



Food and Agriculture Organization of the
United Nations

Pan-American Conference on Wildland Fire

San José, Costa Rica
23 October 2004



Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC)
Global Wildland Fire Network

San José Declaration on Pan-American Cooperation on Wildland Fire Management 23 October 2004

On 23 October 2004 the Government of Costa Rica hosted the Pan-American Conference on Wildland Fire in San José. The conference was sponsored by the FAO Latin America and Caribbean Forestry Commission (LACFC), the FAO North American Forest Commission (NAFC) and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC). The objective of the conference was to strengthen international cooperation in wildland fire management. The participants adopted the following declaration:

The Conference participants:

Recognizing the importance of forests as providers of environmental services and social, economic, and ecological benefits to humankind;

Expressing concern about the increasing frequency and destructive force of unwanted wildfires in the Americas -- including the excessive use of fire in the conversion of forests into other land uses in South America, Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean -- affecting human lives, health and wellbeing, economic assets, property, biodiversity, water resources, soil, atmosphere and climate;

Noting that fire is playing an important role in the natural dynamics and maintenance of many ecosystems in the Pan-American region;

Noting that the use of fire in agricultural expansion in some parts of the Americas is resulting in increased vulnerability of ecosystems; likewise urban encroachment in wildlands resulting in increased vulnerability of human populations to fire, notably at the rural-urban interface;

Recognizing the reasons for changing fire regimes is due to increase in population pressure in many countries and associated socio-economic and conflicts in some rural areas;

Noting an increase in vulnerability of humans and ecosystems to secondary disasters following fires, including floods, landslides and soil erosion;

Noting that the effects of climate variability and climate change caused by human activities are already producing periods of extreme drought resulting in an increase in the severity of fires in some boreal, temperate, sub-tropical and tropical ecosystems, in particular in wetlands;

Concluding from the analyses and reports of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks presented to this conference on the fire situation in participating countries, it is evident that the majority of countries in the regions are ready to establish and strengthen a regional dialogue on cooperation and exchange of information, research and wildland fire management, including through agreements;

Expressing the intention to overcome current gaps and shortages in:

- Consistent information and statistics about fires, their causes and their effects
- Applied research in social sciences and humanities, and innovations in appropriate technology
- Integration of social, economic, environmental considerations and institutions in developing tangible policies and practices related to fire
- Fire becoming an integral component of land, resource, and forest management
- Balanced approaches and solutions, including mitigation, prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery
- Community-based approaches to fire management
- Skills and knowledge of rural people in fire management
- Training in the appropriate use of fire (for example, prescribed burning or the use of fire at the interface of critical risk)
- Long-term visions or plans with tangible short-term and medium-term milestones
- Compatible approaches, e.g., global implementation of the Incident Command System (ICS) and the International Wildland Fire Agreements Template

Recalling the recommendations of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD 2002) and the International Wildland Fire Summit (Sydney 2003) with respect to the management of wildland fires and the strategy to strengthen international cooperation in wildland fire management;

Endorsing the efforts of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) and its Wildland Fire Advisory Group to assist and strengthen the efforts of United Nations bodies, other international organizations, and non-governmental organizations, to reduce the negative impacts of wildland fires;

Supporting the objectives of the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN) and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) to systematically increase the intra- and inter- regional cooperation in wildland fire management for the world;

Supporting the preparations by FAO for the Ministerial Meeting on Forests where wildland fire management will be a major agenda item (Rome, 14 March 2005);

Appreciating the support and hospitality of the government of Costa Rica, host of the Pan-American Conference on Wildland Fire;

Recommend to governments, international organizations and non-government organizations the following action plan for cooperation on wildland fire management:

- Implement national and regional strategies that recognize the importance of forests in alleviating poverty and increasing food security
- Elevate the priority of sustainable forest management on national political agendas
- Elevate the priority of sustainable forest management on the agendas of development assistance agencies and international organizations
- Establish national centres for monitoring wildland fires
- Develop and standardize fire statistics that include common criteria for classification of vegetation types affected by fire
- Develop and implement national laws and policies that promote integrated approaches to agriculture, forest management, fire management, economic development, social and human resources development, and environmental protection
- Develop long-term strategic approaches to fire, rather than only reacting to emergencies and recognize the beneficial use of fire as an ecosystem and resource management tool
- Strengthen the capacities of organizations responsible for managing fire in each country

- Strengthen formal and informal education programs in forest fire management
- Develop and implement national and regional fire research programs, including research in global carbon strategies
- Implement and consolidate the Incident Command System in countries to strengthen the capabilities of their organizations and to facilitate efficient multilateral cooperation in fire emergencies
- implement community-based policies and approaches to fire management, involving civil society, indigenous communities, farmers and forest workers in fire preparedness, prevention and response, as a fundamental principle to gain local commitment for the protection of ecosystems and integrated fire management, and incorporate them as national policies
- Recognize the need for applying economic evaluation of environmental damages caused by fires, as well as damages avoided by preventing or suppressing fires, as a planning and management tool
- In addition to existing funding agencies such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), create national and regional financing mechanisms for fire management, including private mechanisms
- Recommend official recognition of regional fire management networks under the auspices of the United Nations ISDR, FAO, and GFMC, among others
- Endorse the Global Wildland Fire Network
- Recommend FAO and ISDR to facilitate the development of a regional fire management strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean which provides a framework of action for countries to address the problems of wildland fire
- Support agreements between institutions within countries, as well as between countries in each region, and between regions
- Request the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) and the Ministerial Meeting on Forests in Rome (March 2005) to consider the recommendations emanating from the regional consultations that took place in 2004 and support the Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord developed by ISDR / FAO
- Establish bilateral and multilateral agreements on cooperation in integrated fire management and promote the development of an international accord for cooperation in the prevention and management of wildland fire, for example as a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations.