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**Wildland Fire Leadership Council Meeting**  
**September 8, 2022, 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Mountain Time**  
**Santa Fe, New Mexico**

*Tesuque Casino Council Ballroom, 7 Tesuque Rd, Santa Fe, NM 87506*

## **Meeting Minutes**

**MEETING INTENT AND GOALS:** To view, understand and build from on-the-ground successes that support WFLC priorities and the goals of the Cohesive Strategy; to discuss leaders' intent and build strategic opportunities to encourage additional successes; to further the WFLC policy priorities; and to give strategic direction to the Regional WFLC Committees, workgroups and agency and organizational leadership.

### **ATTENDEES:**

**Council Members or Alternates:** Meryl Harrell (USDA), Joan Mooney (DOI), Laura McCarthy (NGA), George Geissler (NASF), Jennifer Flynn (NPS), Mike Zupko (WFLC Executive Director), Cynthia Martinez (FWS), Erik Litzenberg (IAFC), Anne Kinsinger (USGS), Vernon Stearns (ITC), Brett Lacey (NLC), Meagan Conry (BLM), Erik Svendson (CDC), Vera Kornylak (EPA), Jonah Seifer (WGA), Matt Kingsley (NaCO), Ryan Orndorf (DOD), Nicole LaRosa (FEMA-USFA), Johnna Blackhair (BIA), Jaelith Hall-Rivera (USDA FS), RSC representatives, senior staff and other interested participants were also in attendance.

### **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 about the meeting intent including the importance of discussing post-fire recovery.
- Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

#### **WELCOME AND LOCAL OVERVIEW**

- New Mexico State Forester Laura McCarthy welcomed participants and discussed the fire impacts on dispersed rural communities, particularly tribal communities.
- Erik Litzenberg discussed the fire history of the region and the significant impacts that accompany those fires.

## **AGENDA REVIEW AND ADMINISTRATION**

- WFLC Executive Director Mike Zupko reviewed the meeting agenda, intentions, and goals.
- Minutes from the June 13, 2022 Meeting in Washington DC were unanimously approved.

## **TOUR REFLECTIONS AND TAKE-AWAYS**

Council Members discussed the field tour which occurred the day prior. Participants visited the Cochiti Mesa Overlook to learn the fire history of the Jemez Mountains, the Sierra Los Pinos Volunteer Fire Department for a dialogue on initial attack, private land challenges, downstream impacts and mitigation work, the site of the Southwest Jemez Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project Treatments, the locations of the Cerro Pelado (2022) and Las Conchas (2011) fires, the NPS Valles Caldera National Preserve to view the Banco Bonito thinning project, Los Alamos for a listening session on local learning from the past 20 years of challenging wildfires (Cerro Grande, 2000), and the Santa Clara Pueblo. The final stop on the tour highlighted repeated post fire impacts through the decades, including approaches to overcome obstacles faced, and learning from tribal ancestors.

Members reflected on the tribal message from the tour and highlighted the importance of consideration of trust obligations when partnering with tribes. They noted the need to consider tribal values, in addition to other values-at-risk, when decision-making around fire. Better methods of integrating traditional ecological knowledge with hard sciences and data are needed. The collective goal is to address this very serious fire deficit while navigating the complex social interactions that accompany it.

## **LARGE-SCALE LANDSCAPE IMPACTS, CHALLENGES AND NEEDS (*local insight to recent fires, including mitigation of post fire impacts*)**

### **Objectives:**

- To understand challenges from current fire year wildfires and impacts to landscapes and communities
- To understand challenges faced by local communities with both response and post fire response and recovery
- To consider gaps and needs at the community level
- To build a collective understanding of needs to efficiently implement the full suite of post fire programs offered across federal agencies

Collin Haffey, (Forest and Watershed Health Coordinator (NMFD)) facilitated a panel discussion with Sheriff Chris Lopez (San Miguel County), Veronica Serna (Mora County Commissioner), Paula Garcia (NM Acequia Association), Phoebe Suina (High-Water Mark and Cochiti Pueblo), and James Duran (Carson National Forest Supervisor and Acting Santa Fe National Forest Supervisor ). They provided their perspectives on the more recent New Mexico fires and the growing trend of high severity fire activity, highlighting the challenges of post-fire impacts, particularly for watersheds. The level of increased capacity, coordination, and technology present during fire response is not there for post-fire. This capacity gap is particularly problematic for

rural and lower income communities. Local entities and community members are left to navigate multiple funding sources and processes in order to cover the costs of mitigating post-fire risks to communities. Commissioner Serna highlighted the difficulty of accomplishing this mitigation preparation in the face of public perception that post-fire flooding would not be possible in drought conditions. The panel highlighted the value of all of the public servants who work incredibly hard to keep communities safe in the face of numerous obstacles.

