

Wildland Fire Leadership Council

January 25th - 26th, 2016
Fernandina Beach, Florida
Meeting Notes

MEETING PURPOSE:

To view and understand on the ground successes that support WFLC priorities and the goals of the Cohesive Strategy, to discuss joint leaders' intent with EPA and build strategic opportunities around smoke management and air quality issues related to wildland fire, to explore opportunities to enhance and expand the impact of local landscape collaboration, to further the four WFLC national priorities and to give strategic direction to the National Strategic Committee, Regional Strategy Committees and agency and organizational leaderships grounded in the concepts of the Cohesive Strategy.

ACTION ITEMS AND NEXT STEPS:

See "Next Steps" for each issue area.

ATTENDEES: (PHONE PARTICIPANTS ON JANUARY 26TH ONLY)

Council Members or alternates

Jim Hubbard (FS), Jim Karels (NASF), Bill Kaage (NPS), Erik Litzenberg (IAFC), Vern Stearns (ITC), George Geissler (NGA), Sue Phillips (USGS) Mike Zupko (Executive Manager); *Phone participants:* Robert Bonnie (USDA), Kris Sarri (DOI), Jeff Rupert (FWS), Patti Blankenship (FEMA/USFA), Ann DeBlasi (BLM), Tom Tidwell (FS), Helen Riggs (BIA)

Partners: Carol Kemke, Bill Walsler, Rick Gillam, Mark Melvin; *Phone participants:* Rachel Jacobson, Tom Lacrosse, Bill Harnett

Support Staff: Jim Douglas, Bryan Rice, Pete Lahm, Owen, Robert Farris, Doyle, Kelly Russel, Jenn Hart, Danny Lee, Tony Tooke, Caitlyn Pollihan, John Cissel, Katie Lighthall, Gary Wood, Joe Freeland, Harry Humbert, Barclay Trimble, John Fish; *Phone participants:* Denise Blankenship, Vicki Christensen, Paul Steblein, Dan Olsen

National Strategy Committee: Jim Ericson, Joe Stutler, Rich Cowger, Pete Anderson, Patti Blankenship

JANUARY 25TH 0800-0530

Field Tour around South Georgia and North Florida

The field tour of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding areas allowed participants to experience wildland fire and land management on a national treasure as well as the coordination and impact of the surrounding federal, state, private and local lands. Private, state and federal working forests play a key role across the landscape and while the refuge is at

the center, each landowner has different objectives, opportunities and management constraints. Through collaboration, each landowner is able to achieve individual goals, while contributing to the greater landscape. Florida Forest Services and multiple partners were able to conduct a 3,000 acre prescribed fire as well while discussing the various components of smoke planning and personnel coordination. The tour also visited one of the FAC Learning Network members, Baker County, Florida.

JANUARY 26TH 0830-0500

Meeting Summary:

Jim Hubbard welcomed everyone to the meeting and had everyone introduce themselves. Jim Karels gave an overview of the field tour from the previous day and emphasized what a great opportunity it was to highlight excellent partnerships between state and federal agencies. Karels then turned the meeting over to Mike Zupko to review the agenda, meeting purpose and goals of the meeting.

Smoke Management and Air Quality

9:00 – 10:30 Air Quality and Smoke Management Priority – *Karels, Geissler, Zupko*

Objective: To explore opportunities for further engagement with EPA and other partners at the national, regional and local level to minimize impacts from wildland fire (wild and prescribed) over the long-term.

Jim Karels opened the issue by giving a brief comparison of the two field tours (Florida and Oregon) in regards to burning. He framed the discussion around the question of how to formulate a partnership between EPA and forestry so that it works in other states.

National Engagement - EPA Leadership (Harnett) and members of the Priority Task Group (Zupko, Steblein, Lahm, and Melvin facilitate)

Discussion:

- Every state is different, but believes collaboration is where replication could take place.
- Harnett discussed several upcoming areas for engagement on smoke and air issues:
 - Regional Haze and Visibility in National Parks
 - Ozone Standards
 - Particulate matter (pm) 2.5 Standards
 - Exceptional Events Rule
- Question was posed as to how do we engage nationally, at the state level and then at the EPA regional level?
 - The exceptional event rule that is still open for comment. Lots of dialogue occurring at those levels. The view is for the most part, at the national level, there is a recognition that a balance is needed between prescribed and wildfire. But not sure if that view has trickled down to regional EPA and state

levels. So how do we continue the national dialogue at the state and regional EPA levels?

