

## Caribbean Regional Brief on International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management <sup>1</sup>

### 1. Recent trends in wildland fire occurrence in the Caribbean region

Forest fires occur in the countries of the Caribbean region, just like in the majority of countries in the world; however, information on forest fires are either not available or are not adequately distributed. It was only possible to obtain information about the number of fires in 5 out of 25 territories<sup>2</sup> in the region (20% of the total) for the period 2000 – 2003; and information about the surface area burned was only available for 3 countries (12% of the total). In the report on the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000,<sup>3</sup> FAO reported information about forest fires in 52 countries around the world, but only two of these countries were in the Caribbean: Cuba, and Trinidad & Tobago.

**Table 1. Distribution of fire occurrences and area burned in Caribbean countries.**

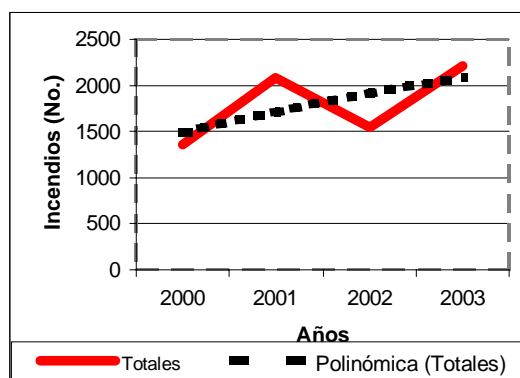
Countries	# of fires	Area burned (ha)	Severity Index (ha.fire <sup>-1</sup> )
Barbados *	3 932		
Cuba **	1 119	38 891,95	34,75
Dominica *	607		
Dominican Republic *	564	18 644,40	33,06
Trinidad & Tobago *	964 ***	11 232,00 ***	11,65 ***

\* Reports presented at the 12th Caribbean Foresters Meeting (Puerto Rico, 8-11 June 2004)

\*\* Reported by the Cuerpo de Guardabosques.

\*\*\* Data only for Trinidad.

Based on this information, the recent trend in fire occurrences observed for all the countries in table 1 is shown in figure 1 below. During the period 2000 – 2003, there is a tendency for an increase in the annual number of fire occurrences. Seen from a statistical viewpoint, it would be very important to make an analysis utilizing a higher number of years and more countries, with the aim of obtaining a more precise answer.



**Figure 1. Distribution and trend of fire occurrences in five countries in the Caribbean (Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Trinidad) for the period 2000 – 2003.**

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<sup>2</sup> Anguila, Antigua & Barbuda, Dutch Antilles, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Cuba, Dominica, Granada, Guadalupe, Haiti, Cayman Islands, Turks & Caicos, Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Vicente & Grenadines, St. Lucia, Trinidad & Tobago and other isles

<sup>3</sup> FAO, Working Paper 55, Global Fire Assessment 1990 – 2000, CD-ROM, 2001.

## **2. Projected trends in wildland fire occurrences in the Caribbean region**

For years fires in tropical forests were not considered an alarming problem. However, since the 1990s more frequent and bigger fires have been registered in forests of Latin America and the Caribbean, just as in the rest of the world. At the global level the uncontrolled use of fire to convert forest land and the use of fire in the various agricultural and pastoril activities have been for long time and continue to be the cause of important threats to the forest ressource. In addition, in years of little rainfall forest fires continue to have serious impacts on natural resources, on human health, on transportation, navigation and on air quality in large areas. In the 1990s, humid tropical forests were also affected. In this context, the Caribbean is no exception. Additionally it can be mentioned that the state of poverty that a large part of the population lives in, is on the increase, which augments the vulnerability of forests to fires. Due to the situation just described, it is very probable that at least in the short run, the trend of forest fire occurrences will be their increase.

## **3. Priority issues for fire management**

The most important priorities are: a) Strengthen prevention techniques, b) Promote collaboration between national agencies and between states on the matter of fire management, c) Develop a research program that takes into account the priorities of each country, d) Implement a system for fire monitoring, e) Promote the development of a regional database, f) Develop training/capacity building strategies.

## **4. Established cooperation agreements for forest fire management**

According to consultations that have been carried out, it was not possible to determine exactly what bilateral, multilateral or international agreements for forest fire management are in existence in the Caribbean Region.

## **5. Other international projects**

At the present time, according to the sources that have been consulted, there are no international projects being developed regarding any area of wildland fires in the Caribbean Region.

## **6. Status of the development of activities and agreements based on regional networks**

It was proposed to establish a Regional Caribbean Wildland Fire Network during the Foundation Meeting of the Regional South American Wildland Fire Network in Curitiba, on 17 June 2004. This idea needs to be concreted during the meeting of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks in Costa Rica, 21 – 22 October 2004.

## **7. Suggestions for future cooperation**

The situation described above indicates the need to establish mechanisms for exchanging information among Caribbean countries. It is very likely that a functioning Network would provide the planification of cooperation between the States. In such a way it would be possible to establish strategic alliances and mechanisms for training, statistics and organization and working groups at the regional level would be created, possibly within commissions such as COFLAC.

## **8. Other**

In the Caribbean region, perhaps the CARICOM (Caribbean Economic Community) organization could be used to implement certain regional mechanisms. However, there are members like Belize, Guyana and Suriname, and observers, like Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela. These countries belong to the continent. When founding the Caribbean Network, it must be defined if these countries would form part of the Caribbean Regional Network, or if they will be part of other regional networks.

## 9. Bibliography

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