



Wildland Fire Leadership Council Meeting

November 2nd, 2017, 9:30 am – 4:30 pm

Washington DC

USDA Whitten Building, Room 104a

DRAFT Meeting Notes

Meeting Purpose:

The purpose of the November 2 meeting of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) was to collectively discuss and develop strategic direction stemming from: the 2017 fire season and opportunities for engagement; consideration of a systematic approach to increase the use of technology in the wildland fire arena; mitigating impacts from wildland fire, including smoke and post-fire effects; collaboration across fire science organizations; implementation opportunities with WGA and other partners; and, current Cohesive Strategy implementation activities at the regional level.

Attendees:

Council Members or alternates: Dan Jiron (USDA), Jim Cason (DOI), Tony Tooke (USFS), Mike Reynolds (NPS), Erik Litzenberg (IAFC), Vern Stearns (ITC), George Geissler (NGA), Anne Kinsinger (USGS), Jim Kurth (FWS), Keith Bryant (FEMA/USFA), John Ruhs (BLM), Brian Rice (BIA), Jim Karels (NASF), Maureen Sullivan (DoD), James C. Ross (DoD), Brett Lacey (NLC), Dan Shoun (NACo), Patrick Holmes (WGA), Mike Zupko (Executive Manager)

Partners and Support Staff: Vicki Christiansen, Harry Humbert, Doug Crandall, Jeff Rupert, Pete Waite, Tami DeFries, Shawna Legarza, Meg Gilley, Maureen Brooks, Katie Lighthall, Shawn Stokes, Ann Walker, Jim Erickson, Johnathan Shuffield, Gary Wood, Gary Schiff, Nelson Bryner, Bob Eaton, Denise Blankenship, Laura Schweitzer, Craig Leff, Charles Cuvelier, Pete Wakeland, Jim Durglo, Paul Steblein, Grant Beebe, Howard Hedrick, Pete Lahm, Joe Stutler, Sarah Swanson, Amy Krause, Cecilia Clavet, Chris Topik, Alex Schaefer, Dave Celino, Jaelith Hall-Rivera, Patti Blankenship, Capt. Kyle Moses

On Phone: Troy Timmons, Larry Mastic, Dan Shoun

Meeting Summary:

Opening Remarks

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and Associate Deputy Secretary of the Interior Jim Cason.

Secretary Perdue challenged WFLC members to review the 2017 fire season candidly and constructively. He exhorted the group to explore questions such as did we do all we could do, what did we learn, and what could we do better, and to provide and accept uncomfortable answers when needed. Associate Deputy Secretary Cason highlighted concerns among members of Congress about the escalating costs of fire suppression and the need to address underlying causes, such as fuel conditions.

Past Minutes

There was a motion, second and unanimous approval of the minutes from the March 2, 2017, meeting and the June 15, 2017, meeting/conference call.

Joint Fire Season Update

Objective: WFLC will gain an understanding of the challenges and lessons learned from wildfires across the country during 2017 to date, geographical challenges encountered, resource needs and opportunities to address. Several items will serve as primers for discussion in agenda items that follow.

Shawna Legarza, Director of Fire and Aviation Management, U.S. Forest Service and Jeff Rupert, Acting Director, Office of Wildland Fire, U.S. Department of the Interior provided a briefing and addressed issues of note from the 2107 fire season to date. High levels of wildfire activity have occurred almost continuously for the last year, from the fires in Gatlinburg, Tennessee in fall, 2016 through the fires in northern California this fall. The number of fires in 2017 nationwide so far is below the ten-year average but the acres burned is significantly above the ten-year average. At the peak of wildfire activity this year, more than 28,000 people were working on wildfires. The wildland fire community also provided personnel to support response for three hurricanes. Tony Tooke, Chief, U.S. Forest Service reported that in 2017 the agency spent a record \$2.4 billion on fire suppression. Fire suppression currently accounts for 55% of the U.S. Forest Service budget and is projected to account for 67% of the agency's budget by 2021, highlighting the need to change the way that fire suppression is funded. Several opportunities discussed below were highlighted that can help address issues raised during the fire season.

Resource Availability and Work Environment

Objective: Consider challenges from the 2017 fire season and evaluate opportunities to address resource availability and work environment issues.

Discussion: Several discussion leads built on lessons learned from 2017 and explored how leaders' intent may address issues discussed. Highlights include: U.S. Forest Service is currently examining costs and need to distribute them more equitably among all wildland fire management agencies; need to enable resources that are already out there to participate, i.e. train, qualify, and reimburse local and rural fire department firefighters; need for better understanding of how wildfire response decisions are made and better coordination and communication among local, state, and federal agencies, and; need to obtain more resources for active management, not just suppression.