- Discussion focused on bridging the communication gap between these groups. The need to engage the public about the tradeoffs from prescribed fire and wildfire smoke. Dialogue also needs to include resource management actions that will address what we are doing with the resource before it becomes smoke.
- Question for the WFLC group- Who are the partners that are not at the WFLC table now that need to be engaged in these discussions? The Nature Conservancy, “Clean” power (bioenergy groups), state fish and wildlife agencies (to help potentially connect the biological and ecological issues), CDC and public health, regional offices of the EPA (this should include those in impact areas as well as those downwind of smoke events). Regional is believed to be the key to the implementation level.
 - Discussion regarding Florida and Georgia and if they ever had/have to work out smoke boundary issues? In the past yes, but current culture there are little issues. In the past they have brought together the state’s air quality monitors, fish and wildlife agencies, forestry, etc. and developed a 10-year prescribed fire plan that addresses smoke management.
- How can WFLC help facilitate taking the discussions from leadership to the local level?
 - WFLC can get the principals together and work to schedule a meeting to discuss progress and possible next steps for success. It would be better to host earlier in the year to engage those at the national political level who have helped bring the discussion to this point.
- In order to overcome the hurdle of facilitating the information and dialogue from the national level to the regional level it was advised to engage Air Division Directors at the regional offices with the states who are running into issues. This can be achieved by holding semi-annual meetings, where agendas are sent out before hand and both sides have time to prepare for discussions. Consider looking into bringing in other Divisions, such as water.

Research Gaps, Collective Solutions – Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) (John Cissel)

ATTACHMENT I

- Zupko introduced this topic by posing the following questions to the group. Where is the research going with smoke management, what are the gaps and how do we fill them?
- Presentation from the JFSP discussed the current smoke science portfolio and identified research gaps as well as the opportunities moving forward.
- JFSP would like to collaborate with WFLC to understand the highest priority needs in regards to smoke management and research. It would like for WFLC to be aware of their goals and be on the lookout for large scale research opportunities and collaboration projects that would further their mission. WFLC could also link scientists and practitioners to further the fire exchange network.
- EPA sees emission factors as being a research need as well as communications need with the public. They would like research that would help them gather quality data

as well as information on what data the public is interested in and when to release it. Third, is there any research related to trust and perception for the agencies.

Regional/State/Local Engagement between land management and air quality interests – EPA Region 4 (with state partners), other EPA Region 6 and Melvin/Zupko/Lahm facilitate

- Regional EPA presenters provided an overview of the process of building relationships; frequent communication forge a strong partnership between the regional groups, state agencies and other stakeholders. A smoke summit has occurred twice between state forestry, state air and EPA and been very successful. This example could be modeled in other regions.
- Discussion centered on difference of regions and states. Initial steps to replicate the success of Region 4 would be to better understand relationships and stakeholders within the various regions. It is important to involve the Regional Deputy Administrators to help set precedent (non-political position).

Next Steps and Playbook – Zupko, Lahm, Steblein, Melvin

- There is an MOU at the federal level that could support this initiative to disperse the conversations to the regions. Would need to vary constituents by region based on stakeholder input, i.e. Tribal groups in the west, Departments of Health, Emergency Services, etc.
- Melvin distributed a copy of the 2015 Prescribed Fire Use Survey. There is a need for information like that, i.e. how much fire is out there now; how that can be tied to an emissions inventory and how to improve upon that inventory and data collection. This information can be useful in building trust with the public as well as partner groups.
- Zupko provided summary of key points and playbook.
 - Beginning- Look at the short term. Focus on engaging partners, data needs and how to provide groups with the information. WFLC will provide base data.
 - Mid-term- Look for upcoming events with enough lead time to decide and how to build playbooks for those.
 - Long term- Expansion and implementation of prescribed fire on the ground. This is the step to bring in education/outreach, demonstration sites, etc.

