



## Wildland Fire Leadership Council Meeting Notes

November 30, 2016, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm  
Washington DC  
USDA Whitten Building, Room 104A

### Meeting Purpose:

The purpose of the November 30 meeting of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) is to discuss collectively key issues to share with a presidential transition team; approaches to a common set of expectations around the strategic priorities, and feedback from the NSC and key staff on strategic approaches to wildland fire.

### Action Items and Next Steps

- *SEE NEXT STEPS FOR EACH ISSUE AREA*

### Attendees:

**Council Members or alternates:** Robert Bonnie (USDA), Harry Humbert (DOI), Tom Tidwell (FS), Louis Rowe (NPS), Erik Litzenberg (IAFC), Vern Stearns (ITC), George Geissler (NGA)\*, Paul Steblein (USGS)\*, Mike Zupko (Executive Manager), Jeff Rupert (FWS), Ernie Mitchell (FEMA/USFA), Ron Dunton (BLM), Pete Wakeland (BIA), Dan Shoun (NACO), Maureen Sullivan (DoD), Brett Lacey (NLC), Jay Farrell (NASF)

*Partners and Support Staff:* Chris Topik, Meg Gilley, Vicki Christiansen, Shawna Legarza, Jean Darnell, Bryan Rice, Caitlyn Pollihan, Chris Marklund, Juan Espinosa, Bob Eaton, Maureen Brooks, Kristin Merony, Tami Defries, Jim Erikson, Ed Kleiman, Matt Struzziero, Ann Walker, Nelson Bryner, Jim Douglas, Katie Lighthall, Gary Wood\*, Larry Mastic\*

*National Strategy Committee:* Patti Blankenship, Matt Rollins, Denise Blankenship

*\*denotes on phone*

### Meeting Summary:

#### Agenda Review, Meeting Purpose and Goals

Robert Bonnie and Harry Humbert welcomed everyone to the meeting and had everyone introduce himself or herself. Bonnie then turned the meeting over to Mike Zupko to review the agenda, meeting purpose and goals of the meeting.

The meeting minutes from the September 7-8, 2016, meeting in Boise, Idaho were approved by voice vote.



## **Transition Discussion**

Objective: To discuss key issues of consideration for a new administration, progress from the previous several years and challenges facing wildland fire along with individual organizational points of view.

Discussion: Bonnie began the discussion with his current knowledge of the transition activities to date and what he saw as the near-term steps and opportunities. He noted there is broad support for the 3 fundamental planks of the Cohesive Strategy (CS) and recognition for the need for landscape scale restoration. Zupko shared his impressions and conversations, both internal and external to WFLC organizations and where he saw key opportunities to engage. WFLC members then discussed ways individually and collectively they can approach the transition. There was agreement by the WFLC members that the WFLC Administration Transition Briefing document captured the key issues, strategic priorities and opportunities for engagement between WFLC and incoming administration appointees. It was also reiterated multiple times that the WFLC members around the table are the constant for the transition and the importance of keeping WFLC together through and after the transition.

### Next Steps:

- WFLC members will utilize the document as a concise and consistent way to communicate key issues around wildland fire and promote the WFLC partnership as a model of coordination going into the new administration.
- The WFLC co-chairs and Zupko will continue to outreach to the transition team as it continues to be built and utilize the key messages to help educate on these issues.
- Zupko will stay connected and support each WFLC organization as appropriate to facilitate the strengthening of relationships during the transition and stability among the membership.
- Zupko will work closely with each member as necessary to build connectivity with appropriate incoming appointed and selected staff that will have responsibility to these issues in the near future.

## **NSC Crosswalk and Strategic Alignment**

Objective: To hear from the NSC on their evaluation of Cohesive Strategy efforts and initiatives nationally over the past several years.

Discussion: Patti Blankenship, NSC Chair, presented the document and gave an overview of the two-phase process in the development. Phase 1, a crosswalk looking at 6 major documents directly or indirectly related to the Cohesive Strategy and Phase 2, an evaluation of the crosswalk identifying challenges and opportunities that can be addressed short and mid-term. The intent of the document is to keep momentum going for current activity around CS, to serve as a foundation for continuity in future Cohesive Strategy strategic implementation discussions in a new administration and as a compilation of opportunities the future WFLC can evaluate for individual and collective action.

### Next Steps:

- WFLC members to forward comments to Patti Blankenship by COB Tuesday, December 6. Any comments will be considered and incorporated as appropriate to a final document.
- The final version will be completed by December 21 and ready for distribution.



- Zupko and Blankenship will continue to distribute to incoming WFLC members and use as a tool in briefings and discussions to understand the various steps in the development of the CS.
- Zupko will identify interest in specific recurring ideas around opportunities as presented in the assessment and look for ways to engage multiple WFLC members in working toward collective solutions.

## **Pre-Fire Season Coordination**

Objective: To discuss what has worked well, evaluate opportunities to improve, and strategize ways for stronger interaction between federal, state, tribal, and local government officials to enter into their local fire season with similar expectations and outlook. The discussion will also evaluate the wildland fire system and discuss further opportunities for co-managing risk.

Discussion: The discussion revolved around leadership intent and expectations in cross agency planning and preparedness in advance of fire season. The local WFLC members shared input from several conversations among their group and discussed potential principle type approaches to presenting leader's intent down to the ground. The group centered on the main question of "What is the best way to facilitate discussions and coordinate information at the local level between and among governments to build trust?"

