

Wildland Fire Leadership Council Meeting

March 5, 2018, 10 am – 3:30 pm

Washington DC

U.S. Department of the Interior Room 3447

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

Meeting Purpose:

Attendees:

Council Members or alternates: Jim Cason (DOI), Dan Jiron (USDA), Tony Tooke (USFS), P. Dan Smith (NPS), Erik Litzenberg (IAFC), Vern Stearns (ITC), George Geissler (NGA), Mike Nedd (BLM), Anne Kinsinger (USGS), Jim Kurth (FWS), Keith Bryant (FEMA/USFA), Bryan Rice (BIA), Jim Karels (NASF), Kyle Moses (DoD), James C. Ross (DoD), John Suthers (NLC), Dan Shoun (NACo), Patrick Holmes (WGA), Mike Zupko (Executive Director).

Partners and Support Staff: Harry Humbert, Vicki Christiansen, Jeff Rupert, Gary Wood, Brett Lacey, Shawna Legarza, Paul Steblein, Pete Wakeland, Tami Defries, Patti Blankenship, Jim Durglo, Ann Walker, Genevieve Giaccardo, Erin Connelly, Bob Eaton, Erica Kuligowski, Bill Hahnenberg, Frank Fay, Meg Nakahara, Craig Leff, Maureen Brooks, Shawn Stokes, Katie Lighthall, Dave Celino, Rick Obernessor, Pete Lahm, Carlos Rodriguez-Franco

On Phone: Dan Shoun, Patrick Holmes, Larry Mastic, Jeff Whitney, John Hall, Colin Hardy

VTC: Erin Horsburgh, Steve Manthei, Henry Bastian, Mark Bathrick

Meeting Summary:

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Jim Cason (DOI), Dan Jiron (USDA), Mike Nedd (BLM), Tony Tooke (USDA Forest Service), Bryan Rice (BIA), Dan Smith (NPS) and Anne Kinsinger (USGS).

- The focus of the meeting is principally on preparation for 2018 fire season. Early Pre-positioning resources, communications, and any other issues need to be worked out.
- Culture change is needed to reduce the amount of sexual harassment across all agencies, with focus on fire.
 - Agency representatives from DOI and USDA acknowledge harassment issues are present, change needs to happen, and highlight measures that they have taken to create culture change.
 - Acknowledgement that much more work is needed to create lasting change.
 - It's important for all agencies and partners to work together to create consistency in dealing with harassment.
- Mental health issues stemming from stressful work environment among firefighters need to be addressed.

2018 OUTLOOK AND JOINT PREPAREDNESS STATUS

PowerPoint presentation given by Shawna Legarza and Jeff Rupert, followed by group discussion.

Objective: WFLC will gain an understanding of the 2018 fire year outlook, key issues being addressed from 2017, status of resources across all partners, current initiatives to support wildland fire response, land management issues that may impact wildfire response and consider joint strategic opportunities to address and engage across all partners.

Discussion:

- Above normal activity is expected in 2018.
- Challenges are suppression funding, transition to active management, hiring processes and workforce development, recruitment/retention, and agency alignment with local resources.
- Resource numbers are comparable from last year to 2018 for both Forest Service and DOI. Resources are being appropriately prepositioned.
- It's more appropriate to use the term "fire year" instead of "fire season."
 - Discussion as to whether "fire year" should be formally adopted.
 - Calendar year was agreed upon by the membership as appropriate.
- International training occurs annually with both DOI and USDA and there is an opportunity for additional use of international resources if necessary in the future.

Next steps:

- Jeff Rupert, Shawna Legarza and Bureau heads are tasked with listing specific issues that impede proper hiring procedures, with a distinction between management and policy issues, and have it prepared for next WFLC meeting.
- Jeff Rupert and Shawna Legarza are tasked with assessing veteran hiring efforts. What is the current situation, what is the goal and what is the opportunity to utilize veterans further?
- Harry Humbert and Mike Zupko are tasked with writing up a proposal for possible "fire year" terminology adoption based around the calendar year.

ACTIVE MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVING FOREST CONDITION

Objective: WFLC will collectively identify opportunities to improve ecosystem health and reduce risk from wildfires through increased use of fuels management, hazard fuels reduction and harvesting across federal lands.

Discussion:

- Currently, there is no integrated strategy for increasing active management across agencies and partners. There was discussion around how to better work across boundaries and match/leverage joint priorities.

- Rehabilitation of milling, logging infrastructure is necessary to keep pace with active management backlog.
- Montana is working within the FS region on a policy framework for interagency collaboration to achieve active management goals. Patrick Holmes will share with WFLC in the next few weeks. It serves as an extension of the WGA Forests and Rangelands Initiative.
- There is a need for a cogent story and an integrated way to look at risk reduction. It will aid in good decision making for investments.

Next Steps:

- Harry Humbert, Vicki Christiansen, and Anne Kinsinger are tasked with proposing methodologies to better coordinate federal, tribal, state and local organizations in reducing fuels and wildfire risk through the use of active management.
- Include knowledge of utility corridors, already managed areas, and areas that are not managed or have a higher risk of fire.
- The end-product should be a risk management tool (a mapping tool) with scalability.
- An update will be given at the next WFLC meeting, but the end product will not be expected.

