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UNECE / FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management

Organized by

The UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Germany, supported by the German Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, the Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), the Council of Europe through its Euro-Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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Preamble

The nature of wildland fire in the UNECE region and globally is changing in ways that require all relevant stakeholders to not only better cope with the current state of affairs but also adapt and develop their approaches to enhance capacity to cope with expected future, unprecedented circumstances and threats. To compound this evolving situation, management of wildland fire in countries of the UNECE region and globally has been found to be limited in a number of common ways that can be identified at all levels of management – from the fundamental, ground-level management of natural and cultural landscapes, to the strategic planning of internal, national systems as well as to the attempts that have been made to collaborate internationally to address these problems more successfully.

The UNECE/FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management was held 28-29 November 2013 at the United Nations in Geneva. The Forum was attended by 49 representatives from 22 UNECE Member States, from other regions, non-government organizations, regional and international organizations (ASEAN Secretariat, SADC Secretariat, Council of Europe, OSCE), and the United Nations (UNECE / FAO Forestry and Timber Section; FAO; UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction / UNISDR; OCHA Environmental Emergencies Section, Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, Emergency Services Branch; Secretariat of the UNECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution).

The main objective of the Forum was to elaborate recommendations to UNECE member states and the international community to build resilience of nations and communities to wildfire emergencies and disasters by enhancing national and collective international fire management capability through exchange of expertise.

The Forum acknowledges and supports the contents of the following preparatory documents provided to the Forum:

1) Study of the Contemporary and Expected Future Wildland Fire Problems in the UNECE Region

The study (including comprehensive supporting materials) provides background and rationale for the need to orientate and strengthen informed fire management policies and fire management capacities in the region vis-à-vis the cumulative effects of socio-economic, environmental and climate changes that will result in an increasing risk of wildfires that are likely to become more destructive and less easy to control.

2) Proposal “Building Resilience of Nations and Communities within the UNECE Region to Wildfire Emergencies and Disasters”

In order to meet current and future regional and global wildfire challenges, the "International Working Group on Cooperation in Wildfire Preparedness and Response" (IWG-CWPR) proposes to establish an **International Wildfire Support Mechanism** (IWSM) for the UNECE Region and globally, that will assist nations to improve their capacity and resilience to wildfire. The mechanism will provide a platform / framework from which to cascade improved knowledge, good practice, experience and training throughout the global wildfire community for the benefit of all.

3) Proposal “Adoption of Voluntary Guidelines for Fire Aviation”

The “International Fire Aviation Working Group” (IFAWG) recommends the adoption of voluntary guidelines for the use of aerial means in wildfire management in the UNECE region and globally, in order to improve the safety, effectiveness and efficiency of fire aviation. Adoption of the guidelines would ideally form part of a wider agreement on international cooperation aimed at enhancing fire management capability within the region. The overall purpose of the proposal is to make a substantial contribution to building resilience that will reduce loss of life and damage resulting from wildfires.

4) White Paper "Fire Management Policies and International Cooperation in Fire Management in the UNECE Region"

The White Paper identifies the major forces of environmental and socio-economic changes affecting current and future fire regimes and the challenges to be prepared for. It concludes that international cooperation in the UNECE region and globally has the potential to be a very powerful tool in increasing the capability for the wildfire threat and the role of natural and management-set fire to be better understood and regulated. The ties that can be formed through improved international cooperation can, and must, have effect at the ground level and impact on the real management of the landscape to be of any value. Drawing on, and improving upon existing examples of legally-binding and voluntary international agreements, the proposals tabled at the UNECE/FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management have the potential to progress this goal substantially. The White Paper provides a concise set of conclusions and recommendations derived from the studies and consultations during the preparatory process of the Forum.

Recommendations

After 33 years of work the mission of the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire has been accomplished. In this period the work of the Team expanded to global level by creation of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and the Global Wildland Fire Network and has been effective in advising development of national and regional fire management policies, and implementing capacity building in fire management at all levels. Keeping this in mind, the work of the ToS will continue within the six Regional Wildland Fire Networks covering the UNECE Region, and, by including other regions of the world, support the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: "Building the resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters" through the Global Wildland Fire Network, the Wildland Fire Advisory Group and the Global Fire Monitoring Center as its Secretariat.