Next Steps:

- FS and DOI are leading a working group moving towards one national training standard. They have tasked NWCG to report on recommendations and timeline by January 2018. That report will be shared at the next WFLC meeting.
- IAFC will continue to evaluate ways to better utilize Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to allow for more middle-management resources to become available.
- Leads TBD to further evaluate the issue around costs and reimbursements from wildfire response as well as considering a process for better communications and coordination between federal, state and local during wildfire response.
- Zupko will work with Legarza and Rupert to consider how to increase training for not only response, but for preparedness and fuel treatments as well.

- Consideration will be given if any tweaks are necessary to ROSS before IROC is completed in a few years.
- Zupko will work with USFA to consider how an assessment of resources could be conducted and collected for each state.

Use of Technology and Integration into the Wildland Fire Management System

Objective: Consider a systematic approach, across all WFLC partners, in the evaluation, adoption and utilization of technology within the wildland fire community. Understanding what systems currently exist and what leadership can build to more effectively integrate emerging technology into the wildland fire management system.

Discussion: Discussion illuminated widespread agreement that federal, state, and local wildland fire agencies need to enhance coordination and efficiency in developing and implementing technology. Capability exists to use technology to accomplish basic wildland fire management tasks, such as obtaining maps for Incident Management Teams and tracking firefighters, but nationwide implementation and integration across all agencies has not been effective.

Next Steps:

- Establish a work group to evaluate existing platforms and understanding of work currently occurring in this arena (e.g. WFIT) and to develop elements of a technology framework including policy inputs to pursue integration across partners.
 - WFLC members that are interested in participating should email Mike Zupko
 - Work group to report at next WFLC meeting
- USGS will pursue an opportunity to further bring together the user community to help define opportunities for Landfire to meet data needs.

Challenges and Opportunities with Excess Federal Property and Supporting Rural Fire Departments

Objective: Expand WFLC understanding of the impact of the issue to state and local responders and determine appropriate WFLC engagement points to move the issue forward. The members will also understand an opportunity for BLM to further the ability of local responders to access federal excess property and receive other necessary support.

Discussion: Problems with Federal Excess Property Program regarding Q6 classification have been resolved and the program has stabilized as a result of Secretarial agreements. A legislative solution is being worked on but may not be needed. Separately, the Rural Fire Assistance Program was lost in 2011, and the new Rural Fire Readiness program is limited to training. There is a need to restore ability to provide Personal Protective Equipment and other items to Rural Fire Departments. BLM is working to build understanding of the new program and to expand what can be offered to create a greater reach. There is an opportunity to better track and share the benefits of these programs that support rural and local responders.

Next Steps:

- Zupko to develop rationale for state and local assistance programs to include accountability mechanisms, case studies and generally to tell the story around the positive impacts of these programs.

Linking Fire Science Capabilities Across the WFLC Partners

Objective: Understand current coordinated activities around research and how research is distributed, and look for opportunities to further across the wildland fire community.

Discussion: Discussion identified need to enhance coordination and alignment of priorities among all organizations producing fire science. Need for additional science related to fuels management as well as social science.

Next Steps:

- Identify science and technology priorities around key policy questions for WFLC to align behind.
 - Zupko and Steblein will solicit input on the following questions to help distill collective needs and alignment from each WFLC member.
 - Zupko will convene a workgroup to evaluate input, current capacity and identify gaps considering future needs and utilizing existing structures (e.g. JFSP).
- How to scan the horizon better for science needs?
 - How can science better underpin the importance and need for management?
 - How to better facilitate information coordination and leverage resources?
 - What does the co-production of science look like going into the future?
 - How to efficiently set joint priorities for research needs and ensure science is outcome based?
 - How to consider collaboration and depth of capability across science organizations?
 - How to develop tools to translate science into use in the field and on the ground?
 - Within the WFLC community, who are the primary wildland fire science producers (i.e., scientists) and deliverers (science packagers and translators), what are their roles, and how do they coordinate with and leverage each other?

Fire, Flood and Mud – Post Fire Stabilization and Rehabilitation

Objective: WFLC members will be introduced to the opportunity for collective engagement and consider how, across the partners, post-fire risk can be evaluated and addressed during and after a wildfire.

Discussion: Highlighted the importance for WFLC partners to work together on post-fire events such as flooding and mud-slides. Potential areas of cooperation include community education and preparation and mitigation.

Next Steps: Zupko to work with a small team to:

- Evaluate USGS earthquake program around predictive services and understand applicability for its use in public outreach (model for wildfire).
- Consider additional ways to reach across boundaries for stabilization and rehabilitation activities (e.g. FS Region 1 uses an integrated approach to BAER Teams as well as the NRCS utilizing funds on private lands)

Smoke Management and Air Quality Related Issues

Objective: WFLC will hear an update of multiple activities ongoing around smoke management, air quality and enhancing the use of prescribed fire including: current work around enhancing the use of prescribed fire, smoke response in 2017, current fire season impacts around firefighter and public health including mitigation activities, lessons and challenges across the west, EPA rules and regulations, and initial findings and recommendations from

the WFLC data gap forum. WFLC will consider opportunities for next steps and expansion of relationships around the issue, especially with state air regulatory agencies.

