

2nd Wildland Fire Policy Summit

February 9, 2006

Report

Washington, D. C.



**International Association
of Wildland Fire**

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The International Association of Wildland Fire invited the national leaders in the field of wildland fire to meet in the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, DC on February 9, 2006 to discuss the future of national wildland fire policy and strategy in the United States. Assisted by two representatives from Canadian wildland fire agencies, the participants exchanged ideas on policy issues of importance to the entire wildland fire community.

The participants focused on three issues:

1. Measuring Performance in Wildland Fire Mitigation and Vegetation Restoration
2. Fire in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)
3. The Workforce

Areas for improvement for each issue were first identified, then recommendations for actions at the national level were developed. The recommendations begin on page 11.

Issue #1: Measuring Performance in Wildland Fire Mitigation and Vegetation Restoration

Key points brought out during the discussion included:

- A. Agencies need to measure long-term trends when evaluating their accomplishments in wildland fire mitigation and vegetation restoration. Important questions might include;
 - Are we reducing losses to life, property, and natural resources?
 - How many acres have been treated (including federal, state, and local)?
 - Are the highest priority acres being treated?
 - Are wildland fires burning fewer acres?
 - How should we include climate change and variability as we measure long term trends?
 - How much are we spending on suppressing wildland fires?
 - Are we spending less on wildland fires?
 - Are we appropriately measuring property and resources losses?
 - Are improvements occurring in National, State, and Local fire, building, and Wildland



- Urban Interface (WUI) codes, standards, and Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP)?
- How well are we involving communities, local governments, and other appropriate organizations?
- How many CWPPs are in place?

B. Several significant barriers interfere with the ability to evaluate agency accomplishments in wildland fire mitigation and vegetation restoration. Major barriers include:

- Currently no comprehensive, systematic strategy/approach for evaluating agency accomplishments exists.
- The WUI is by its nature always moving, expanding and advancing. We have no centralized database, and because of the level of flux in WUI, it is especially difficult to characterize the nature of the fire problems there. Our understanding of the fire problems and occurrences make it difficult to even name the metrics that we need to measure mitigation progress in the WUI.
- The same lack of centralized data makes understanding the nature of fire problems in the WUI, and fire occurrence there, difficult. Consequently, it is difficult to know what the appropriate metrics are for measuring mitigation progress in the WUI. The WUI is always moving, expanding, and advancing.
- At the federal level, short-term “metrics” are highly valued. The Executive Branch and Congress encourage short term metrics because they want to know that funds were spent as directed. Most fire prevention and mitigation programs take several years to show results. Long term metrics are needed to gauge the effectiveness of programs on a time frame that is consistent with the time it takes to see results
- Performance measures do not exist for restoring the vegetation to an identified condition, for example, pre-European settlement.
- We lack interagency and cross-boundary priority setting. In the absence of interagency and cross-boundary priority setting, it is difficult to know that the right acres are being treated.
- Measurements and measurement approaches split along ecological/social lines. There seems to be lots of measurement regarding physical/ecological effects, but not of social effects. Meaningful metrics often lie “outside of fire,” such as social change and social acceptance. There exists a need to look for “non-traditional ways to measure accomplishment; particularly social measurements.



- We struggle with the concept of getting fires back into areas that need it, while keeping it out of areas where we don't want it (WUI). Agencies need to de-couple these two concepts. They are separate measures of success.
- Agencies need to sort-out whether they will restore historic conditions or manage change, putting their focus on restoration or sustainability, especially in the light of global climate change.
- The smallest category of funds provided through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program is for fire prevention. Fire prevention is not on the national radar, and is rarely supported in any organized way nationally or locally. The measurement of success seems to be emergency response. At the federal level, we need to measure success by prevention and mitigation.



Issue #2: Fire in the Wildland- Urban Interface (WUI)

Key points brought out during the discussion included:

A. We have made tremendous progress defining and identifying the WUI, and need to make similar progress on identifying what needs to be fixed and fixing it.

