



7th International Wildland Fire Conference

Regional Statement of Australasia and North America – An Input Paper to the Conference Statement

30 October 2019

Introductory Remarks

The UNISDR Australasian and North American Regional Wildland Fire Network is one of seven Regional / Subregional Wildland Fire Networks of the Global Wildland Fire Network. The Australasian and North American Fire Network is mainly lead by the North American Forestry Commission – Fire Management Working Group (FMWG) and the Australasian Forest Fire Management Group (FFMG).

Specific landscape fire problems of the region

The landscape across this Regional Fire Network spans a broad range of climates and vegetative zones. Weather with the potential to drive extreme fire behavior is increasingly common across the Region at specific times. In many parts of the Region volatile fuels sit in the intermix with communities and infrastructure. Over the last half decade all regions have seen continued challenges and pressure on fire management resources. The confluence of a changing climate with increased development of landscapes has led to escalated community losses and fatalities in some regions in recent years. Resource sharing between the countries in the Region is being increasingly used to address shortfalls in fire suppression resources relative to the increased fire load in some of the Region.

In parts of the Region, the traditional delineation of the year into a “fire season” and a period with no expectation of significant activity is changing; the ‘fire season’ is being stretched such that some regions are essentially experiencing a ‘fire year’. That is, increasingly in some regions there is the potential to need to mount very significant response effort to large and problematic wildfire at any point in the year. This is a significant shift that is beginning to affect the fire management business across high populations landscapes (e.g., the continental US).

Gaps / shortcomings in landscape fire science, management and policies

Over the period since the 6th IWFC this region has looked to improve the cross-border deployment of resources in times to need; this in response to the expectation that high fire loads will increasingly challenge current operational capacities in many regions. It is recognized that such deployments of resources must be consistent (i.e., meet some minimum standard) and timely to be effective. Agreements, operating plans and memorandums of understanding (MOU) have been updated or put in place to facilitate such deployments. To provide more effective assessment of deployment potential, further discussion is needed between operational response agencies to identify basic international resource sharing standards and guidelines.

The need for continued incorporation of fire science and information management capabilities to enhance fire intelligence supporting fire decision making has been recognized in many jurisdictions. Fire management agencies across the Region could benefit from regular cross-jurisdictional sharing of approaches and lessons learned on information and decision support system development and utilization.

Gender, diversity and inclusion issues are important in fire management, however historically this area has received little attention. Such issues of equity are increasingly seeing emphasis and across the Region but there is need for continued emphasis and genuine engagement on this topic.



Main advances achieved since the last International Wildland Fire Conference

Background preparations for enhanced suppression resource sharing has seen hundreds of personnel deployed between countries during busy fire seasons most years since the IWFC in 2015; it may be that this is becoming more the norm than the exception. This has allowed the process of international resource deployment to be tested and further streamlined in many cases. Ongoing off-season discussions and after-action reviews continue to identify issues with and enhancements to these activities.

Scientific advances in wildfire science have continued through ongoing investment by some countries in the region in long term fire science programs (i.e., the US Joint Fire Science Program, and the Bushfire and Natural Hazard Cooperative Research Center). Last year Canada published the results of a year-long assessment of science gaps and needs for Canadian fire management (the “Blueprint for Wildland Fire Science in Canada (2019-2029)”) and has followed this with increased its federal investment supporting wildland fire management. Initial discussion of a broader North American science gap analysis (similar to the Canadian Blueprint) and targeted joint science program have begun.

Several ‘Women in Wildfire’ forums and training sessions have been hosted within the region in recent years to recognize gender issues in fire management and provide opportunities for training exclusively targeted to increase the role of women in wildfire management.

Conclusions

Wildfire management is, as anticipated, becoming increasingly challenging as we get further into the 21st century. There are numerous drivers of these changes and it must be recognized that there will be numerous ways wildland fire management agencies must continue to adapt to meet these challenges. Communication and the sharing of both new challenges and new solutions to such challenges is more important than ever. Cross-jurisdictional support for operational wildfire management during periods of extreme wildfire activity has increased over the period since the last IWFC and such continued international cooperation is critical for responding to pressures facing wildfire management organizations.

Recommendations

- Continued off-season work to enable timely resource exchange between countries should continue. Discussions and development of common deployment guidelines and standards for skills and training should be continued. Such discussions should increasingly involve other jurisdictions across the Global Wildland Fire Network, and should be supported.
- Broader discussions on common North American fire management science needs should continue. This work should identify projects of common interest and benefit across multiple jurisdictions.
- Continue sharing of information regarding the ongoing changes being seen across the region at established venues like: the NAFC-FMWG annual meeting, the FMWG/FFMG study tour, the IWFC conference, and other opportunities for potential face-to-face communication.
- Continue to offer options and opportunities to engage communities in the wildland urban interface and work with them to become more resistant to wildfire threats.
- Continue support for gender, diversity and inclusion within wildfire management agencies.