

Tom Harbour  
Director, Fire and Aviation Management  
USDA Forest Service  
201 14<sup>th</sup> Street SW – Room 2SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Jim Douglas  
Director, Office of Wildland Fire  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

March 4, 2014

Dear Mr. Harbour and Mr. Douglas:

The Fire Learning Network (FLN) has been working to address our nation's wildfire problems since 2002 under a series of cooperative agreements between the Nature Conservancy, Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. The current agreement—Promoting Ecosystem Resilience through Collaboration (PERC)—began in 2011, tasked the FLN with innovating and implementing integrated solutions as laid out in the then-emerging Cohesive Strategy. On behalf of the hundreds of practitioners involved in the FLN, I am pleased to offer our support for the next phase of the Cohesive Strategy for Wildland Fire Management—and to provide some insights based on our work under its earlier phases.

It is clear to us that support for integrated delivery of the three elements of the Cohesive Strategy has now been built through the engagement of a broad suite of stakeholders in the first phases. The country is well positioned for transformational change by focusing on direct delivery of on-the-ground implementation. Early adopters and innovators are already moving forward under existing programs—for example, innovations funded through the Fire Learning Network and the Fire Adapted Community Learning Network have advanced understanding and delivery in all three aspects of the Cohesive Strategy. But the current effort is not enough to reach our critical goals. Much can be done in Phase III to support these and like efforts that build community and ecosystem resilience locally, and serve as exemplars of what implementing the goals of Cohesive Strategy on a broader scale can bring.

As we move into Phase III—and begin increasing the pace and scale of Cohesive Strategy-guided implementation—we advocate a focus on:

- **On-the-ground implementation**—the Federal Agencies have key roles in both funding and participating in local collaborations for integrated fire management—we suggest that now is the time to redirect funds that supported the initial national- and regional-level efforts toward on-the-ground capacity-building and outcomes

- **Strategic alignment**—a strong and seamless partnership of USFS, NRCS and DOI bureaus, with landscape and community resilience as an integrated measure and goal; for example, have DOI agencies join the Forest Service in putting resources into the growth of on-the-ground Fire Adapted Community efforts
- **Integration**—merging the three elements of the Cohesive Strategy and promoting full engagement of communities in planning, implementing and adaptive management, which includes the integration of CWPPs and similar collaborative community based efforts with agency planning and implementation
- **Collaborative engagement in planning**—locally, with communities, organizations, tribes, states and local federal units
- **Collective actions**—cross-boundary implementation by the USFS, NRCS, DOI and local partners, working together, will build capacity and make communities and landscapes more resilient before, during and after wildfire
- **Enabling conditions for success**—while the National Risk Assessment provides a coarse-filter screening for places at risk, making strategic investments that will result in effective change critically depends on having—or developing—local leadership, collaborative engagement and the capacity for collective action, components not represented in the National Risk Assessment; we have learned that these critical enabling conditions make the difference between success and failure and thus guide our investments

Once again, let me say how pleased we are at the integrated approach set forth in the Cohesive Strategy. It encapsulates what we have seen in a dozen years of collaborative work in landscapes across the country: On-the-ground Fire Adapted Community efforts, integrated with increased community capacity for implementing restoration actions will help create resilient landscapes across ownership boundaries, as well as communities that are resilient to wildfire. This improves community safety and well-being in the short-term, and makes possible the eventual return of “good fire” to landscapes that need it.

We look forward to continued engagement in the next phase of the Cohesive Strategy. Thank you both for your agencies’ continued leadership, and for the numerous staff at all levels with whom we have been able to collaborate, learn and work with.

Sincerely,



Lynn M. Decker

cc: Tim Melchert, Cooperative Fire Specialist, USDA Forest Service  
 Erik Christensen, Fuels Management / Biomass Coordinator, U.S. Department of the Interior  
 Chris Topik, Director of Restoring America’s Forests, The Nature Conservancy