B. The issue does not appear to have the political impact that would drive a significant budget increase. Consequently, agencies will need to address the WUI issue without more money, by using incentives, making better use of existing budgets and otherwise taking creative approaches

C. It is 10-50 times more expensive to suppress an interface fire than to mitigate the hazards before the fire.

D. Roles and responsibilities represent a key issue. Too often, it remains unclear as to what entity is responsible for protecting communities, especially in unincorporated areas. It remains unclear whose “problem” the WUI is, before or during an emergency.

- Unclear or conflicting roles and responsibilities for structure protection represent an ongoing problem.
- Protecting structures many times results in allowing fires to become larger, as resources are committed to structures, rather than suppression.
- Communities (small, rural) don't have capacity to accept responsibility for fire in the WUI. The potential to build capacity and distribute responsibility has actually diminished.
- The issue is not single dimensional (who's responsibility it is, or is not) but what responsibilities each party/entity has and the appropriate mix of responsibility in the WUI. Federal and State Agencies need to better understand that dealing with the WUI is a complex issue and requires all the appropriate players to be at the table.
- There is a need to change expectations regarding who is responsible for what, including establishing the homeowner's responsibility. A paper from the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) very effectively communicates the roles of the homeowner, the roles of fire agencies, and what fire agencies can and cannot do.
- Multiple programs such as CWPP, Firewise, Firesafe, Firefree, Firesmart, and other similar programs are confusing to the participants and the public. The wildland fire agencies are not doing a good job of communicating about and delivering these interrelated programs.

E. Rural residents expect urban-level emergency services.

- The public needs to better understand the issue of firefighter safety vs. the values at risk.



- The actions of firefighters, especially in small communities, is largely driven by local issues of living and working in those communities, with significant implications for firefighter safety
 - The existence of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) may actually, inadvertently, raise expectations of WUI communities.
 - Better communicate issue of FF safety vs. values at risk.
 - Civilians are dying in the WUI; tends to swing political/public expectations more than FF fatality.
 - Will the family of a FF killed while defending a house ever sue the homeowner for not mitigating the hazards around the house?
 - The Australians have done a good job of educating rural homeowners about their roles, as well as letting them know what the protection agencies can and cannot do.
- F. There is a need to proactively affect the behavior of planners and homeowners before or while an interface area is being developed, rather than waiting until problems develop and then having to “fix” a situation.
- Community protection is not currently inherent in community planning decisions.
 - We are not effectively addressing people’s behavior before they arrive in the WUI; we are not proactive, consequently we are always “fixing” the problem.
 - Responsibility for control of growth and development lies at the local level. From the perspective of fire agencies, that’s the problem. We must ask what structure/approach is needed at the local level to do the right thing.
 - Can’t trust this issue to traditional/obvious policy makers or elected officials. Hurricane Katrina provides an effective example why. A program of mitigating fire issues in the WUI will not be sold at federal level.
 - Fire in the WUI is a generational issue requiring strategic educational approach.
 - We need to ask whether the fire agencies are providing appropriate incentives. Should the community incentive be more fire trucks or better land use planning? We must ask what role fire protection plays in enabling WUI development.
 - The existence of a CWPP may actually, inadvertently, raise expectations of WUI communities.



- It is a mistake to perceive a CWPP as a means to obtain federal funds rather than as a way to protect communities.

G. The expanding WUI constrains and may preclude other ecological, restoration efforts. WUI planning needs to consider, in addition to fire suppression, mitigation, prevention, public education, community planning, and restoration.