Next Steps:

- After MOU is executed, work with EPA to provide the vehicle to bring stakeholders together. Provide access on the models of “how to” but leave the specifics up to the region.
- Continue to explore how to engage the non-federal partners in policy discussions.
- Define joint priority needs (research and data).
- Policy or priority exchange at the federal level
- Identify additional partners
- Determine what each individual WFLC member’s engagement point is.

Large Landscape Collaboration Priority

Issues: Increase the number and area of wildfire resilient and healthy landscapes, resilient communities, and efficiency of wildland fire response by expanding cross-landscape, cross-ownership collaboration.

Current Overview & Structure – Pete Anderson (task group lead) gave an overview of the LLC discussions to date.

Discussion:

- Anderson proposed that using the term landscape level collaboration would be a better suited name for this priority.
- There is a lot of existing information out there; however the challenge is how to consolidate it into a useable format. They have created a template or process for determining the priorities.
 - Overview and partners/stakeholders
 - Risk- what is the profile?
 - Priorities- what is the process?
 - How do people finance the activities? What are key traits for grants?
 - Have National Environmental Policy Act ready projects
 - Monitoring
- Draft template is being reviewed and would appreciate feedback from the WFLC. Once reviewed, proceed to next step, which is implementation with the Joint Fire Science Program. Anticipate completing step one by June and moving to step two then.
- Third task is recognizing that most landscape level collaboration projects start small and grow. They can move into this phase third quarter.
- Fourth task is the transfer of data. Utilize the cohesive strategy committee to develop a calendar of all meetings/conferences to move this message forward. WFLC would provide thoughts and feedback on how to get the message out and to whom. Master list would be created.
- Fifth task is defining effectiveness for landscape level collaboration. Communicate the best management practices out to the groups.

Florida/Georgia/Alabama – Multi-state proposed example – Bill Palmer, Director, Tall Timbers ATTACHMENT II (web link)

- Next was a presentation from Palmer looking at a project that could serve as a model large landscape level collaboration project in the red hills area of Florida and Georgia. Goal is to maintain and/or increase fire frequency on approximately 430,000 acres to create fire resilient landscapes. Would involve federal, state, NGO's as well as private landowners. There is an opportunity within the community to provide connectivity for this project.

Tracking Success and Impact – Dr. Danny Lee

ATTACHMENT III

- Presentation: “New Tools for tracking” from Danny Lee. Goal of the project is to provide a set of accessible, cost effective tools for characterizing landscapes. Utilizing photography to measure resiliency. They see promise for using this system in identifying potential fire problem areas, but not for measuring species diversity.
- Zupko closed with review of LLC discussion. The discussions looked at what is working; how we utilize, an example to implement those tools, and then possible large scale monitoring. WFLC should look at these and utilize these pieces within the taskforce going forward. These talks reaffirm that the LLC taskforce is moving in the right direction.

Reducing Risk to Communities

Issues: Build a suite of enabling conditions for the creation and enhancement of fire adapted communities across the country.

Priority update by Erik Litzenberg.

Discussion:

- Still working to identify and solidify task force team members.
- Current group is also working to classify communities at risk. They want to look for communities with a history of fire and analyze a subset and evaluate what has worked in those areas to reduce risk. They will then take those factors and put them in a matrix to determine which organizations/agencies are best to engage at what level. Production of the matrix has not started yet.
 - Matrix can help WFLC determine future priorities.
 - Suggestion to look at Utah and examine their approach at a risk assessment.

Next Steps: 1st call is scheduled to hash out viable starting points and consider models that currently exist.

Environmental Compliance

Issues: Conduct project planning and analysis in a timely, coordinated and efficient manner to expedite fuels management, restoration and maintenance of healthy, resilient landscapes.

Zupko led the update for this priority.

Discussion:

- This is a new group coming together thus it provides an opportunity for future engagement in the following areas:
 - Categorical exclusions
 - Programmatic agreements
 - Online tools available currently

- Discussion then moved on to look at risk aversion and working to keep people accountable.

REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES UPDATE

SRSC – Gary Wood, coordinator

Gary Wood opened discussion for SRSC focusing on the culture of strong partnerships that exist in the southern region.

