



## **Joint Press Release**

*For immediate release*

## **Global Fire Partnership Established to Combat Escalating Forest Fires Issues**

**Durban, South Africa, 10 September, 2003 (IUCN)** – IUCN – The World Conservation Union, The Nature Conservancy and WWF International today announced that they are joining efforts to establish a Global Fire Partnership that will help prevent the kind of destructive forest fires currently raging throughout North America, Europe and other parts of the world.

The Partnership was launched at the World Parks Congress, highlighting the three organizations' commitment to finding solutions to unwanted wildfires which impact human lives, degrade the environment and threaten the success of conservation activities worldwide.

The announcement comes at a time when incidences of destructive fire throughout the world appear to be on the rise. A preliminary evaluation suggests that the year 2000 alone saw 92 million hectares of forest burned worldwide, an area the size of France and Spain combined and equal to about 2.4% of global forest cover. In the year 2003 again, large tracts of forests are burning.

"A coherent, shared global approach to fire issues is needed," says Dr. Claude Martin, Director General of WWF International. "The intent of the Partnership is to provide an integrated strategy that can serve as guidance for fire managers, governments and communities".

"While too much fire is often the major issue, fire suppression and lack of fire in ecosystems that burn naturally is also a problem to be addressed by the Partnership," says Steve McCormick, President and CEO of The Nature Conservancy.

"Many ecosystems, plant and animal species depend on natural fire cycles, and in the absence of fire, crucial biological and ecological processes like regeneration and nutrient cycling are interrupted", he said.

The Partnership will focus on tasks such as involving key stakeholders in fire management planning, fostering community-based fire programs, promoting natural fire regimes, restoring impacted areas, building awareness of fire issues and increasing research, monitoring and recording systems.

Economic losses to fires can be significant. In 1997/1998, losses were estimated at \$9 billion USD worldwide, an amount equivalent to 20% of current total global spending on overseas development aid (\$50 billion USD).

In Ghana, 2% of the Gross Domestic Product is estimated to be lost to forest fires each year – over 80% of forests in the country are degraded or partially degraded. This means that the country loses \$100 million USD each year - almost half of what the country spends annually on education.

“Bad fire management can create significant costs that negatively impact the livelihoods of rural communities,” states Dr. William Jackson, Director of the Global Programme at IUCN. “Good fire management, on the other hand, can deliver tangible benefits”.

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