Issue #3: The Workforce

Key points brought out during the discussion included:

A. It is recognized that the wildland firefighter workforce is being used for various all-hazard incidents unrelated to wildland fire. To re-configure for these missions would be very expensive, and this trend is stretching the wildland fire workforce and creating pressures including:

- Year round activity resulting in employee burnout
- Reduced availability for fire incidents
- Subsidizing non-fire incidents with fire funds
- Exposure to hazards for which the firefighters are not trained
- Qualifications outside fire very unclear and inconsistent with fire.
- More and more mandates distracting from core mission

B. Changes in society and lifestyles have led to a workforce that is less available on nights, weekends, and for long duration assignments. Impacts are being felt, especially in the “militia” (collateral duty) workforce. Social and lifestyle changes having impact include:

- Married with dual incomes
- Unavailable after regular hours, on weekends, and for long assignments
- Attitudes regarding what constitutes hardship and what hardships are acceptable
- Reduction in forestry trained employees. The workforce has trended toward people trained in environmental studies, etc., as a function of agency recruiting practices (particularly for resource management positions)
- Local units cannot supply the logistical needs of Type 3 Incident Management Teams (IMT), so they are increasingly requesting Type 2 IMT because they come with the necessary logistical personnel
- Agency administrators are unwilling to make their personnel available for fire assignments

C. Age, experience, and skill gaps have developed in agency workforces with ramifications for training and recruiting.



- It has become difficult to obtain adequate training for all the individuals who have a need for the training. Since it is reported to take 20 years or more to develop a Type 1 Incident Commander, there exists a need to carefully allocate training.
- The agency increasingly depends on a number of retirees and AD employees on IMT. This is not a good sign
- The agencies are not fostering ability to work in an integrated/complex/electronic/technical workplace. Generational differences exacerbate this problem. Need to convince agencies to recruit for modern skill-set while also convincing employees to accept hardships or working environment
- The legal/liability environment may be exacerbating workforce problems. The perceived exposure to liability may be causing people to select themselves out (see NIMO report.)

D. Perhaps a symptom of a shrinking and strained workforce is the increasing number of retirees, administratively determined (AD) employees, and contractors assigned to incidents. However, these non-traditional resources are presenting the agencies with significant issues, including:

- While we are relying more on contractors on competitive sourced resources on fires, it can be difficult for the procurement sections of agencies to administratively support contract fire management resources
- Funding authorities, including the use of AD employees, vary among agencies and some former AD employees are refusing assignments due to the perceived inadequate compensation in recent AD pay plans.

E. Compensation

- Need a new pay plan developed for hiring non-agency personnel that fairly compensates personnel for fire and non-fire incidents, especially the higher-qualified positions
- Some former AD employees are refusing assignments due to the perceived inadequate compensation in the recent AD pay plans.

F. Qualification and Certification System

- A rule-based approach to qualification and certification is problematic
- The current approach is keeping experienced instructors out of the work pool
- Cross-border certification issues limit ability to share resources
- Variable qualification and certification standards for “different kinds of fire” (for example, prescribed fire, wildland fire use and fire suppression)



- Need to move to one unified set of qualifications and certifications (see NIMO report)



Recommendations for Action on a National Level:

1. Action Needed: National Wildland Fire Policy or Strategy

There exists a need to develop a national, (rather than just federal) wildland fire policy or strategy, Consider making it a North American wildland fire policy or strategy. Such a comprehensive policy or strategy would serve the following purposes or have the following characteristics:

- It would include a balanced portfolio or comprehensive strategy including:
 - prevention
 - mitigation
 - fire suppression response
 - the role of science and the distribution of scientific information.
- The national/North American fire policy would clarify what comprehensive “community protection” means.
- It will clarify, resolve and integrate roles (federal, state, county, local, and individual) and tier to regional, state, and local policy. The ultimate goal would be to produce complete interoperability.
- A national or North American fire policy would demonstrate an understanding of a changing climate, demographics, and operating environment, and would be aimed at changing the social/political landscape by affecting individual attitudes/behaviors.
- It would examine a doctrinal approach concentrating on priority setting, implementation, a philosophy for pushing decision-making and communication down to first responder level, the natural role of fire, and the role of science and scientific information dissemination.
- The effort would use a democratic process that maximizes the involvement of all appropriate stakeholders.
- It will include a comprehensive strategy for communicating the national/North American fire policy or strategy to the local and first responder levels, who will ultimately implement it. Consider the needs of volunteers, seasonal employees, and local government and address how the policy might be communicated to the people who need the information in an atmosphere of information overload.
- The effort would consider all the consequences (incentives and disincentives) of a national or North American fire policy, and create a policy that enabled or encouraged desired behavior.
- Technology has to keep up with the policy. Establish a management model that technically supports the vision. A national technology transfer system is needed.



