



Wildland Fire Leadership Council Meeting
June 13, 2022, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time
Washington, DC

USDA Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Ave SW, Room 104A, Washington, DC 20250 & Virtual via Zoom

Meeting Minutes

MEETING INTENT AND GOALS: To review information and dialogue on wildland fire system technology and data integration, workforce, wildland fire management system coordination, and smoke management, particularly as the 2022 fire year continues and the bipartisan infrastructure law implementation takes shape, in order to 1) position WFLC to provide strategic leadership, 2) develop solutions and set WFLC policy agenda, 3) provide guidance to the WFLC Regional Strategy Committees, 4) serve as a forum for information exchange and dialogue, and 5) capture issues and opportunities for current and future WFLC consideration.

ATTENDEES:

Council Members or Alternates: Homer Wilkes (USDA), Meryl Harrell (USDA), Joan Mooney (DOI), Randy Moore (FS), Laura McCarthy (NGA), George Geissler (NASF), Jennifer Flynn (NPS), Paul Steblein (USGS), Tracy Stone Manning (BLM), Ed Christopher (FWS), Johnna Blackhair (BIA), Laurie Moore-Merrill (USFA), Vernon Stearns (ITC), Rich Elliott (IAFC), Mike Zupko (WFLC Executive Director)

Numerous guests, partners, and support staff were in attendance and on Zoom as well. Full list available from WFLC staff upon request.

MEETING SUMMARY

OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTIONS

- USDA Deputy Undersecretary Meryl Harrell, DOI Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Joan Mooney and WFLC Executive Director Mike Zupko welcomed participants to the meeting and provided remarks reflecting on the urgency and importance of wildland fire leadership and coordination, and opportunities afforded the system as a result of passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- Meeting attendees in the room and participating virtually introduced themselves.

AGENDA REVIEW AND ADMINISTRATION

- WFLC Executive Director Mike Zupko reviewed the meeting agenda, intentions, and goals.
- Minutes from the March 28-29, 2022 Meeting in Spokane Valley, Washington were unanimously approved.

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AND DATA ACROSS THE WILDLAND FIRE SYSTEM

Objective: To gain an understanding of individual and joint leadership needs and uses of data and systems. To understand the current structures for acquisition, coordination and governance of data. To look at future needs and opportunities to enhance how data is coordinated across wildland fire and land management organizations including connections and feedback with research and non-governmental organizations, including industry.

Nichole LaRosa (FEMA) and Paul Steblein (USGS) facilitated discussion on the primary questions, goals, and uses associated with data that leadership are trying to answer. They focused particularly on cultivating understanding about where data from the built environment fits and how we more broadly cross-pollinate internal data with external data (i.e. the data we generate versus the data generated by other agencies and organizations).

Steven Manthei gave a presentation focused on current structures, with particular focus on Wildland Fire Information and Technology (WFIT). ATTACHMENT I.

Kate Dargan Marquis and Sean Triplett gave a presentation on data and information sharing, focusing on the need for integrated, interoperable, multiagency intelligence centers to enhance wildland fire operations. ATTACHMENT II.

Outcomes:

- Gain a broader collective understanding of current systems in place and build a joint vision for the future integration of data across the wildland fire community and for use by government officials in planning and management decision processes.
- Identify a pathway to incorporate data from the built environment with land and wildfire data.
- Identify opportunities and recommendations for the Wildfire Management and Mitigation Commission
- Develop a shared vision for prioritization of data and decision making across the wildland fire community.

Action Items:

- Work towards identification of opportunities to jointly align and utilize data.
- Develop a technology and data integration team to work on:
 - Recommendations for the Commission and other wildland fire coordinating entities' consideration.
 - Recommendations for data utilization that enable WFLC to more strategically engage in implementation of dynamic communications.

- Coordinate interest among agencies and external organizations around data and technology.
- Clearly define gaps and needs in connecting land management data governance and built environment as well as private sector partners.

WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM COORDINATION (WLFC / INTERAGENCY WILDFIRE RESILIENCE WORKING GROUP / WILDFIRE MITIGATION AND MANAGEMENT COMMISSION)

Objective: To build awareness and understand of the interrelationship of the three national bodies to support issues around land management and wildland fire. To jointly integrate the strategic priorities and programs of work near-term. To leverage the intent of each of the organizational structures and associated missions.

Jenna Knobloch and Mike Zupko presented and facilitated a discussion on the major coordination entities engaged in the Wildland Fire Management System, noting that part of the system including the Commission, are still coming together and it is anticipated that these should be operational by late summer/early fall. Participants emphasized the importance of working towards coordination of recommendations and messaging so that all three entities relay consistent content to decision makers and avoid contradicting one another. Additionally, a Cohesive Strategy refresh will present WFLC with opportunities to emphasize important issues such as local government’s relevance to community resilience, the need for data alignment and integrity, the relevance of drought and climate change to understanding wildland fire dynamics, and the necessity of including social science elements. ATTACHMENT III.

