Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy
National Goals; Collective Solutions

Response to Wildfire
Fire Adapted Communities
Resilient Landscapes
Supported by Science

Western Regional Strategy Committee (WRSC) Update **October 2012**

CS Stretches Limited Resources

Implementation planning is on the horizon and the Cohesive Strategy (CS) Phase III is nearing completion. Many folks are concerned about funding and the prospects for increasing the amount of work to achieve the three CS goals. Since the beginning of the CS effort, participating stakeholders have been committed to the assumption that all of our efforts need to be considered from a budget neutral standpoint. There are a variety of reasons for that assumption, one of the most important reasons for this assumption is that it would not be responsible to project what a given decision maker might choose to invest in the three goals.

Stakeholders may want to review the latest CS data on fire probability and risk, housing density, climate, natural and human caused fire ignition rates, landownership and other topics, in order to improve program efficiency. Redistributing funds among the three CS goals of the strategy may be an option. While these choices will emerge within each jurisdiction, the intent of the CS is to foster a collaborative discussion among all of the affected jurisdictions within a given area.

Organizations can review the CS data to reassess their geographic funding distribution, or to ensure they are getting the greatest "bang for the buck" within their locale. State and federal agencies may want to review fire response staffing with local agencies to eliminate duplication or to shore up resources where the need exists. Land management agencies and tribes may want to reassess fuels treatment priorities based on the vulnerability of certain areas or other values at risk such as domestic water supplies. Local fire organizations may want to reassess the proportion of funds used to prepare the community for fire versus improving fire response capability.

The upcoming draft Western Regional Science-based Risk Analysis Report will provide the latest data from across the western U.S., helping stakeholders to seek out the answers to questions such as: Where is our workload? Where is our capacity? Who provides protection and where?

- Are we leveraging our response capability at the local, state, tribal, federal, and private sector to the maximum degree possible? Where are we successfully leveraging that capability? Where and under what conditions do opportunities for leveraging exist?
- What are the barriers to achieving our objectives under the current response system? Are the response objectives for a given area realistic and do they pose the threat of risk transference or cost transference?
- Where can the application of fire lessen the need for long-term commitment of response resources?
- Where or under what conditions do we have the highest number of injuries per number of fires?
- Where can we balance smoke emissions in fire prone areas through a combination of pre-treatment, maintenance fire, cultural burns, and re-ignition of suppressed fire under favorable conditions within the natural or historic fire return interval?

These critical discussions require broad participation by stakeholders across agency and jurisdictional boundaries. The CS provides the substance to frame a new working relationship among western stakeholders concerned about fire management.

Comment Period
October 5 through October 10!

The draft Western Regional Science-based Risk Analysis Report will be available on Friday October 5! Stakeholders have the opportunity to provide comments through close of business on October 10. The draft report will include information about the risk analysis, alternatives for program emphasis, recommendations and next steps in the strategy.

Comments will be used to further refine and finalize the report.

Find the instructions for providing feedback at:
http://sites.nemac.org/westcohesivefire/updates/

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Western Communities Already at Work on CS

The Western Community Fire Management Assessment describes how communities and their partners in the West are working to better live with wildland fire. The full report, "Living with Wildfire: The State of Practice in Western Communities", will be available as part of the draft Western Regional Science-based Analysis Report on October 5 at http://sites.nemac.org/westcohesivefire/updates/

A few highlights:

- Over 60 percent of respondents are working on all three goals of the CS. This might provide opportunity for synergy and integration among fire management goals, which could result in improved fire management outcomes and adaptation over time.
- 80 percent of respondents were working across jurisdictional boundaries (i.e. spanning ownership, governmental or social boundaries) in each of the three CS goal areas. This indicates a strong adherence to the Secretary of Agriculture's "all lands" focus associated with existing fire management efforts across the west.
- Volunteers and in-kind donations provided the most support for integrated fire management goals at the community level, followed by grants, goods for services and retained receipts from stewardship activities and use of timber receipts.
- Respondents were eager to share lessons learned and these will be shared with the cohesive strategy working groups.
- Innovation and dissemination is moving fire management forward. Over 50% of respondents felt they were involved in innovative activities including: landscape scale treatments, local planning strategies and processes, collaboration and partnerships, experimenting with legal authorities and legislation, communications, outreach and messaging.
- Agency technical assistance, peer-to-peer exchanges, and personal and organizational networks were key to moving from education/information to action.
- Less than 50% of the respondents had been involved in the process to create the CS.

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Just What Are Resilient Landscapes?

The technical definition of landscape resilience, from the Phase II CS Report, is "the ability of a landscape to absorb the effects of fire by regaining or maintaining its characteristic structural, compositional and functional attributes. The amount of resilience a landscape possesses is proportional to the magnitude of fire effects required to fundamentally change the system."

Tom Quigley, Co-Chair of the CS National Science and Analysis Team (NSAT), offers another view that he's observed in use among collaborative groups.

"Even though the concept of resiliency to fire is not strictly reliant on a scientific definition, there is a notion that collaborative groups working locally unite around desired landscape and vegetation conditions they view as resilient. Landscape scale changes in vegetative structure and fuel loadings are needed to significantly alter wildfire behavior, reduce wildfire losses, and achieve longer term fire resiliency. Large landscapes predisposed to stand replacing fires may fit the scientific definition for resilient if they regenerate following fire, yet the intersection of these large fires with the social and economic networks intertwined may suffer dramatic consequences if large fires occur. The local collaborative process may well define the desired landscape as a mosaic where stand replacing fires are smaller in size so as to reduce the social and economic consequence of any individual fire. Thus, resiliency carries with it some elements of social and economic concerns as well as ecological. Resiliency as a goal is important in the near term as well as the long-term. Resilient landscapes contain vegetation conditions that are capable of withstanding fire while important values are protected."