Discussion: A brief primer was given of WFLC activities around this issue to date including: Working with EPA staff leadership building and understanding joint messaging; building off ongoing activities with the Southern Region of the EPA, WFLC Smoke Research Forum held in 2016, Smoke Data Gap Forum held in 2017, enhancing relationship with many leaders around smoke including – EPA OAQPS, NWS, NOAA, state air, ENGOS, land managers, responders etc. Also discussed was work stemming from the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils and the joint formation of the National Prescribed Fire Alliance including interest in the PNW, MT and CA. The discussion then shifted to current wildfire season and impact. Smoke was widespread and persistent this year. Wildland Fire Air Quality Response Program deployed more than 100 Air Resource Advisors to fires this year to monitor and model smoke to address impacts on public health, transportation safety, and fire personnel exposure. Several operational challenges were highlighted in response to wildfire including lack of consistent 1KM grid and the depth of duff of material burning and understanding the impact in the creation of smoke and particulate matter.

Next Steps:

- Opportunity to leverage the WFLC relationships with NWS/NOAA and help them understand the importance of consistent 1KM grids.
- Zupko will work with the West and NE to identify states to engage and increase understanding around the smoke issue and the ability to increase the use of prescribed fire.
- Zupko, Lahm and a small team will work with increase relationships with EPA OAQPS and build from previous work around joint messaging.

Active Management and Injecting Value into the System

Objective: WFLC will collectively understand the administration’s intent to increase ecosystem health and reduce risk from wildfires and negative impacts to forests and rangelands through increased use of fuels management, hazard fuels reduction and harvesting across federal lands.

Discussion: The issue was presented by several WFLC members to better understand the administration’s encouragement to better utilize active management as a tool to increase forest health, reduce wildfire risk and create value from national lands. Three buckets were discussed to help move the issue forward. 1) Science and data needs, 2) Decision trade-offs of action/no action and 3) Prioritization of implementation and how to input other considerations for scaling up and how to better utilize states and partners to assist in translating planning to action.

Next Steps: Two primary considerations going forward: 1) Collective messaging that active management benefits all (both partners and the general public. 2) Opportunity to interface with WGA and other partners on key components of the WGA initiative to help further promote working lands (e.g. increase GNA, increase use of prescribed fire, develop additional ways to promote shared stewardship and cross-boundary work and increase the efficiency of the environmental compliance process). Zupko will coordinate activities around both opportunities.

WGA-WFLC Joint Implementation Strategies

Objective: WFLC will explore opportunities in the WGA National Forest and Rangelands Management Initiative for joint activity between the two organizations and begin mapping out joint priorities that can be collectively moved forward.



Discussion: This initiative, which has the support of 19 Western Governors, is making progress. Multiple engagement points include: smoke management and air quality including expanding the use of prescribed fire and secondly, increase of active management and evaluation of creating a more efficient environmental review process.

Next Steps: Zupko will continue to work closely with the WGA staff to prioritize joint activities around key issues going forward.

Regional Cohesive Strategy Implementation Activities and Engagement Points

Objective: WFLC members will hear from each of the RSC regions to understand current activities that support WFLC priorities and offer leaders' intent. WFLC will consider opportunities for further engagement at the regional and local level to support national and regional priorities around CS core goals.

Discussion: NERSC, SRSC, and WRSC all thriving and conducting a variety of activities to implement the CS. Highlights include NERSC has hired LANDFIRE Coordinator for three years, SRSC is seeing lots of cross boundary collaborative work between partners, and WRSC will soon be releasing a County Wildfire Playbook written by County Commissioners for County Commissioners.

Round Robin

FEMA/USFA has been part of a team that will release a Draft National Mitigation Investment Strategy for comment soon. Goal is to align mitigation across all levels of government. Opportunity for WFLC members to provide input.

Next Steps: Zupko will notify WFLC members when draft is released.

Administrative/Information Updates

Jim Erickson is retiring from ITC and will be replaced by Jim Durglo. Erickson was recognized for his years of serving within the wildland fire community and his dedications to be a team player working towards a solution while carrying the tribal leadership message.

Public Comment

Ann Walker discussed the opportunity to coordinate with big box stores during wildland fire response.

Dave Celino reiterated a couple topics from the NERSC briefing paper including the importance of consistent training standards and the firefighter liability issue. This would allow for many more state and local fire resources to be deployable on wildland fires, especially from the east.

Closeout

The next meeting will be held the week of March 5 in Washington, DC. USDA will host. Zupko will work with the members to determine the specific date.