## SLIDE ATTACHMENTS I

### Outcomes:

- Shared understanding of the challenges faced in the current fire year during the wildfires both from a response and community level.
- Shared understanding of the challenges, both immediate and long-term, related to post fire impacts across the landscape and with water management systems.
- Identification of key challenges and opportunities to better support communities both during and after a wildfire.
  - Federal restrictions that may not reflect the realities of the local community, such as not being able to obtain FEMA assistance due to a house being passed between generations without the formal ownership paperwork.
  - Assistance that occurs via reimbursement rather than providing the funding upfront does not work for lower income communities and leads to unmet needs and potential further impacts.
  - Cost share challenges
  - Lack of ability to use the fire team resources for the post-fire flood aspects
  - Challenges doing work across boundaries
- Joint strategies to efficiently implement post fire mitigation both before and after wildfires.
  - Long Term Recovery Group concept and/or repurposing fire teams
  - Overarching framework for federal agencies
  - Evaluate immediate and systemic issues versus longer-term challenges to overcome
  - Local coordinator to help navigate through programs
  - Clear guidance for decision-making roles
  - Working boundaryless, similar to how fire response works with MOUs etc.

### Action Items:

- Seek solutions to assist communities in the capacity needed post-fire. Including:
  - Coordination and human capacity
  - Assistance in navigating funding opportunities
  - Transportation and human services
  - Exploring ways to better align programs with the needs of communities.
  - Build out structure or post fire response and pass off
- Zupko will review the needs and some of the strategies provided and put those forward to the group for consideration, including reviewing those captured in P. Garcia's slides. Specifically reference the list of ideas within Paula's presentation and the roadmap /navigator concepts.

## PROACTIVE ROLE OF FIRE ON THE LANDSCAPE

### Objectives:

- To understand the role fire has and will play across the landscapes of the west and nationally
- To understand community concerns and perspectives around the use of fire as a management tool
- To understand the differences in approach and ability to utilize fire across the landscape proactively, including social and political license
- To explore opportunities to further utilize fire at scale, to restore landscapes to a more natural condition and reduce overall wildfire risk while enhancing ecological function.

Jaelith Hall-Rivera (USFS) began the session by announcing that the USDA Forest Service was [releasing the report](#) that resulted from the 90 day pause on prescribed fire that today. The National Prescribed Fire Program Review can be viewed [here](#). She noted the inherent risk in this work but the need for this tool on the landscape.

New Mexico State Forester Laura McCarthy facilitated this panel lead discussion with speakers Mike Martinez, Tesuque Pueblo (Natural Resource Dept.), Alan Hook (City of Santa Fe Watershed Program), Gwen Kolb (NM State Coordinator, FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife), Anna Hansen (Santa Fe County Commission Board Member), Dana Skelly (acting Deputy Director, FAM WO).

### SLIDE ATTACHMENTS II

### Outcomes:

- Shared understanding of the various perspectives and sensitivities land managers need to consider when developing management decisions.
- Identify various legal, political and social license that may/may not be available with utilizing fire in different circles and geographies.
- Identify policies, procedures and protocols that can be addressed to consider new stressors and inputs in how proactive fire on the landscape is approached.
- Identify opportunities to use different tools, traditional ecological knowledge, approaches, and systems in decision-making for when and where fire as a management tool may be available and applicable.

### Action Items:

- Explore methods to better assist private landowners in accomplishing fuels reduction work through use of proactive fire (63% in NM)
- Develop a WFLC communications strategy on building social understanding and social license around the need for increased use of proactive fire.
- Consider what an all-government (federal, state, tribal and local) long term review and strategy would look like to map out the intersection and gaps surrounding use of proactive fire. Opportunity to pull from CS Refresh once finalized as a starting point.

## ENHANCING SMOKE MANAGEMENT AND AIR QUALITY

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

Mike Zupko and Jim Karels facilitated a dialogue with Pete Lahm (USDA Forest Service), Vera Kornylak (Environmental Protection Agency), Erik Svendsen (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and Doug Grafe (Office of the Governor, State of Oregon) on smoke management and air quality. In looking at the firesheds and priority landscapes, there is a lot of intersection with the new standard. This doesn't mean there is not the ability to burn in these places, but there will be significant coordination and work to be done. It was noted that while the northeast and south are experiencing air quality improvement, the West are increasing which is driving the overall increase seen nationally due to the levels. Three key elements highlighted were data, coordination with additional partners, and public acceptance.

