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Organización
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NEAR EAST FORESTRY COMMISSION

NINETEENTH SESSION

NEAR EAST FORESTRY WEEK

HAMMAMET, TUNISIA
5 – 9 APRIL 2010

**Forests and range: adapting to global changes for sustainable
development**

FOREST PROTECTION

(A) FOREST AND FIRE MANAGEMENT IN THE NEAR EAST REGION

Introduction

1. Although change in land use is the main reason for fire increase, climatic factors and extreme weather events also contribute. The climate changes predicted to occur in the near future as a result of releasing greenhouse gases will increase fire risk.
2. Timely and reliable data on fires is a major problem in most countries of the Near East Region. When available, it is not always comparable, due to different methodologies, definitions and understandings. The lack of data on forest fires and their causes is a major obstacle in understanding the nature of forest fire design strategies and measures at both national and international levels. With the exception of Cyprus, there have been no major studies or research undertaken in the region on forest fires, fire ecology or fire behaviour.
3. International agencies and unions have developed policies and strategies to promote the protection of Mediterranean countries from forest fires. In 2006, FAO released the Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines, which were supported by the six Regional Forestry Commissions. However implementation of these Guidelines has not yet been reported by the Near East countries.

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4. Treaties and agreements for cooperation exist but limited measures exist on the ground. Most agreements concerning forest fires are part of broader forestry policies, strategies for civil protection and environmental declarations. None specifically address policies and strategies in Near East and North African countries. Trans-boundary cooperation remains a crucial issue.

Progress on field projects:

(i) Syria: GCP/SYR/012/ITA: Integrated and community-based fire management Phase II

5. This Italian funded Phase II project (2008-2011) supports greater integration and participation of communities through promotion of sustainable livelihoods, integrated watershed management and land use approaches to reduce the negative impacts of fires and contribute to food security and poverty alleviation in Lattakia, Tartous, Idleb and Aleppo. The project strengthens policies, laws, regulations, strategic and management plans, operational practices and institutional capacity of the Forestry Directorate together with FAO Project TCP/SYR/3103.

(ii) Morocco: UTF/MOR/028/MOR: *appui à la mise en oeuvre du programme forestier national. Component: élaboration des cartes des risques aux incendies des forêts*

6. During Phase I fire risk maps were developed for high fire risk regions. Phase II (until 2010) extends the same approach to other regions and supports development of a national early warning system.

(iii) Lebanon: OSRO/LEB/709/UNJ: Integrated forest fires management

7. The emergency project (2009-2010) undertook needs assessments and restoration activities following the damage incurred in the 2006 conflicts and forest fires. The project strengthens capacities in fire prevention, protection and suppression with special emphasis on community-based fire management.

Normative work – production of documents and guidelines

8. The Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines are now available in the six FAO languages and are distributed upon request. Other documents produced include: i) Forest Fires and Law (English), based on the Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines; and ii) Wildland Fire Management Handbook for Trainers (English and Arabic). FAO is preparing a global publication on Community-Based Fire Management.

Networks

9. The Forest Fire Working Group of *Silva Mediterranea* has achieved good results in capacity building and regional cooperation, but needs to adapt these activities to the Near East and North African regions to meet their unique needs.

10. As a follow-up to the NEFC discussions in Larnaka, Cyprus, June 2006 and Khartoum, Sudan, February 2008 as well as the 18th Session of COFO, 2007, a proposal to establish the Near East Network on Forest and Wildland Fires was prepared at a regional workshop in Lattakia, Syria, in November 2009.

11. The mission of the Network (NENFIRE) would promote collaboration, sharing of expertise and information, and implementation of projects to predict, combat and manage forest and wildland fires in the region, for the mutual benefit of member countries.

12. The overall objective of the network is to foster active bilateral, sub-regional and regional cooperation on issues related to forest and wildland fires in the Near East region. Specific functions include to:

- promote the collection and dissemination of information, create awareness, and foster scientific, technical and technological exchange relevant to fire detection, suppression and management in forests, rangelands and other natural ecosystems;
- promote the better understanding of human behaviour and how to measure changes in behaviour towards fire management;
- communicate, collaborate and coordinate with existing international, regional and national organizations dealing with forest and wildland fires; and
- collaborate to identify and address key regional challenges and strategies.

13. A Secretariat, including Algeria, Cyprus Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Turkey and Yemen, is proposed. Mr. Kostas Papageorgiou (Cyprus) was designated as focal point. The Interim Secretariat will take the lead in finalizing the establishment and management of the Network in collaboration with the FAO Forest Management Team and the Regional Office for the Near East. An interim Executive Committee to assist the Secretariat including Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen is proposed.

14. Members of the Network will include Near East Forestry Commission member countries, who will nominate a formal focal point. Individual experts may be invited from time to time. Partnerships are proposed with i) The Near East Forestry Commission's Task Force; ii) *Silva Mediterranea* Working Group on Fire; iii) The Forest Fire Action Alliance; and iv) other fire networks.

