



WILDLAND FIRE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Wildland Fire Leadership Council Meeting - Hybrid

June 24th, 2024, 10:00 am – 4:15 pm

Department of the Interior

1849 C St. NW (*C street entrance*)

Washington, DC, Room 5160

Meeting Goals

To leverage WFLC strategic priorities for joint understanding and action across the wildland fire community; to further explore key issues impacting the ability to create resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities and safe and effective wildland fire response; to support WFLC priorities and facilitation of implementation of the Cohesive Strategy; to discuss leaders' intent and develop opportunities to encourage additional successes; to determine how to advance progress around the WFLC priorities; and to give strategic direction to the Regions, agency and organizational leadership.

Attendees

Council Members or Alternates: Meryl Harrell (USDA, Co-Chair), Joan Mooney (DOI, Co-Chair), Jeff Marsolais (USFS), George Geissler (NASF), Rick Elliot (IAFC), David Applegate (USGS), Trina Locke (BIA), Ron Tickle (DoD), Anne Jewell (DoD), Mike Nedd (BLM) Cynthia Martinez (FWS), Laura McCarthy (NGA), Chris Wilcox (NPS), Erik Svendsen (CDC), Faith Berry (US Fire Administration), Kate Lighthall, Erika Sasser (EPA), Pete Lahm (USFS), Matt Kingsley (NACo), Brett Lacey (NLC), Eric Letvin (FEMA), Ara Andrea (WGA), Cody Desautel (ITC), Robert Bonnie (USDA-FPAC), Mike Zupko (WFLC Executive Director)

RSC representatives, senior staff, discussion leads/presenters and other interested participants were also in attendance.

Opening Remarks and Introductions

- Joan Mooney (DOI) welcomed attendees to WFLC meeting and covered recent events regarding this wildfire season.
- Meryl Harrell (USDA) emphasized the devastation of the wildfires in New Mexico and discussed how important the WFLC work is for mitigating risks and providing long-term recovery.
- Attendees introduced themselves both in-person and online.
- Mike Zupko reviewed the meeting agenda, intentions, and goals.
- The minutes from the March 5, 2024, WFLC Meeting were **unanimously approved**.



WFLC Priorities

I. Enhancing and Integrating Science, Data and Technology

(Dave Applegate offered opening remarks)

Topics:

- Overview high level workshop findings from June 4-5 (Zupko, Paul Steblein, Jens Stevens, Kris Ludwig)
- Deep dive into top tier gaps and opportunities identified by participants (Stevens, Steblein)
- Begin developing WFLC process for identifying gaps short-term (Zupko, Steblein, Stevens)
- Next steps for coordination and potential engagement points stemming from workshop (Zupko, Steblein, Ludwig)

Notes:

- WFLC members were provided with a report out and presentation (**ATTACHMENT I**) of the recent SDT workshop held in Fort Collins, CO June 4-5. 29 top tier recommendations were identified and elevated by participants. These top tier recommendations aligned with WFLC-identified gaps and priorities (**ATTACHMENT II**).
- Problem statement used to guide the SDT workshop: “Science, data, and technology (SDT) have not kept pace with the extent of wildland fire and postfire impacts or been fully integrated into decision making for fire, land, and community managers.”
- The group recognized that there was a gap in representation at the workshop and discussed how collaboration with local communities is crucial in this decision-making space and is currently lacking.
- The group emphasized interagency collaboration and coordination, specifically with the importance of data and priority sharing.
- The “top tier” of 29 recommendations from the Science and Technology Policy Institute (STPI) draft report was elevated by workshop participants as priorities to be considered for advancement by WFLC. WFLC members commented on the potential for short-term, high-impact actions under WFLC’s leadership.

Discussion around SDT Workshop:

- The members brought up that putting together a burn plan is very difficult at the local government level. Putting together a step-by-step guide for prescribed fire and other mitigation tools could help streamline things at a local level, and points to the need to scale SDT applications to the local level. This is aligned with WFLC’s All-Lands Framework efforts.



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- The SDT workshop demonstrated the strong desire for interagency coordination and collaboration. The Workshop Planning Committee is functioning as an ad hoc work group to develop the report.
- WFLC members discussed the idea of a neutral agency structure, or a sort of “third party” that sits outside any particular institution (e.g. WFLC).
- The group emphasized the lack of a roadmap for governance. Members proposed a commitment for planned governance to close the gaps and emphasized the need to find a set of shared values as they come together.
 - Remaining questions include: What makes a good governance structure? What timelines are possible without the necessary governance structure? Are there opportunities to examine other interagency coordination efforts?
 - WFLC members suggested exploring other natural hazard interagency coordination efforts to gather information on what is working well, and opportunities to build on successful foundations.
 - Kris Ludwig (OSTP) offered to use the Science and Technology Policy Institute (STPI) as a resource to review other models of governance structures and develop a report for WFLC.
- The point of “doing things differently, better, together” was brought up within this session. The WFLC members reiterated the importance of determining actual next steps to get to the longer-term destination using the tools, authority, and technology WFLC has right now, with a SDT lens and an interagency focus.
- The group discussed the struggle of figuring out who to coordinate with on the federal level. They specifically mentioned the lack of capacity in smaller counties to be able to find the assistance they need, and the potential of utilizing technology for real time updates.

Next Steps:

1. Interagency governance, coordination and communication are a crucial need, with the current steering committee continuing to serve as an important piece of that. The core team with input from STPI will produce a suite of options on both what a structure(s) may look like to serve in the coordination role as well as a proposal on an action plan to move it forward (e.g. timeline, capacity needs etc.).
2. The core team will produce a methodology that will allow WFLC members to determine the top priorities from the 29 recommendations to invest time and resources moving forward in the short-term.
3. As the group moves forward with the recommendations, finding places to prioritize and getting leadership into the spaces needed is important.
4. Evaluating what type of capacity and resource needs WFLC will have in the future and how to reach the capacity needed will accompany both the interagency coordination proposal and the recommendations proposal.



II. Increasing Proactive Use of Fire – Resource Sharing

Topics:

- Confirmation of leaders' intent and individual member execution (George Geissler)
- WFLC coordination of proposal going forward (Geissler, Zupko)
- Socializing across WFLC agencies and organizations and strategy to engage additional partners (All)

Notes:

- The final draft of the “Scaling up size and pace – Enabling cross-boundary support for utilization of prescribed fire through improved and increased resource sharing” (**ATTACHMENT III**) was presented and discussed.
- Discussion on how WFLC needs to hold itself accountable for making meaningful change.
- The group discussed how “fair is not equal” and shared thoughts on ways to move forward without placing more burden on firefighters' shoulders. The framework is not about demanding a mandatory response, but rather how can we act in a better way and utilize different tools some agencies may have.

DECISION: Meryl Harrell called the question to move forward with the “white paper” document. **The decision to move forward was unanimous.**

Next Steps:

1. Mike Zupko and George Geissler will refine the appendix/action plan and adjust dates as needed.
2. WFLC will develop a communications strategy for how the white paper will go out that aligns with the various departments and agencies, including early outreach to the fire directors.
3. Various SME's which need to be involved in this conversation will get pulled in.

III. Recognizing and Expanding Cultural Burning

Topics:

- Overview of differences between cultural burning and prescribed fire including discussion around co-stewardship (Cody Desautel)
- DOI and Forest Service overview of current programmatic assistance to move cultural burning forward (Alicia Bell-Sheetter and Mark Jackson)
- Introduce intent for scan of existing vehicles for increasing cultural burning and prescribed fire across the landscape – target Fall WFLC (Zupko, Harrell)
- Plan for next step / WFLC identified engagement



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Notes:

- An overview presentation (**ATTACHMENT IV**) of cultural burning was provided to WFLC members. It was emphasized that practices of cultural burning are diverse and vary from tribe to tribe, and individual tribes may feel differently about collaborating with outside entities. Additionally, the presentation touched on how cultural fire practitioners do not wear PPE, create burn plans, or follow modern burn protocols. Policy language that makes these things mandatory is dismissive of tribal sovereignty and does not respect Indigenous Knowledge.

Question posed to WFLC members:

- There are challenges that range from the legal or policy realm to the cultural role within agencies and organizations, what is WFLC's role in this space?

Dialogue:

- The group discussed how to implement tribal fire whilst protecting those on the ground. This conversation involved personal protection measures like providing fire-proof cloth that tribes could incorporate into traditional regalia. The idea of having tribes burn under a "burn boss" came up, which could aid tribes with resources and liability. While agencies want to support tribal sovereignty within cultural burning practices, is there a way to protect the safety of cultural practitioners?
- The group discussed the differences between prescribed burning and cultural burning, and they identified key distinctions of cultural burning. Additionally, the members discussed the challenges to the success of co-stewardship cultural burning, including legal issues, lack of capacity (within both tribal and agency circles), lack of institutional knowledge, and regulatory concerns.
- The members discussed the importance of communication and giving the public the knowledge they need around cultural burning, specifically at the local level. A key question remained: How does WFLC educate the public on cultural burning, while still respecting the sanctity of these practices?
- Co-management is the ultimate goal, and it allows tribes to achieve their objectives and fully exercise their sovereignty. The members discussed moving from co-stewardship practices towards co-management with tribes. Finally, the group emphasized the importance of building relationships as a path to greater understanding.

Next Steps:

- WFLC members need to identify opportunities to learn from pathways that already exist.
- Consideration of a convening that could be of use to this issue in the near future.
- Evaluate and roll up existing communication and education materials and consider how to best collectively utilize the information.



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- Identify who will lead a scan of the existing vehicles of best practices in this space for presentation at the October WFLC meeting.
- Resource/capacity leads will also need to be identified.

IV. Enhancing Smoke Management and Air Quality (45-60 minutes)

Topics:

- University of Oregon research update and smoke messaging next steps/leaders' input (Heidi Huber-Stearns)
- Introduction to American Lung Association and opt to work together on messaging and education (ATTACHMENT) (Natalia Reyes Becerra)
- Follow up from March WFLC Meeting – EPA and CDC engagement opportunities (ATTACHMENT - 3 actions identified) (Sasser, Zupko)
- Engagement and facilitation around PM 2.5 and EER use (data, education, coordination) (Zupko, Pete Lahm)
- Expanding partnerships (Zupko, All)

Notes:

- University of Oregon presented on barriers to prescribed fire, including how the public perceives prescribed fire (**ATTACHMENT V**)..
- Tabletop exercises on the state level regarding prescribed fire helps build relationships and trust surrounding prescribed burns. WFLC members conversed about community safety and communication with locals during prescribed burns. The Bend, OR tabletop excelled because of communication with locals and awareness of communication needs. However, questions arose about the sustainability of replicating a situation like the one in Bend, as it required many resources and a capacity that few communities could produce.
- How can members work to ensure that WFLC is building capacity for incident management and interacting with the public where they can?
- The American Lung Association discussed how they view fire in the larger context of climate change as a public health emergency. (**ATTACHMENT VI**)
- EPA revisits the three main themes/next steps that came out of the March meeting (**ATTACHMENT VII**):
 1. Defining expressed joint leaders' intent around prescribed burning is necessary, so that the resources needed can be mobilized ahead of time and priority areas can be determined.
 2. The need to begin mapping and building some of the communication and data systems to gather the information that is critical in the smoke air quality space.
 3. Building trust with CDC, EPA and local public health agencies is needed to better approach the issue from the local level.



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Next Steps:

- Zupko and Sasser will build out engagement steps for the 3 main themes into an action plan including resource/capacity needs.
- Consider how to sketch the relationships in the pace to understand current and missing relationships. Work with the University of Oregon if relevant to their current body of work.

V. Additional WFLC Activities tied to Strategic Priorities – updates

Notes:

- Post-fire MOU
 - Almost finalized, and implementation will be occurring soon.
 - Decisions about who will need to be sitting on the newly formed IPC are forthcoming.
- Joint work on invasives + fire with National Invasive Species Council (ATTACHMENT VIII) - Stas Burgei discussed the joint work between WFLC and NISC and the opportunity to be both reactive and provide information and joint input as requested, but also be proactive in producing useful input that agencies and partners can utilize in planning and budgeting processes. The members emphasized creating a common framework or vision which lays out a set of issues across invasive species and wildland fire for agencies who perhaps aren't engaging but could.
- All Lands Wildfire Resilience Framework – Zupko briefed the group on current status of the work. The playbook is a strong working draft but has reached a point where the steering committee is no longer able to move it forward. Zupko and Lighthall have been working to securing funding that would allow an organization or contractor to come on board to finalize the playbook, communicate it out to partners for utility and begin development of a pilot for utilizing the framework across multiple landscapes.
- WFLC MOU
 - A DOI/USDA interim version of the WFLC MOU should be signed within the coming days. This will allow more time for valuable conversations around a longer-term MOU with more signatories.
- Future WFLC meetings:
 - Week of October 14th in Flagstaff, AZ- This will be a combined meeting with WFLC's national and western regions. The Monday of this week is a holiday, hoping folks can travel Tuesday morning and meet Tuesday afternoon. Wednesday will be a field tour with expanded topic specific issues.
 - A Washington DC meeting will be scheduled in early December once calendars are evaluated.

VI. WFLC Regional Strategy Committee Reports (15 minutes)



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Southern Region Update (Gary Wood):

- Smoke Summit provided a lot of discussion about the change in the NAAQS and what will happen with the EER. Georgia is working on a template for other regions to use in EERs. A survey has been put out to thirteen state fire chiefs within the Southern WFLC region.
- Facilitated a new grant with Tall Timbers to develop a NE/Mid-West virtual prescribed fire training center, to put a more formal coordination effort in place.

Northeastern Region Update (Larry Mastic):

- In training capacity, RSC has initiated efforts to provide training across the region on the fire risk assessment portal and all of the tools in it that was deployed 3 years ago. This is a focus since it has a lot of value to people on the ground to deliver programs related to implementing the CS and cross-boundary landscape projects, CWPP development, grant applications, etc.
- Designed 2-day training, first one in March 2024 in Maine. MI, IL, MD will be future training sites + virtual training based on these sites which will be delivered to USFS Region 9 personnel in the coming year.
- RSC is working towards providing training for a risk assessment portal because it has a lot of value in helping to deliver the Cohesive Strategy. Based on input received from state foresters, the Northeast region is working on creating fact sheets with information on invasive species, prescribed fire, smoke impacts, etc.
- Two workshops:
 - Regional RX Fire Science and Management workshop one held the week of August 19 in Albany, NY – had 250+ people attend last year
 - Hosting 7th National Cohesive Strategy Workshop in Atlantic City, NJ Sept 16-19. Located adjacent to the NJ Pinebarrons ecosystem of over 1 million acres.

Western Region Update (Katie Lighthall):

- Wildland Fire Incident Communications Work Group
 - Learning a lot, draft problem statement is centered around the 209 forms, and the system it has unintentionally created does not allow teams to communicate accurate information.

VII. Administrative

Public Comments:

- Megan Fitzgerald- McGowan (NFPA): How could the “FAC Collaborators Group” become more formal and develop a “Partners Resource Council” that would serve as a venue for NGOs to collaborate and aid WFLC?
 - There were questions about WFLC chartering and the structure of how this could work out, but WFLC members broadly supported the idea.
 - Megan has a 2-pager that outlines the idea – this public comment is the introduction to tell us they’re here, working towards the same goals, and they want to support and engage with WFLC members.



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- Want to discuss how they can provide subject matter expertise and other support as WFLC is tackling issues in the future.

Member Roundtable:

- None

VIII. Wrap up and Closing Remarks

- Joan Mooney thanked attendees for their participation and adjourned the meeting.