RESEARCH, DATA, AND TOOLS TO INFORM PRIORITIES

PowerPoint presentation given by Anne Kinsinger and Paul Steblein, followed by group discussion.

Objective: Review existing research and science products for applicability to current administration and WFLC priorities. Evaluate potential gaps and needs in strategic areas to help inform the decision process. Review maps and tools that support the active management priority to show the ability to utilize research, data and tools to inform strategic decision-making processes. Consider additional priorities that can be informed by joint production of data and tools.

Discussion:

- Many tools exist and are being used to collect data to improve resiliency of landscapes; e.g. LIDAR and laser imaging.
- LANDFIRE and GEOMAC data is valuable and available for everyone.
- There is an opportunity to better link data to help tell the story (to both the Hill and the public) around active management and other joint priorities.
- Local data needs to be integrated into larger systems; powerline, right of way, highway, conservation area data would be important for decision making.
- Scalability is key to move from the 30,000-foot level to more local decision making.
- Understanding various perceptions around risk and how to collectively define is necessary to come closer together on decision-making.

Next Steps:

- Use of already available technologies added to risk management tool assignment.
- Brett Lacey was task with developing suggestions to create relationships to better engage local authorities across boundaries to help reduce risk. This should include identification of the challenges and proposing solutions and joint risk mapping and policy tools to accomplish the necessary work.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND INTEGRATION INTO THE WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Jeff Rupert presents with Erin Horsburgh, Steve Manthei, Henry Bastian and Mark Bathrick, followed by group discussion.

Objective: Gain an understanding of current information and technology systems and coordination within wildland fire. Evaluate best practices around the use of unmanned aerial systems. Consider how WFLC might evaluate specific cross agency/partner coordination, understand gaps and build opportunities to advance technology integration between partners.

Discussion:

- WFIT portfolio overview given, technology summary and initiatives.
- It's important to understand the business process behind the IT product.
- UAS program highlights are given. There is an expected increase for usage in 2018.
- Interagency UAS Operations Guide is ready to be signed by FS and DOI.

Next Steps:

- Jeff Rupert is tasked with sharing the 5 Year WFIT Strategic Investment Plan to the WFLC.
- Harry Humbert and Vicki Christiansen are tasked with creating a framework for common UAS processes, or a joint UAS policy framework.
 - Rollout should occur at next WFLC meeting.

MITIGATING POST FIRE IMPACTS – STABILIZATION, REHABILITATION AND RESTORATION

Objective: Consider opportunities to further the pace and scale of post fire activities to mitigate impacts due to wildfires. Evaluate hurdles and challenges related to emergency stabilization, rehabilitation and restoration of impacted lands and determine a pathway to address.

Discussion:

- Backlog of post fire stabilization and rehabilitation projects is astronomical.
- Funding is a challenge.
- Messaging is important for the budgetary process.

Next Steps:

- Stabilization and rehabilitation issues and messaging added to active management assignment.
- Further consideration will occur at upcoming WFLC meetings.

SMOKE MANAGEMENT AND AIR QUALITY RELATED ISSUES

PowerPoint presentation given by Pete Lahm, followed by group discussion.

Objective: WFLC will hear an update of activities ongoing around smoke management, air quality and increasing the use of prescribed fire. This will allow WFLC to identify additional engagement points and strategies to provide policy input and education in a favorable direction to increase use of prescribed fire.

Discussion:

- Relationship building with the EPA is important at multiple levels.
- Helping the general public understand prescribed fire is necessary.
- Annual mortality rate from wildland fire smoke is expected to increase.
- Smoke management data goes beyond emissions; smoke from fire can become a global pollutant.
- Prescribed fire smoke data v. wildfire smoke data needs to be examined.
- Agreement to expand the WFLC relationship with NWS and move forward with the request for increasing access to 1 KM grids.

Next Steps:

- Zupko evaluate how to further examine the prescribed fire versus wildfire topic to include the science behind it as well as key talking points.
- Zupko prepare a general briefing for WFLC leadership to connect with NWS leadership including the 1 KM grid opportunity.

ROUND ROBIN

Discussion:

- Local resources need to be captured and engaged for benefit in all facets discussed.
- There is an opportunity to integrate IAFC NMAS with IROC in the development phases to better capture local resource availability for response.
- Mental and physical health and wellness of firefighters is an important aspect that needs to be addressed. A legislative solution is potentially necessary.
- Work environment and culture must be addressed.

Next Steps:

- Mike Zupko is tasked with writing a Leaders' Intent memo to address workplace harassment and culture change to be circulated to the WFLC.

Public Comment

- Frank Fay offered to brief WFLC on LANDFIRE.
- Ann Walker discussed RFI and NIROPS missed opportunities in counties and states.
- Dave Celino brought up the issue of liability and litigation impacting the ability for some states to be able to respond to federal fires outside of their geographical area.

Closeout

- Next meeting tentatively planned for second or third week of June. (June 12 and 13 has since been set for Colorado Springs.)