Erik Svendsen outlined the Health Impact Assessment Project which can show the impact of certain activities on the landscape on health of communities. Erik highlighted the availability of a wildfire smoke guide for public health officials through CDC.

Doug Grafe noted the need to address this problem at scale, but the challenge of doing so in light of these hurdles and restrictions. Living with fire inherently means living with smoke.

### SLIDE ATTACHMENTS III

#### Outcomes:

- Increase the understanding of the regulatory outlook (e.g., NAAQS) and other rules that may conflict with wildland fire and addressing fuels considering expectations in Infrastructure funding, the Inflation Reduction Act, FS 10-year strategy, DOI 5-year
- Expand upon joint messaging opportunities across agencies and organizations to minimize the impact of smoke from wildland fires and prepare communities for smoke.
- Identify tools, grant programs and other investment opportunities for use at the local level.

#### Action Items:

- Examine policy changes needed to incentivize rx fire while considering health impacts. (Note that OR willing to be a pilot state for trying something new in smoke management outside existing regulatory barriers)
  - Utilizing study on prescribed fire smoke versus wildfire smoke
- Identify barriers- social or policy-wise for potential WFLC engagement.
  - What are the things we can do to think about what it is going to take to reach the goal of scaling up? Better guidelines?
  - Consider a team to craft recommended policy changes?

- Reconvene the WFLC Smoke Communications working group to develop next steps for the Joint Vision Document with CDC and EPA and enhance a communications strategy to create greater public acceptance.
- Bring social scientists to the conversations (e.g. share resources from USFS and CSU on Rx fire through WFLC)
- Build stronger relationships with public health officials at the local level. CDC to help facilitate.
- Report back on question of whether landscape and ecological factors go into the determination of standards. These standards are set with an adequate margin of safety for the most vulnerable
- Assess a potential best practice regulatory pathway on a national scale in advance that recognizes better health outcomes from prescribed fire instead of catastrophic wildfire (Rather than making assessments after the fact per monitored exceedance,).
- Provide notification on the promulgation of a final NAAQS standard and highlight opportunities to provide feedback during proposal stages.

## WFLC MEMBER ROUND ROBIN

Vernon Stearns (ITC) mentioned the following updates: ITC President and Bill Tripp have been selected for the Wildfire Commission; Hiring workforce coordinator to assist in building capacity; tribal forestry student summit in October; IFMAT report underway- congressionally mandated every 10 years- state of forestry throughout Indian Country; 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Timber Symposium in June 2023; ITC continues to inform and enhance TFPA efforts; and OWF partnership to assess capacity

Meagan Conry (BLM) mentioned the agency received up to \$2M annually to support TFPA work, as well as the work with USFS and ITC and overlaying risk assessment maps to identify opportunities. BLM has entered into formal relationship to look at large-scale restoration to drive landscapes towards more resilient conditions- priority with mitigating invasive grasses. They are looking at how to build capacity to achieve prescribed fire and other landscape restoration efforts. They are transforming BLM fire workforce to more permanent positions which will serve to also assist build longer term relationships in communities.

Anne Kinsinger (USGS) referenced USGS climate adaptation science centers which may have the potential to increase relationship with WFLC. She referenced a partnership with UC San Diego to look at advanced modeling- fire and atmospheric behavior models to be more attuned to local conditions and future conditions of climate change (for planned and unplanned ignition). **There is a desire to present to WFLC when it is a bit more mature.** USGS delivered landslides hazard assessments at request of BAER teams.

Jaelith Hall-Rivera (USDA FS) discussed implementation of BIL/IRA and focusing on 10-year wildfire strategy. There is funding in BIL to increase firefighter salaries for a few years but more needs to be done to maintain workforce so they are working on a permanent solution around pay. She highlighted partnering with DOI on mental health programs for FFs (e.g. counselors who have first responder work experience). **This has the potential for a future WFLC discussion on caring for our workforce.** She noted it is helpful to know what the challenges are across the

entire wildland fire system as they are looking at housing challenges for workforce in the places they are needed most. Looking at potential public/private solutions.

Matt Kingsley (NaCO) discussed golden state natural resources obtaining a 20-year resource agreement to work on building pellet facilities to take pellets and ship them to Japan and Europe as there is huge demand for that as they are switching from nuclear to pellets.

Ryan Orndorf (DOD) highlighted the publishing of their climate adaptation plan which has a 30-year horizon. Wildland fire is in the top 3 of their global assessment for exposure to different hazards. They have hired DOD's first wildland fire program manager. They are working to bring their people up to NWCG standards so they can participate on wildland fires.

