the international cooperation in integrated fire management and joining efforts to strengthen networks and thematic resource centers at the international level, where the state of the art, future work and innovation can be shared among policy and decision makers and with the broader community of practitioners; and (iii) searching for and developing an instrument for funding integrated fire management actions globally.

On 19 May 2023, the final day of the IWFC-8, it is envisaged to reach consent by participants, including representatives of governments, regional and international organizations and NGOs, that the Guiding Principles reflect the state of views and recommendations of the community of experts. The Guidelines would then become part of a process of resuming the dialogue within the United Nations family and international / multilateral organizations towards developing an international instrument tentatively called “*Global Landscape Fire Framework*”.

References

The proposal refers to the following statements of international thematic conferences:

- [Recommendations of the UNECE / FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management](#) (05 December 2013) (UN Geneva)
- [The Pyeongchang Declaration “Fire Management and Sustainable Development” and the Conference Statement \(Annex to the Pyeongchang Declaration Fire Management and Sustainable Development\)](#) (16 October 2015) (6th International Wildland Fire Conference)
- [Campo Grande Statement “Building Sustainable and Fire-Resilient Societies and Landscapes”](#) (01 November 2019) (7th International Wildland Fire Conference)

Review of 30 years of international cooperation in landscape fire management (2021):

- Thirty Years International Wildland Fire Conferences: Review and achievements of a circumglobal journey from Boston to Campo Grande (2021) – <https://gfmc.online/wp-content/uploads/GFMC-IWFC-7-Review-30-Years-Int-Cooperation-Fire-Management-Biodiversidade-Brasileira-11-2-2021.pdf>

White Paper “Vegetation Fires and Global Change:

- White paper on vegetation fires and global change. Challenges for concerted international action. A white paper directed to the United Nations and international organizations (2013) – <https://gfmc.online/wp-content/uploads/Vegetation-Fires-Global-Change-UN-White-Paper-GFMC-2013.pdf>

Earlier proposals for developing an international instrument

- First attempt (2004-2006): [Framework for the development of an International Wildland Fire Accord](#) (FAO, UNISDR, GFMC and partners)
- [Proposal towards development of the “International Landscape Fire Management Framework”](#) (Draft 5, 23 March 2022)
- [Presentation of the proposal by the Secretariat of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement \(EUR-OPA\) of the Council of Europe at the 2022 Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction](#) (Bali, Indonesia, 23-28 May 2022), Sendai Framework Mid-Term Review Plenary Session 3 (27 May 2022)