- Participants in this summit should report the recommendations to their leadership of their organizations and other organizations with which they partner. There exists a need for a common communication strategy/message resulting from the Policy Summit to help people communicate to their organizations and others.
- IAWF will distribute the Policy Summit report to congressional appropriations hearings.
- IAWF will distribute the Policy Summit report to National Association of County Officials (NACo), International City/County Management Association (ICMA), National Governors Association (NGA), Western Governors Association (WGA), and the U. S. Conference of Mayors.
- Involve the organizations listed above in developing a National wildland fire policy in addition to the invitees to the 2nd Wildland Fire Policy Summit.
- Conduct a national dialogue (across major fire service elements) to determine if we want to separate a Fire Policy from the National Fire Plan.
- Make a compelling case/evidence developed by an interagency core team.
- Focus on changing behavior, not just producing a document.
- Consider “scoping” around the country to get input and develop a policy, rather than a big conference with lots of people.
- Use a “mid-course look at the National Fire Plan”, the QFFR, and revision of 10-year Comprehensive Strategy as opportunities.

The Next Logical Steps Would Include:

- Develop a brief, common communication strategy/message resulting from the Policy Summit to help people communicate to their organizations and others. Volunteers to help develop: Smalley (NFPA); Michael Medler (Association for Fire Ecology); Dan Bailey (ICC)
- Participants in this summit should report the recommendations to their leadership of their organizations and other organizations with which they partner.
- Convene a group of stakeholders to determine if there is support for a national (or North American) wildland fire strategy. If needed, develop a framework for establishing it.
- Produce a white paper describing the concept of a national/North American wildland fire policy and establishing framework for discussion. The IAWF could accomplish this with assistance from the Policy Summit participants.



- Consider having the IAWF establish a “listening post” or resource center for discussing a national/North American fire strategy – perhaps through the IAWF web site or as a “community of practice” at the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned site.
- Determine which agencies and organizations would be involved and who the signatories would be.
- Identify sources of funding to complete the project.
- The International Association of Wildland Fire could convene and organize the effort, but would need funding/resources.

2. Action Needed: Measuring Performance on Mitigation and Restoration Work

- First determine how to measure long-term success of mitigation and restoration work at a landscape scale, include climate change and demographics considerations, develop long-term measurements, and then develop an implementation program.
- Determine if fire regime and condition class can provide the appropriate measurements of success for restoration. If restoration can be accomplished for an area, determine if we can maintain it in that state. For restoration, we’re generally talking about restoring forests to their original fire regime, rather than rehabilitation/restoration following a fire or other disturbance. Better to think in terms of regime and condition, rather than “condition class”.

3. Action Needed: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

- Rather than separate fire and WUI, attach fire and WUI to other issues like land use planning. Focus on who logical partners are (homeowners, firefighters, policy makers, land use planners, elected officials, etc), focusing on areas and issues that affect behavioral change.
- Clarify expectations/intent for Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP). Stop confusing people and integrate CWPP with Firewise and other similar programs.
- Address critical issues including sustained importance and sustained funding, and resolve issues of credibility and trust with Congress and state legislatures. What is needed is a mechanism to tell decision makers and politicians that even if we have success, we need to continue efforts; don’t reduce efforts if the number of acres, houses, lives lost decline for a while.
- Bring together the players involved in WUI nationally, and work out the issues of:



- Duplication of effort
 - Current roles, responsibilities, and service provision (current operating environment)
 - Drawing the players together, integrating efforts, and achieving consistency
 - Needed initiatives
 - The possible need for a new umbrella organization
- Involve key non-governmental organizations including IAWF, International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), NACo, National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), NWCG, and FIREWISE. USFA/NFA presents a great communication method/venue to communicate directly with local government firefighters and officials.
 - Acknowledge and distribute known “best practices”. Some good work is already occurring and there is no need to reinvent the wheel. For instance, the Canadian Forest Service has established a database of best practices. Possibilities for distributing best practices include the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center at www.wildfirelessons.net, by increasing awareness of the Canadian system, and through resources of the US Fire Administration.

4. Action Needed: Workforce Issues

- Develop an interagency wildland fire workforce strategy and adjust business practices accordingly. Such a workforce strategy may include truly unified standards and certification.
- Increase the pool of available resources by sharing resources globally - including incident response and support outside fire the season. Expand the workforce pool with non-traditional (non-fire) personnel.
- Institutionalize the national draw down philosophy used during the summer of 2005.
- Determine how wildland fire personnel and land management agencies can better fit into the FEMA ESF-4 “wildland firefighting” emergency services function, to better serve FEMA, and minimize adverse affects on the land management agencies. The natural resource agencies were not consulted during the last revision of the National Response Plan (NRP). FEMA needs skilled and experienced natural resource agency personnel “at the table” when revising the NRP, if they are to depend on natural resource agency resources.
- Develop an agreement through the Department of Homeland Security and in cooperation with NWCG that would apply to all 50 states and cover uniform authorities, pay, and legal liabilities for non-federal personnel on non-federal wildland fire and all hazard incidents. Also, develop the same type of agreement for deployment to Canada and Mexico.



- Develop common, uniform contract administration procedures for private wildland fire services contracts.

5. Action Needed: Communicating the Outcomes of the 2nd Policy Summit

- A clear, concise communication message from the 2nd Policy Summit needs to be developed to assist in a dialog with other organizations. Information from the Summit needs to be distributed to key congressional committees, all major land management agencies and organizations, and other affected stakeholders.



Attendees at the 2nd Wildland Fire Policy Summit:

Dan Bailey
Director, Wildland Fire Programs
International Code Council

Fred Bird
Wildland Fire Operations Specialist
Department of Interior Office of Wildland Fire

Charles Dickinson
Deputy Administrator
U.S. Fire Administration

Rick Gale
Member
National Wildfire Suppression Assn.

Tom Harbour
Director, Fire and Aviation Management
USDA Forest Service

Kelvin Hirsch
Manager, Forest Fire Program
Canadian Forest Service

Jeff Jahnke
Colorado State Forester/
Chair Nat'l Assn. of State Foresters Fire Comm.
Nat'l Assn. of State Foresters

Art Latterell
National Fire Plan Coordinator
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Chrissy Lebo
Congressional Relations Associate
International Code Council

Invited, did not attend:

International Association of Fire Chiefs
National League of Cities
National Fire Plan
USDI, Bureau of Indian Affairs
USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Western Governors Association

Dick Mangan
President
International Association of Wildland Fire

Laura McCarthy
Western Forest & Fire Restoration Program Dir.
The Nature Conservancy

Michael Medler
Member, Board of Directors
Association for Fire Ecology

Steve Roberts
Chair, Council of Directors
Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre

Jim Smalley
Firewise Project Manager
National Fire Protection Association

William Sommers
Director, East Fire Laboratory
George Mason University

Mike Wallace
Acting Fire Director
National Park Service

Mike DeGrosky
Facilitator
The Guidance Group, Inc.

Bill Gabbert
Logistics/Recorder
Executive Director
International Association of Wildland Fire