Johnna Blackhair (BIA) is making sure upholding trust responsibilities, treaty obligations, and fiduciary aspects. They are assisting in providing those deliverables and success stories. Similar to other who have voiced capacity concerns they have workforce development and training initiatives ongoing. BIA, DOD and DHS are working together in a partnership to try to provide technical support.

Jennifer Flynn (NPS) **expressed interest in a robust conversation about mental health for firefighter.** Highlighted Yosemite NP example in how we talk about success- not just acres but outcomes like stopping the rapid progression of the fire through the grove due to work done thought it may have come off as insignificant by any metric. Desire for a common language across agencies about managed fire/prescribed fire/fire for resource benefit in order to talk to the public consistent across agencies.

George Geissler (NASF) discussed engagement with DOI and USFS partners on BIL and now IRA. Referenced wildland fire agreements and authorities that we have and better utilizing them to move resources more easily (Stafford act- personnel, equipment, and aviation) and expressed a hope to be able to see the holes in the system and assess changes. In relation to prescribed fire one barrier worth discussion is liability insurance. An analysis of options available and what policy change is needed or other recommendations for what could improve this area to overcome this barrier are being explored currently.

Cynthia Martinez (FWS) also mentioned the importance of the mental health conversation. She expressed need to work across jurisdictional boundaries for post-recovery efforts and to look downstream for impacts. She discussed the usefulness of uniform monitoring so there can be comparisons across agencies.

Erik Litzenberg (IAFC) discussed the qual and employment systems that are utilized barely tap into local resources on that national scale and that there may be better ways to ramp up that participation, such as making it more robust and usable for other needs, and NWCG accepting prior learning. IAFC is trying to complete a guide for implementing RPL. They have lots of learning and case scenarios on mental health, They have a new project, the WUI fire chiefs mentorship program and there is a cadre mentoring FDs right now. WUI Conference is upcoming.

Erik Svendson (CDC) discussed the study in coordination with DOI and USFS in current fire season on wildland fire health impacts, both mental and physical, as part of BIL. It includes a study on short term effects and systemic effects beyond lung and the unique exposures of WUI fires. A recent announcement from WHO- IARC- looking at exposure to smoke within firefighter communities and classifying it as carcinogenic. CDC has an environmental justice dashboard available for the public in their environmental tracking program. They are working on water access issues; specifically a \$6M foundation program working on water access in AK native communities.

Jeff Rupert (DOI) highlighted several initiatives and issues common to other members, including the new firefighter series, capacity, mental health, and the NIOSH study of occupational risk, which was noted as a great collaboration in expanding that to mental health. He mentioned the geospatial portal with USFS and NASF using 28 state data streams that are out there that was part of the pilot project in WA, NV, and TX.

Wildland Fire Commission update: Annie Schmidt and Tyson Bertone-Riggs who are providing staff support to the Wildland Fire Commission within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided an update to the group about the Commission. Governance and recommendation order will be worked on next week at the first meeting in SLC. This is a complementary effort to WFLC and it is a short-term initiative over one year. They will attend future meetings for updates.

## **COHESIVE STRATEGY REFRESH**

Objective: To present the draft Addendum Update as compiled by the CS Refresh Task Force as an update and enhancement of the 2014 National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

Mike Zupko and Katie Lighthall presented the intent of the Cohesive Strategy Refresh to WFLC membership. The document is intended to work in conjunction with the original but look at the changes over the last 10 years that deserve discussion, such as increased impact of climate change. The Commission has been instructed by the legislation to review the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy and make recommendations. Providing a draft to the relevant workgroup would be an effective place to start with a transmittal letter outlining policy recommendations to come later.

## **ATTACHMENT IV**

### Outcomes:

- Approval in principle by the WFLC membership to be utilized as a companion document and addendum to the 2014 document.
- Transmittal to the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission for their utility in their review of the Cohesive Strategy.
- Capture potential recommendations from WFLC to the Commission of opportunities stemming from the CS Refresh Task Force deliberations.

### Action Items:



- Cohesive Strategy Refresh will be sent out for approval in principle to share with Commission as soon as possible with the intent for final approval in October.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Jonathan Bruno from Coalitions and Collaboratives, Inc. urged WFLC to reengage in the conversation on post-fire navigators and roadmap to help communities know what to do in the aftermath of wildfires.

Kristie Mackzo from Sustainable Rangelands Roundtable discussed a recent forum they hosted on the nexus of prescribed fire across rangelands. She noted Zupko participated to discuss the joint work of NISC and WFLC and the larger opportunities for further collaboration between WFLC and SRR.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

Meryl Harrell, Joan Mooney, and Mike Zupko indicated that the next WFLC meeting will be convened most likely in early December (November 29 in Washington DC) with a virtual option likely available. They thanked attendees for their participation and closed the meeting.