7th International Wildland Fire Conference

Regional Statement of the Central Asia Region – An Input Paper to the Conference Statement

30 October 2019

Introductory Remarks

Over the past few decades, the Central Asian countries have witnessed a growing number of average size wildfires in forest and non-forest ecosystems (steppe ecosystems), predominantly caused by people, but also by lightning in sparsely populated areas. In conjunction with unsustainable land-use practices, climatic extremes such as extended droughts (multicentennial reconstructions of past temperature for both Mongolia and Asia indicate that growing season temperatures are in the late 20th and beginning of 21st century 1.5°C higher than previous several centuries) and exploitation of natural resources, these fires have caused considerable environmental and economic damages and some have had transboundary impacts, for example, through smoke pollution, loss of biodiversity, forest degradation or transforming forests into steppe ecosystem at the landscape level. The interaction between anthropogenic environmental disturbances and wildland fire demonstrates a new dimension of fire problems that may become of increasing importance with the expanding population and shrinking natural resources – a challenge to environmental management and particularly to wildland fire management.

First steps to enhance fire management capacities of Mongolia and Central Asian countries have been initiated by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) in 2004. In 2004, the first international conference "*Forest Fire Management and International Cooperation in Fire Emergencies in the Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans and Adjoining Regions of the Near East and Central Asia*" was held in Turkey[1], followed by the "*Regional Central Asian Forest Congress: "Forest Policy: Problems and Solutions"* in Kyrgyzstan in the same year.[2] In the resolution of the Congress, the forest services of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan endorsed the participation in the Global Wildland Fire Network and the development of an international wildland fire accord. Subsequently, the **Regional Central Asia Wildland Fire Network**[3] was established as one of the 14 regional networks within the Global Wildland Fire Network.[4]

Specific landscape fire problems of the region

Central Asia has recently suffered major forest and other landscape fire problems. The causes of an increasing occurrence of wildfires in forests, steppes and other ecosystems, including the underlying reasons for increasing human-caused fires, vary within the region and are due to:

- transition from centrally planned to market economies
- increasing population growth and land-use pressure
- regional climate change towards increase of extreme droughts

Gaps / shortcomings in landscape fire science, management and policies

The common issues in wildland fire science, management and policies in Central Asia are insufficient professional firefighter capacity, limited public initiatives, insufficient budgets, and insufficient training and awareness activities, limited bilateral or regional trainings on fire management.

Main advances achieved since the last International Wildland Fire Conference
(reference to the recommendations of the 6th IWFC and the results of activities between the 6th and the 7th IWFC, i.e., between 2015 and 2019).

In September 2014, Mongolian-Russian Government *"Agreement on Transboundary Fire Management Cooperation"* has been signed during the official visit of the Russian delegation headed by the President of

[1] http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/Antalya-Declaration.pdf
[2] In the resolution of the congress the forest services of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan endorsed the participation in the Global Wildland Fire Network and the development of an international wildland fire accord: http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/Resolution-Central-Asia-Eng-GFMC-final.pdf
[3] http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/CentralAsia/CentralAsia.html
[4] http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/globalNet.html

Russia Vladimir Putin to Mongolia. Since, then it was followed by a cross-boundary firefighting exercise in 2014 and follow-up bilateral annual consultation meetings in Mongolia and Russia.

In September 2015, the Regional Central Asia Fire Management Resource Center (RCAFMRC) has been established with the long standing support of the GFMC and financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) through the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The RCAFMRC is functioning as the Coordinator of Regional Central Asia Wildland Fire Network and Secretariat of the National Committee on Forest and Steppe Fire Protection of Mongolia. The RCAFMRC has been mandated by the Government of Mongolia to serve as secretariat of the National Coordination Committee on Forest and Steppe Fire Protection (NCCFSFP). In order to enhance local capacity building, series of fire ecology and management trainings are conducted for students and emergency management authorities.

In May 2016, Members of Global Wildland Fire Network co-hosted the First International Fire Management Week, which was organized in Islamic Republic of Iran, within support of the voluntary framework of the International Wildfire Preparedness Mechanisms (IWPM), which is offering capacity building and cross-boundary cooperation in fire management through exchange of expertise and application of voluntary standards in fire management.

In July 2018, the Government of Mongolia hosted the three-day Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction which is being attended by over 3,000 participants, including representatives from over 50 countries and 1,500 organizations in the capital, Ulaanbaatar. In his statement, Deputy Prime Minister U. Enkhtuvshin expressed that "*In Mongolia, series of actions have been taken to establish management and coordinating mechanism for disaster risk reduction, to update and approve policy documents, rules and regulations. The Government of Mongolia has approved the national strategy to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2017. The national strategy is being implemented on the basis of the partnership and collaboration between public and local organizations, scientific and civil society organizations, citizens, communities and international organizations*". The GFMC and the Regional Fire Management Resource Centers of Asia were invited to give a statement the Conference. Side Event has organized under theme of "Forest Fire-Related Risks on Challenges and Progress made in National Capacity Building in Landscape Fire Management in the Asian Region and at Global Level: Towards the Implementation of Target E of the Sendai Framework".

Within and outside Central Asia the RCAFMRC is actively involved in international cooperative activities at the landscape fire Science-Policy-Practitioners Interface (SPPI):

- Inauguration meeting of the Eurasian Team of Specialists on Landscape Fire Management (GFMC, October 2018)
- Meetings of the UNISDR-WFAG, ILC and the Brazilian Conference Organizing Committee for the 7th IWFC (GFMC, October 2018)
- All-Russian conference with international participation, dedicated to 75th anniversary of V. N. Sukachev Institute of Forest SB RAS, together with the
- Opening of the Regional Eurasia Fire Monitoring Center (REFMC) the auspices of the (GFMC) and the GWFN (August 2019)

Proposals for solutions / action to be taken

Financial resources for fire management are limited in all countries globally. Financial constraints and transboundary implications of destructive wildfires necessitate co-operation at all levels including sharing of scientific, technical and human resources at national and international level, capacity building of personnel responsible for fire management at landscape level, entering to formal agreements within and between countries that are sharing common natural resources and common wildfire risks, and the participation of civil society, notably local rural communities and dwellers.

Conclusions

Altogether the problem of forest fires in Mongolia and the Central Asian countries are complex and cannot be addressed on a single sectoral level. To overcome the limited capacity in fire management there is a need to strengthen human and technical resources of agencies and local communities that deal with fire prevention and response.

Recommendations

An instrumental weather data and climate model prediction suggests that future fires may be more extensive than before. Therefore, a strong consideration needed for the impacts of a drastically warming climate in the region. Systematic and hand-in-hand cooperative measures within similar disaster prevention organizations of the countries could increase the region's fire management capability.