



Wildland Fire Leadership Council Meeting
March 2nd, 2017, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm
Washington, DC
Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW, Interior Operations Center, Room 3447
Meeting Notes

MEETING PURPOSE:

The purpose of the March 2 meeting of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) was to collectively discuss: key engagement points with new administration and new federal WFLC membership; approaches to a common set of expectations around the strategic activities; an understanding of the 2016 fire season and the upcoming 2017 forecast from predictive services as well as regional activities contributing towards collaboration across the country.

ACTION ITEMS AND NEXT STEPS:

- *SEE NEXT STEPS FOR EACH ISSUE AREA*

ATTENDEES:

Council Members or alternates: Dan Jiron (USDA), Jim Cason (DOI), Tom Tidwell (FS), Mike Reynolds (NPS), Erik Litzenberg (IAFC), Vern Stearns (ITC), George Geissler (NGA), Anne Kinsinger (USGS), Jim Kurth (FWS), Denis Onieal (FEMA/USFA), Ron Dunton (BLM), Bruce Loudermilk (BIA), Jim Karels (NASF), Maureen Sullivan (DoD), James C. Ross (DoD), John Suthers (NLC), Chris Marklund (NACo), Mike Zupko (Executive Manager)

Partners and Support Staff: Vicki Christiansen, Harry Humbert, Tami DeFries, Denise Blankenship, Shawna Legarza, Bryan Rice, Rick Obernessor, Dan Smith, Craig Leff, Genevieve Giaccardo, Dave Celino, Brandon Quinn, Bill Honorer, Gillian Fay, Bob Eaton, Meg Gilley, Maureen Brooks, Jeff Whitney, Paul Steblein, Cecilia Clavet, Patti Blankenship, Katie Lighthall, Shawn Stokes, Chris Topik, Anna Walker, Caitlyn Pollihan, Kyle Moses, Nelson Bryner, Brett Lacy, Karen Prentice, Sarah Swanson

On Phone: Jim Erikson, Larry Mastic, Gary Wood

MEETING SUMMARY:

AGENDA REVIEW, MEETING PURPOSE AND GOALS

A welcome address was given by Dan Jiron and Jim Cason. The confirmation and swearing in of Secretary Zinke was acknowledged, as well as the importance of the transition to a new administration. Introductions followed. Jiron then turned the meeting over to Mike Zupko to review the agenda, meeting purpose and goals of the meeting.



TRANSITION DISCUSSION

Objective: To discuss the status of current and pending appointments and key issues being brought forward by the administration.

Discussion: Department of the Interior has a beachhead team of over 30 people who have been instrumental in creating a smooth transition under Secretary Zinke. DOI is not anticipating any major issues associated with the transition. USDA is waiting on the hearings and possible confirmation of Governor Perdue as the Secretary of Agriculture. Although Secretary of Defense Mattis has been in place since January, no nominations for undersecretary positions have been made. The Secretaries of the Army and Navy are priorities. DoD is facing reorganization challenges in addition to the transition to the new administration. A community transition involving the North Carolina National Guard will be the changeover from C130 aircraft, which participates in aerial firefighting operations, to the C17 which does not. Department of Homeland Security Kelly was sworn in January, but they are still awaiting the FEMA and USFA Administrators.

Next Steps:

- The WFLC co-chairs and Zupko will continue to outreach to the beachhead teams as positions are on boarded and utilize the key messages.
- Zupko will stay connected and support each WFLC organization as appropriate to facilitate the strengthening of relationships during the transition and maintaining stability among the membership.

2016 FIRE SEASON REVIEW

Objective: To understand the challenges and lesson's learned from wildfires across the country during 2016, geographical challenges encountered, resource needs and opportunities to address in 2017 and future years.

Discussion: Shawna Legarza (USFS) gave a presentation with slides (Attachment I) regarding the 2016 fire season, initiatives, and challenges with focus on the state of California. Round table discussions on life first initiatives have been engaged in by fire and non-fire personnel. These talks concentrated on unnecessary exposure and risk. Qualification standards for fire workers vary significantly between agencies and levels of government. Multiple agencies in California have participated in the Governor's task force to address epidemic tree mortality, beetle infestation, and drought. A cohesive dialog on how to deal with dead trees to prevent fires is ongoing and necessary. The majority of fires reported in 2016 were human caused and a significant number of them occurred in the southern states. The fires were scattered over the western area, but the southeast had more activity than usual. The cost of wildland fire management is increasing. Detailed slides were viewed showing cost of fire in FY 2016, aircraft types and availability, and number of structures lost in different fires.

Next Steps:

- More conversation is needed on the topic of tree mortality.
- Qualifications for workers must be standardized.
- Pre-season collaboration is necessary to build upon fire adapted communities, specifically to create escape routes.



