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Contact: Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov

Press@ceq.eop.gov

Press@oc.usda.gov

Obama Administration Outlines New Strategy to Better Protect Communities, Businesses and Public and Private Lands from the Threat of Wildland Fire Ahead of 2014 Fire Season

WASHINGTON—As the 2014 wildfire season approaches, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, and Council on Environmental Quality Acting Chair Mike Boots today released the Administration’s [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#). This strategy, developed by federal, state, tribal and local community partners, and public stakeholders, outlines new approaches to coordinate and integrate efforts to restore and maintain healthy landscapes, prepare communities for fire season, and better address the nation’s wildland fire threats.

“Through more strategic coordination with local communities, the National Cohesive Strategy will help us better protect the 46 million homes in 70,000 communities along the wildland-urban interface from catastrophic wildfires,” said Secretary Vilsack. “This effort, combined with the Administration’s newly proposed wildland fire management funding strategy, will allow USDA and our partners to more effectively restore forested landscapes, treat forests for the increasing effects of climate change, and help avert and minimize destructive future wildfires.

“The National Cohesive Strategy is the result of an ongoing partnership that is providing us with a collaborative roadmap for how we better work together – across federal, tribal, state and local governments and with our NGO partners – to effectively manage landscapes,” said Secretary Jewell. “Relying on a science-based approach to managing risks, this effort embodies the type of intergovernmental coordination that citizens and communities expect. The framework provided will help guide informed policy and decision-making while increasing our resilience and sustaining our resources.”

"As climate change spurs extended droughts and longer fire seasons, this collaborative wildfire blueprint will help us restore forests and rangelands to make communities less vulnerable to catastrophic fire," said Acting Chair Boots. "With President Obama's Climate Action Plan, the Administration is committed to promoting smart policies and partnerships like this strategy that support states, communities, businesses, farmers, ranchers and other stakeholders who are

working to protect themselves from more frequent or intense fires, droughts and floods, and other impacts of climate change."

The Strategy includes both national strategic planning and regionally-specific assessment and risk analysis to address such factors as climate change, increasing community sprawl, and pests and disease affecting forest health across landscapes, regardless of ownership. Approaches include:

- Adopting preventive measures, such as fuels thinning and controlled burns;
- Promoting effective municipal, county and state building and zoning codes and ordinances;
- Ensuring that watersheds, transportation and utility corridors are part of future management plans; and
- Determining how organizations can best work together to reduce and manage human-caused ignitions.

The comprehensive principles and processes highlighted in the strategy have already been implemented successfully in some areas of the country, such as the Blue Mountains near Flagstaff, Arizona and the Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners in Georgia. The Strategy will encourage knowledge sharing between communities and expand best practices to other projects and locations across the country.

"As we move into implementation, it is important to note that this collaborative effort is broader and more inclusive than previous efforts," said National Association of State Foresters' President and Alaska State Forester Chris Maisch. "It is national in scope, includes all lands, is grounded in a science-based risk analysis, and built with an emphasis on the field level perspective."

In addition to the Strategy, the President's fiscal year 2015 budget, released in March, outlines a new framework for funding fire suppression. The budget updates how fire suppression costs are budgeted by treating extreme fires like other natural disasters. This change will stabilize U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior budgets, provide stable support for fire suppression, and allow the agencies to invest in fuels management, preparedness, restoration and other land management activities critical to the success of the National Cohesive Strategy.

Together, these actions support the Obama Administration's [Climate Action Plan](#)'s call to reduce wildfire risks. The impacts of a changing climate on wildland fire risk management are observable in the form of extended drought periods, longer fire seasons, timber stands that are susceptible to insect infestation and mortality, and greater rates of fire spread, all of which can contribute to larger and more complex and costly incidents. These impacts challenge the fire community to provide more annual coverage and response capability for a longer period of time, as well as maintain a high initial attack success rate on faster growing fires, all while managing incidents of unprecedented size and complexity. Improving the resilience of landscapes will make natural areas and communities less vulnerable to catastrophic fire.

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