Action Items:

- Zupko to actively engage with the Commission and Interagency Working Group, particularly to inform and enhance coordination and messaging alignment across national level wildland fire management system entities.

IMPROVING WORKPLACE AND WORKFORCE ISSUES

Objective: To understand current status of federal implementation around workforce enhancement opportunities stemming from IIJA. To collectively explore the many facets of workforce challenges. To prioritize a subset of changes to further engage across all of government. To explore models and successfully implement share structures that can be further expanded.

Jaelith Hall-Rivera and Jeff Rupert presented and facilitated a session focused on workforce issues, emphasizing the importance of developing long term, durable solutions for wildland firefighter pay and recruiting from nontraditional groups.

Outcomes:

- Shared understanding of what is collectively considered under the broad topic of workforce.

- Understand models for leveraging all levels of government in building shared teams/systems and/or joint positions to most effectively implement actions.
- Reduced competition of similar skillsets across all of government (jointly prioritize needs and overall implementation goals).

Action Items:

- Capture known (short-term and longer-term) workforce needs across the WFLC membership (e.g. firefighter, mitigation, prevention, prescribed fire etc) and explore a joint approach across all government entities at all elvels.
- Examine short-term solutions in which multi-disciplinary teams that pull from more places across agencies (beyond forestry – USGS for example) can be constituted and deployed. This can be more than for suppression, but also for community outreach, education, NEPA, and resilience work.
- Explore how people could be inspired to come in and serve – ‘fight the climate change problem’ – ‘serve your country.’ How do we better market our collective job set?
- Address challenges associated with Tribal firefighters fighting fire as quasi federal individuals not having pay supplements that fully federal firefighters will receive.
- Build out better transition plans for those shifting from military, high school, Amercorps, incarceration, etc.
- Articulate what is meant by workforce and the needs in the wildfire space as part of a Cohesive Strategy refresh.
- Better define and explain the affordable housing crisis within the wildland fire system and look to jointly develop solutions across the WFLC membership including public private partnerships.

SMOKE MANAGEMENT AND AIR QUALITY

Objective: To collectively identify methods to minimize air quality impacts from wildland fire over the long-term while improving the resiliency of landscapes to wildfire, to protect the health and increase the safety of communities, firefighters and the public by using fire as a land management tool and to build the concept of preparing communities for smoke.

Pete Lamb and Mike Zupko presented on the state of smoke policy and facilitated discussion on smoke management and air quality. Emphasis was made that entities like local government and the Centers for Disease Control can be helpful in communicating about smoke and the benefits of prescribed fire, and that partnerships between the wildland fire community and these entities is critical. ATTACHMENT IV.

Outcomes:

- Increase the understanding of the short-term regulatory outlook (especially NAAQS) and other rules that intersect with wildland fire and fuels management.
- Identify opportunities for improving regulatory approaches to wildland fire smoke.
- Expand upon joint and consistent messaging opportunities across agencies and organizations to minimize the impact of smoke from wildland fires and prepare communities for smoke.

- Improve education and awareness of public health agencies regarding smoke and the benefits of resilient landscapes.
- Expand awareness and engagement around the “smoke ready communities” concept to address smoke exposure to communities.

Action Items:

- Identify engagement points for WFLC around the development of public policy that impacts the ability to use fire proactively while minimizing the impacts of smoke to communities.
- Create a team (after the western wildfire season) to build out “smoke ready communities” concept at both the national level development of programs and also the local level to help connect resources with needs.
- Work with CDC, NLC and NACo to expand relationships with local public health agencies.
- Work with the IWG to jointly address smoke related interests.

ADDITIONAL WFLC POLICY PRIORITIES – STATUS UPDATE

Mitigating Post Fire Impacts:

Laura McCarthy (NM State Forestry) provided an update on the wildland fire situation in NM, remarking on the rough fire season that have already experienced. More information may be available at a later date – they remain in the middle of the situation currently.

Meeting participants commented that putting together post fire funds coherently remains a challenge, and that ‘navigators’ could be a valuable tool for assisting communities in accessing and putting money to use on the ground in areas that have experienced severe wildland fires. It was also remarked that liaison officers are being deployed in new ways i.e. being left in place in communities to assist in accessing resources. Finally, better mapping resources was noted as an additional need to enable improved assistance to communities impacted by wildland fire.

Action Items:

- Get a read-out of the wildland fire situation in NM, including a summary of lessons learned, at the next WFLC meeting (targeted as a field meeting in NM).
- Include discussion of resources for communities impacted by wildland fire at a next WFLC meeting.
- Build out a roadmap of best practices, resources, and models for post fire communities.

PUBLIC COMMENTS No public comments provided.

NEXT STEPS AND MEETING CLOSE OUT

Meryl Harrell, Joan Mooney, and Mike Zupko indicated that a next WFLC meeting will be convened most likely in September, with focus on post fire, the Cohesive Strategy refresh, member round robin, and other high priority topics. They thanked attendees for their participation and closed the meeting.