1) Promote the understanding of and the response to the transboundary effects of fire

The cross-boundary effects of wildfires require jurisdictions at all levels to cooperate in fire management and to define collective solutions. While prime emphasis should be given to cooperation in fire management between jurisdictions sharing common borders, the long-range consequences of fire emissions are calling for strengthening existing and, if necessary, developing additional protocols addressing the reduction of adverse consequences of wildfire at international level. This call is supported by the UNECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP) and the recommendations from the international congress "Forest Fire and Climate Change" (Novosibirsk, 11-12 November 2013).

2) Expanding the scope and strengthening of international cooperation in fire management

The formal phasing out of the Team of Specialists coincides with the current and with foreseeable future increase of wildfire problems globally. This combination of factors inspires the call for further development of the voluntary and institutional regulatory framework directly tasked with building resilience of nations and communities within the UNECE region to wildfire emergencies and disasters by enhancing national and collective regional fire management capability through international cooperation.

This is calling for the development of a voluntary regulatory institutional and policy framework aimed at building resilience of nations and communities within the UNECE region.

3) Application of a holistic approach to wildland fire management

Any recommended measures in building resilience of nations and communities to wildfire require an holistic approach to integrated fire management and wildfire risk reduction. This approach must include activities directed at wildland fire prevention, preparedness, response and post-fire recovery and restoration at landscape level including all ecosystem types, land uses and land tenure. Emphasis should be given on people-centered (participatory) approaches.

4) Adoption and continued development of the International Wildfire Support Mechanism (IWSM) and the Voluntary Fire Aviation Guidelines

The Forum proposes to establish an International Wildfire Support Mechanism (IWSM) for the UNECE Region and globally, that will assist nations to improve their capacity and resilience to wildfire. The mechanism will provide a platform / framework from which to cascade improved knowledge, good practice, experience and training throughout the global wildfire community for the benefit of all.

Furthermore, the Forum recommends that UNECE member states adopt in principle the Draft Fire Aviation Guidelines and support their continued development. The Forum recommends that in order to fully realize the potential benefits of consistent and standardized approaches in this field, the global wildland fire community also consider adoption of the guidelines.¹

5) Support the International Wildland Fire Conference Series

The UN System has supported the International Wildland Fire Conference (IWFC) series through the auspices of UNISDR and FAO and, in particular, the North American Forestry Commission – Fire Management Working Group (NAFC-FMWG) and the International Liaison Committee (a subcommittee of the NAFC-FMWG), which oversees the IWFC series. The Forum recommends that any future UN-based Secretariat on Global Wildland Fire continue its support of the IWFC series, including the upcoming 6th IWFC being hosted by the Republic of Korea in October 2015.

6) Explore options for the transition from voluntary rules to a more formalized regulatory framework

Considering the increasing impacts and damages of fire on the one side, and the required investments in building fire management capacities at global level on the other side, the option should be explored of whether a strengthened mechanism should evolve from the currently existing voluntary framework to a more formalized framework under the auspices of and support by the United Nations taking into consideration, and supportive of, bilateral and regional frameworks.

The Global Wildland Fire Network over the past decade has been promoting fire management and networking which is appropriate to continue and expand its role as the overarching framework at the global level to host a new, strengthened global mechanism of cooperation in fire management. This framework should ensure that voluntary initiatives and the wealth of experience of individual, national, regional and international actors be utilized and shared.

It is proposed to explore options to establish a UN Secretariat mandated with the implementation of a global fire management programme that should have a key role in facilitating the free and open global transfer of knowledge. A key task of such a Secretariat would be to host and implement the proposed International Wildfire Support Mechanism (IWSM) and the maintenance and application of the Fire Aviation Guidelines. It will be built on a common, coordinated approach with the UN agencies and programmes and those of other international organizations that are mandated or involved in addressing the problems. Funding for the secretariat and its associated Global Wildland Fire Network, the Regional Wildland Fire Networks and the emerging Regional Fire Management Resource Centers must be secured.

7) Seek interest of UN Organizations

The UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire to jointly prepare a set of possible organizational scenarios that will ensure that the successful work it has carried out so far will not be interrupted, creating a vacuum, but will rather go global with a new mandate and a different setup. Based on these scenarios the leader of the Team will approach and seek the interest of UN organizations. The results of the consultation could be discussed at a team of specialists meeting to be organized before July 2014.

¹ Note: The current draft of the Fire Aviation Guidelines, as presented at the Forum, needs to be completed. The recommendation to adopt the guidelines is based on the consideration that the details of the Guidelines are still evolving and the Guidelines are considered to be a living document in which details will be changed as deemed appropriate.