Dan Smith (NASF) gave a presentation (Attachment II) with the following key points:

- The southeast region seemed to have an explosion of fire activity that was mostly due to drought conditions. Predictive services had accurately captured this possibility three to four months prior to the activity.
- Many typical firefighting tactics did not work in the southeastern mountain region in 2016 due to drought conditions and high fire season activity.
- The large number of human caused fires in FY '16 in the southeast is not due to lack of educational efforts, but instead to population density and a longer than usual fire season.

Bryan Rice (DOI) added a few comments:

- Discussion on fire prevention from human behavior must be ongoing.
- The fire season is becoming longer and more active, taking place twelve months out of the year.
- The current service delivery model and the desired service delivery model need to be reconciled.

2017 SPRING AND SUMMER FIRE SEASON(S) OUTLOOK

Objective: To understand the outlook and challenges that might be addressed pre-season to better approach, offer leader's intent and discuss opportunities for collaboration.

Discussion: Shawna Legarza and Dan Smith continued their presentation with slides regarding the 2017 fire season, predictive services, and resource availability, with Bryan Rice adding a few comments at the end. Resource allocation and safety improvements for firefighters and communities are continuously being discussed and implemented. The predictive services program map is updated and available every three months on the NIFC website. There has been improvement in fire agency culture, in which workers feel empowered to speak up or question authority if they feel safety isn't being properly addressed. States are big players in supporting fire response. In 2017 the states are looking stable. Some have had budget cuts, but nothing out of the ordinary. DOI has several international agreements that can be leveraged if necessary.

Next Steps:

- More dialogs are needed for safety, response, and engagement sessions for fire fighters and administration to talk about risks.
- The increased dialog will spur transition to becoming more transparent in collaborative strategies.

PRE-FIRE SEASON COORDINATION

Objective: To review leadership principles that can be utilized to help encourage and promote cross agency and partnership briefings before local fire seasons with the intent to help improve interaction between federal, state, tribal and local government officials locally to collectively approach the fire season.

Discussion: Mike Zupko presented a draft (Attachment III) of the Pre-Wildland Fire Season Coordination Principles document. The document is intended to capture leaders' intent and facilitate government to government discussion in conjunction with multi-organization contributions. The document is a tool that could be as simple as a letter from WFLC or could be used in a cross agency message. It's important for



those at the table to push the message out without being prescriptive in how that happens. The following input was provided:

- Life safety must always be prioritized.
- To be most effective, the document can expand from pre-season principles to encompass all-seasons.
- The document can enhance the context in regard to the co-management of risks. Risks can be more than biophysical, they can be cultural, social, or political and the points of the document need to address risk management at different levels. The document must articulate that risk is expected from across the spectrum and is not to be transferred unintentionally.
- “Unnecessary” exposure should be defined and an understanding should be built around that definition in a regional and local context. Risk expectation should be built early on and agreements made ahead of time so resources can be organized through NIFC.
- There should be more of an emphasis on cross agency coordination and the services different organizations bring to the table. The coordination specifications should continue before, during and after events.

Next Steps:

- Zupko will work with Rice, Legarza and the advisory board to sharpen the document and gain feedback over the next few weeks.
- Discussion on risk management is needed to determine specific needs and language that should be added to the document.
- A joint communications team should be explored to control the message that is distributed, especially if it will be targeted to different audiences.
- The document should be changed from “pre-season” to “all season” or collaboration in general in order to reflect its status as a record of guiding principles.
- Once the core principles are agreed upon, each individual member can build out specific actions relevant to their scope and influence.

WFLC STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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.*

Life safety initiatives were covered earlier in the meeting. The goal is to utilize input from multiple organizations such as National Fallen Fire Fighter Foundation and FS Life First initiative to bolster life safety within all organizations.

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.*



The Center of Excellence was discussed in depth in September. The idea is to pull information from projects that are already going on and put it into one database so people can learn from multiple examples in a clearing house structure. Multiple agencies and organizations are contributing at this time. The internal mechanics are complete and beta testing to rollout the external interface is nearing completion. Connecting with existing databases will be the next hurdle to help rapidly populate back-end data.

Zupko then introduced Karen Prentice (BLM) who presented a briefing document (Attachment IV) and spoke about the assessment of cross-jurisdictional partnerships in a multi-scale setting (local, regional, and national).

- BLM as well as many other agencies and organizations are working on large landscape collaboration to increase cooperation across resilient landscapes. The assessment strategy group has met several times in person and via phone to synthesize different methods and assumptions of how things work. Work needs to be done to find a standard set of assumptions.
- The cohesive strategy will be reflected to keep the linkage with resilient landscapes and try to leverage as far as possible and meet everyone's needs. With differing challenges, the BLM funded project is assessing to draw conclusions on what specifically can be done.
- Workshops are being considered to test common assumptions that can be used across the board.
- A report should be ready within the next six months.