15. The Secretariat and Executive Committee will prepare a work plan, budget and funding proposals. The Network could play a role in support of the implementation of the Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines through a regional workshop to develop national and regional action plans on fire management as well as to share results and lessons learned from different projects in the region.

Recommendations for Discussion. The Commission is requested to:

- consider endorsement of the proposal for the Near East Network on Forest and Wildland Fires;
- encourage member countries to collaborate in trans-boundary forest and wildland fire cooperation; and
- encourage member countries to organize their fire management activities taking into consideration i) Voluntary Guidelines; ii) Wildland Fire Management Handbook for Trainers; iii) Forest Fires and the Law; and iv) Community Based Fire Management in the Near East context.

(B) FOREST HEALTH

Background

16. During the 17th Session of the Near East Forestry Commission (Larnaka, Cyprus, 5-8 June 2006) member countries expressed concern about the increased threat to the forests and trees outside forests posed by climatic changes that may influence the movement and establishment of new insect pests and diseases. The Committee recommended that the issues be highlighted during the Task Force meeting in Cairo in December 2006 and again in Rabat in July 2007. The Task Force issued a Technical Paper on Forest Health in the Near East Region, and further recommended that an expert meeting should be organized by the end of 2007 in order to discuss regional cooperation and strategies for addressing forest health and invasive species issues in the region.

17. An expert meeting organised by *Direction générale des forêts*, Tunisia, and FAO was convened in Hammamet, Tunisia, in December 2007, with the major objective of creating the framework of a network which is able to foster integrated and dynamic forest pest management in the Near East region and to provide decision-makers with baseline data for making informed decisions.

18. Representatives of Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen, as founding members of the network, recognised that the region faced common forest health issues and particularly noted that the overall health conditions of the Near East forests were threatened. It was acknowledged that forest health (diebacks, declines, endemic insects and diseases, degradation of forest ecosystems) is impacted by climate change and climatic fluctuations and that land-use such as livestock grazing, silvicultural practices and recreation influence forest health. While it is apparent that forests are increasingly vulnerable to the impact of exotic invasive species (plants, insects and diseases), it was felt that the region lacks adequate detection, prevention, and management strategies to deal with invading forest species.

19. The **Mission Statement** of the Network is to seek to promote collaboration, sharing of expertise and information, and implementation of projects to mitigate the adverse affects of biological invasion and subsequent impacts and the declining health of forest ecosystems for the mutual benefit of member countries. Objectives are to be achieved through collaboration to identify problems and strategize regional prevention and management programmes. It was acknowledged that the network would be an effective tool to facilitate sharing of expertise within and beyond the region.

20. In line with the forest health issues in the region and increasing concern about the threat of invasive species, including insects, diseases and woody species, it was agreed to name the network “the Near East Network for Forest Health and Invasive Species” (NENFHIS).

21. It was unanimously agreed that initially the geographic coverage should be extended to cover all countries within the Near East Region which wish to participate in the network; that there shall be no distinction between language or forest type. At a later stage membership would be open to other countries and interested parties.

22. The *Direction générale des forêts*, Tunisia agreed to take on the responsibility of Interim Secretariat/ Coordinator of the network and a focal point was designated.

Progress to date

23. There has been minimal progress to date with only three countries active within the network i.e. Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

24. An interim Executive Committee to assist the Secretariat in establishing NENFHIS, agreed upon during the 2007 meeting to include representatives from the following countries

Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, has not yet been established as no focal points have been selected. It was intended that the Interim Executive Committee was to decide on the role and function of the Committee as well as determining the rotation of membership and the provisional workplan and to provide support to the Secretariat/Coordinator.

25. The NEFC endorsed the network at its 18th Session held in Khartoum, Sudan, 18-21 February 2008.

26. A website was created and hosted by FAO but subsequently has not been updated with the exception of the uploading of a newsletter that was produced with financial support from FAO [HTTP://WWW.FAO.ORG/FORESTRY/51295](http://www.fao.org/forestry/51295)

27. NENFHIS was represented by the Secretariat/Coordinator during a side event entitled “Working together through formal and informal invasive species networks” at the World Forestry Congress held in Buenos Aires, Argentina in October 2009. The presentation included county reports prepared for the three active member countries; Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. During the formal and follow-up informal sessions it became apparent that NENFHIS was lagging behind all the other operational invasive species networks for Africa, Asia-Pacific, North America and the newly created one for Latin American South Cone countries. In the list of constraints the problem of establishing communication between the member countries was highlighted

Comments

28. A network can only function with the support of the members through dynamic committed leadership provided with a supportive infrastructure.

29. Countries should select focal points with technical expertise and interest in forest health and a meeting should be organised for the country focal points to encourage active participation and free flow of information in order to fulfil the objectives and to activate the network.

30. “A guide to forestry practices and international phytosanitary standards” to provide information on international phytosanitary standards in plain language is being prepared through a multistakeholder process and it is envisaged that the invasive species networks, including NENFHIS, will be one of the main dissemination tools of the practical aspects of the guide. To enable this to happen, the network has to be fully functioning.