### Next Steps:

- Zupko will follow up with the non-federal WFLC members to identify potential principles that capture leader's intent to key components of the pre-season briefings might entail.
- Each WFLC member will forward Zupko ideas as to principles to be included for consideration.
- Zupko will work with WFLC members to refine the list of principles into a concise, overarching briefing paper to capture leader's intent.

## **WFLC Strategic Priorities**

Zupko gave brief updates on each of the priorities.

### ***Landscape Level Collaboration***

Issue: *Increase the number and area of wildfire resilient and healthy landscapes, resilient communities, and efficiency of wildland fire response by expanding cross-landscape, cross-ownership collaboration.*

Zupko led the update which centered around the virtual center for excellence and the work flow guide to understand how successful landscape collaborates are building from the ground up. He will continue to work with the contractors to refine the site and integrate existing databases into the system. He is also part of an assessment strategy group being led by BLM to evaluate what makes landscape level projects successful. Findings should be ready first or second quarter, 2017.

### ***Environmental Compliance***

Issue: *Conduct project planning and analysis in a timely, coordinated, and efficient manner to expedite fuels management, restoration, and maintenance of healthy, resilient landscapes.*



Zupko briefly mentioned much of the content is being included in the landscape center of excellence. He is also working on a small effort to collect and compile existing information around categorical exclusions for leadership to better understand both the similarities and differences in their use among federal agencies. Evaluating opportunities for more consistent use across agencies can be considered in the near future.

### ***Reducing Risks to Communities***

**Issue:** *Build a suite of enabling conditions for the creation and enhancement of fire-adapted communities across the country.*

It was briefly mentioned the community of FAC practitioners contains the appropriate connections and finding ways for leadership to support and promote the types of activities currently ongoing is the best use of near-term energy. There is also an opportunity to evaluate current programs and policies to find further areas for engagement or consistency in implementation across agencies and organizations.

### ***Smoke Management and Air Quality***

**Issue:** *Minimize air quality impacts from wildland fire over the long-term, improve the resiliency of landscapes to wildfire, and increase the health and safety of communities, firefighters and the public by using fire as a land management tool.*

Zupko briefly updated activity around this priority. Relationship building with EPA and regulatory agencies, both nationally and regionally, continues. He reminded the members of the forum WFLC convened that evaluated joint research needs between the regulatory and land management communities. A final report should be concluded by the end of the year. Lastly, he discussed working with the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils to pull together a National Prescribed Fire Alliance (NRxFA). The intent is to create a national forum consisting of national and regional organizations and interests to serve as a coordinating body and conduit to promote prescribed fire through existing channels. The first call will be held December 12.

### ***Life Safety Initiatives***

**Issue:** *Expansion and development of initiatives (e.g. Forest Service “Life First”) to further protect wildfire responders and the public from unnecessary risk while sustaining communities and the landscape.*

Discussion revolved around how to move forward on learning and applying ways to approach risk management within the wildland fire system and the role individual agencies and organizations have in helping to change culture. There was recognition it doesn’t change overnight, but general agreement in continuing to discuss ways to further approaches (individually and collectively) to reduce risk across the spectrum of wildland fire.

**Next Steps on the priority issues:** The council was in agreement with the proposed opportunities for each priority and encouraged Zupko, the task groups and WFLC member organizations to move forward.



## **WFLC Strategic Priorities**

WFLC discussed and confirmed the following five WFLC Strategic Priorities and suggested they should be presented in the following order when being discussed and written externally:

- 1. Life Safety**
- 2. Landscape Level Collaboration**
- 3. Reducing Risk to Communities**
- 4. Smoke Management and Air Quality**
- 5. Environmental Compliance**

## **Public Comment**

No comments were submitted.

## **Administrative/Information Items**

- WFLC Advisory Board and Alternates – Zupko mentioned he will work with the members to confirm who they would like to serve on the interim advisory board until a new support structure is determined next year.
- WFLC MOU – Zupko reported the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture had signed the new MOU and Secretary of Homeland Security was imminent. He has been working closely with Department of Defense and they are ready to move quickly once Homeland Security signs.
- CS CSF #12 Report – Patti Blankenship presented the report distributed to WFLC the week prior as the culmination of CS Barrier and Critical Success Factor work stemming from earlier discussions within the CS. FEMA was officially releasing the report on December 1. The report and outcome of discussions has already had an impact on how FEMA views and manages the grants contained to give greater consideration for issues surrounding wildland fire.
- Federal Fire Science Coordinating Council – Jim Douglas gave an overview of the council currently in the formative stages as having stemmed from discussions within the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. The intent is for better coordination between federal agencies, but the benefit will reach to non-federal partners as well. The charter is currently between FS Fire and Aviation Management and DOI Office of Wildland Fire to finalize.
- Regional Strategy Committee Reports – These were distributed as briefing papers with the meeting agenda before the meeting.

## **Closeout**

- Next meeting is scheduled for March 2, 2017. Specific location (in Washington DC) will be confirmed after the first of the year.
- Closing comments from Bonnie, Humbert, and Zupko – They thanked everyone for their input, efforts, collaboration and participation. Bonnie expressed gratitude for all the support and coordination from partners during his tenure as Undersecretary.