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 and can fold in with new administration priorities.

REDUCING RISKS TO COMMUNITIES

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

The National League of Cities is interested in engaging with their membership around risk reduction through several proposed initiatives. Current opportunities include using internal NLC messaging tools such as their blog, CitiesSpeak and joint pre-season messaging with NACo and IAFC. Additionally, they will conduct a survey of how mayors are interested in this topic to gauge presentations at NLC conferences and other avenues to bring in NLC membership.

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 introduced Paul Steblein who presented a briefing document (Attachment V) and spoke about the Fire and Smoke Model Evaluation Experiment –FASMEE. He also reminded the council that last year WFLC supported the smoke management and air quality research forum which was hosted by Tall Timbers. The Joint Fire Science Program (and member agencies) is providing coordination and funding for FASMEE, and partners include NOAA (FIREX), NASA (FIREChem), DOD, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Additional collaborators are being approached. The research culminated with scoping and agency interactions- distributed to everyone and key areas for immediate needs, the report was distributed across agencies. FASMEE is expected to include 2-3 large experimental burns in forested systems in the West and Southeast. These burns will be intense and highly measured. Areas of measurement are fuels and consumption, fire behavior and energy, plume dynamics, and smoke emissions. The experiment will have a prescribed fire aspect and a wildfire focus. The experiment will be less simple than the last prescribed fires, and with larger plumes.

Discussion:

- Logistics are challenging. State environmental agencies are needed to buy in. States that did participate: Georgia, Florida, and Washington; California is interested in engagement. WFLC is continuing to facilitate discussions between state forestry fire directors and air agencies.
- As appointees get into place and a clear understanding of the new administration emerges there will be more engagement to determine the priorities.

Next Steps:

- This project will continue 5, 10 years or even further to complete whole experimental systems.
- The final draft of the experiment design is almost complete.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Objective: To gain an understanding of regional coordination and activities on the ground that supports the implementation of Cohesive Strategy and WFLC priorities.

Discussion:

Dave Celino (MA Forest Bureau) and Maureen Brooks (USFS) presented a briefing paper (Attachment VI) and spoke about the Northeast Regional Strategy Committee (NERSC) Update. Highlights included: a pilot project in NH assisting towns to do prescribed fire, NE Fire Compact, sustainability coordinator expansion, AD hiring rules and the development of an online community protection guide.

Katie Lighthall (WRSC) presented a briefing paper (Attachment VII) and spoke about the Western Regional Strategy Committee (WRSC) Update. Highlights included: learning laboratories, annual accomplishments and stakeholder implementation report, County Wildfire Playbook with NACo, and the upcoming CS science implementation workshop.

Gary Wood (SRSC) presented a briefing paper (Attachment VIII) and spoke via telephone about the Southeastern Regional Strategy Committee (SRSC) Update. Highlights included: review of Fall SE Fire Season and lessons learned, regional communications campaign, supporting the Appalachian RC&D FAC expansion, working with extension agents to expand fire messaging throughout extension networks.



PUBLIC COMMENT

Chris Topik commented that the Nature Conservancy ran controlled burns last year and assisted with other agencies controlled burns. The Nature Conservancy is deeply involved and deeply committed to WFLC and the cohesive strategy. When cities, counties, tribes, and states are working together with the federal government amazing things can happen. He also suggested there should be a method of tracking accomplishments that reflect information on budget and policy across agencies.

ADMINISTRATIVE/INFORMATION AND MEMBER ROUND ROBIN ITEMS

- Motion to approve minutes from November 30th, 2016: All are in favor of minutes being approved.
- Qualification standards for wildland fire responders should be updated to consist of one national qualification system. This will be a long term project and should be done in small steps.
- NSC/Advisory Board- the decision was made to last fall to wait until the new members of WFLC were on boarded to determine the best support structure for WFLC. NSC is a WFLC chartered committee whereas the advisory board is ad hoc to serve until WFLC makes a determination.
- The USGS will be working on the Strategic Plan regarding fire science, engagement of the community and a rangeland fire strategy. Suggestions are needed concerning a research focus.
- The executive order signed May 18, 2016 on the subject of WUI Federal Risk Mitigation was limited, but a step forward.
- Acknowledgement that the effective response to fire is a result of improvements including learning labs and increased coordination. Chris Topik's sentiments were echoed regarding accomplishment tracking.
- The WFLC supported Cohesive Strategy Science Workshop is scheduled for April 25-27, 2017, in Reno NV.

CLOSEOUT

Next meeting is scheduled for June 15, 2017 in Washington DC at the USDA Whitten Building.

- Future tentative dates
 - During the week of September 11, 2017 for a field meeting.
 - Proposed: Early December, Washington DC.

Closing remarks and gratitude given by Jim Cason, Dan Jiron and Mike Zupko.

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