- Working on major revisions and regional action plans that currently outline 153 priorities and how those can line up with WFLC's priorities.
 - They have identified 11 priorities that align with 2 of WFLC's
- They are working on a gap analysis that is due by April.
- Regional and multi-agency academies are continuing to be successful.
- Developed a priority trainee list this past summer and felt it was very successful.
- Lots of success with resilient landscapes, lots of collaboration efforts happening, success with prescribed fire associations.
- Continue to promote SouthWRAP and working to develop a FAC guide using southeastern case studies and photos.

WRSC – Joe Stutler, co-chair

Started discussion by outlining their committee makeup and focusing on the four co-chairs.

- Discussed the difference between activity and achievement. They are using the National Strategy to develop options.
- They have released the first western report highlighting the top 10 projects for the region. They also highlighted work that is been accomplished in all 17 states of the region.
- They have developed four priorities for the region
 - Success at the community level- achieving success using the cohesive strategy through developing relationships, facilitating shared successes and lessons learned.
 - Gave several examples of this work including working with San Diego gas and electric, State Foresters and FEMA.
 - Next priority is large landscape level collaboration – this is an emerging issue for the west. Landscapes are being restored, but may not be resilient, West is working with collaborative illustrating the difference.
 - Third priority is smoke, working with leadership in management plans, advisory groups and education and communication,
- Believes the key to successful CS implementation is communication and connecting the dots of efforts. In reality there are many great examples of CS implementation in the West, but being called something else. The WRSC is the facilitator of the cohesive strategy and are working to connect the right players.
- They are going to co-locate with smoke symposium in November.

- Emerging issues include unplanned ignitions, creating resilient landscapes and opportunities for communities that have already been affected.
- 2015 QFR- evaluated wildfire response and preparedness with focus on asymmetrical fires, which we saw in 2015, we will see more of that in the future.
- Discussion on keeping good areas good, i.e. future investments in fuels treatment may be in previous landscape unplanned ignition.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Can WFLC look at how to capture a success story where progress is being made against wildfires and communicate that story to the public? NASF is working to identify performance measures to be able to evaluate and then communicate success stories both with fire and water. Also mentioned was the importance of messaging.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

Zupko reviewed several administrative items relative to WFLC

- National Strategic Committee
 - The first term slate expires March 1st. Confirmation is needed by WFLC that it is acceptable to extend those terms for a second term. **WFLC CONFIRMED**
 - There are three open seats, two that have been put forward.
 - Two names that are being put forward are Chief Cowger (fire service for 1 year appointment) and Denise Blankenship (FS) are recommended to fill two of the three seats. No objections, **WFLC CONFIRMED**
 - John Ruhs (BLM) cannot go forward, but they are looking for someone with similar background to nominate.
- 2015 Fire Season Review Taskforce- Hubbard discussed the review from the executive level. Since large fire reviews will continue to occur, the small group that evaluated is proposing the focus be in the following three areas:
 - Looking at that was learned on **risk based response** to how, when and where we deploy in the following specific situations:
 - In the WUI
 - Initial Attack
 - Preparing first responders mentally
 - In the Wilderness- maybe evaluate not deploying at all in the wilderness
 - **Cross Boundary Mitigation** Look for ways to bring everyone together and as funds are being appropriated, look for ways to ensure priorities line up and keep stakeholders engaged.
 - **Aviation**- Evaluate certifying standards across states and regions for consistency.

Goal of the Fire Season Review Taskforce is to stay away from the tactical and focus on the strategic. WFLC members agreed this was a good way to proceed and they were focused on the right issues.

- White House Security Council will be drafting something for federal facilities to be more resilient in the WUI. This is being developed primarily by the NSC. They are proposing a ½ day conference for folks to provide strategic input and to have dialogue to discuss the need to work together to tackle issues in the WUI.

Closeout

- Next meeting is targeted to be in late April in DC and still in discussion phase for a late summer meeting.
- For the members not present, the Mayor of Colorado Springs is interested in filling the National League of Cities vacancy, Zupko is pursuing a letter to fill this seat.
- Zupko is working to formalize the relationship between WFLC and DOD.
- Zupko met with the President of NACo and they are interested in formalizing a relationship with WFLC. Zupko plans to meet with them during their legislative session.
- Closing comments from Bonnie and Sari- Thanked everyone for their efforts and participation. Agreed that there was lots of good discussion today.