

**Wildland Fire Leadership Council**  
**Conference Call – VIA ZOOM**  
**April 8, 2021. 1000 am – 1256 pm EDT**

**CALL SUMMARY – via ZOOM**

**Council Members (Principals or alternates)**

Rachael Taylor (DOI), Chris French (USFS), Robert Bonnie (USDA), Vicki Christiansen (USFS), Michael Nedd (BLM), Cynthia Martinez (USFWS), Johnna Blackhair (BIA), Jennifer Flynn (NPS), David Applegate (USGS), Ryan Orndorff (DOD), Tonya Hoover (DHS-FEMA), Erik Litzenberg (IAFC), Vernon Stearns (ITC), Mayor John Suthers (NLC), Matt Kingsley (NaCO), George Geissler (NASF), Sam Eaten (Gov. Brad Little – WGA), Laura McCarthy (Gov. Lujan-Grisham – NGA), and Mike Zupko (WFLC Executive Director). RSC representatives, senior staff and other interested participants were also on the call.

**Meeting Objective:** The meeting was focused on allowing the WFLC principals or their designated alternates to discuss lessons learned from the 2020 fire year, the 2021 fire year outlook, the Administration's priorities, and smoke management and air quality issues.

**Opening Remarks** – Chair, Chris French, Acting Under Secretary, USDA, Deputy Chief of Staff and Climate Advisor, Robert Bonnie, USDA, and Co-Chair, Rachael Taylor, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, DOI offered welcome remarks.

**Roll Call of Principals/Alternates by organization** – Mike Zupko, Executive Director, WFLC, conducted the roll-call for the principals for each organization represented.

**Agenda Review and Call/Zoom process** – Zupko briefly reviewed the agenda, the intent of the meeting to focus on the upcoming fire year, smoke management, and the Administration priorities, and gave a brief overview of how to use the Zoom technology to help in facilitation of presentations and discussions of the WFLC principals.

**Approval of Past WFLC Meeting and Call Minutes and Notes** – **There was a motion, second and unanimous approval of the following WFLC minutes and notes from the previous WFLC engagement:**

WFLC Call December 3, 2020

**WFLC Overview and Mission** Zupko briefly gave an overview of WFLC, the history of additional partners added, and discussed the mission and most recent MOU signed 4 years ago. There are 19 defined members at this time.

**Vision for WFLC upcoming Year** Chair, Chris French, Acting Under Secretary, USDA discussed some key areas for WFLC to focus on, including learning from interagency wildfire response to COVID and how we start to change the dynamic of increasing wildfires every year by reducing the risk and educating communities. French discussed an all-in approach to try to create some shifts and change for the problem we are facing. Co-Chair, Rachael Taylor, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, DOI discussed the emphasis on firefighter safety and the importance of WFLC acting as a convener for these issues to accomplish our goals.

## **2021 Fire Year Outlook / 2020 Fire Year Strategic Roundtable**

**Objective:** Build a shared vision for the upcoming fire year in 2021 while leveraging understanding of lessons from 2020.

**Outcomes:** Develop a collective understanding of the current outlook for 2021, key issues to consider, applicability of lessons learned from 2020 (e.g. COVID mitigation application) and expand opportunities for strategic coordination across the WFLC membership as it relates to wildfire response in 2021 and beyond. Additionally, consideration of joint messaging engagement across and among the WFLC membership and federal departments.

- Jeff Rupert, DOI, provided opening remarks and an overview of what would be covered in the presentation. He discussed the 2020 fire activity and showed the total acres/fires by agency. The large fires were more geographically dispersed than previous years which added to the complications of COVID.
- Patty Grantham, USFS, touched on the support aspects of 2020, including international support to Australia, military and international support to the US, and 2021 COVID vaccination ESF#4.
- George Geissler, NASF, emphasized how important interagency cooperation and personal relationships can be. George also outlined several lessons from 2020, lessons we can carry over for 2021, and the fire outlook for 2021.
- Zupko outlined some strategic themes: interagency cooperation/relationships, joint communication, and community engagement.

### **Smoke Management and Air Quality:**

**Objective:** Review new research findings, evaluate how to utilize the findings, develop joint engagements to increase the use of prescribed fire as a management tool and enhance relationships across the land management, fire management, public health, and regulatory structures to improve the resiliency of landscapes to wildfire while minimizing air quality impacts.

**Outcomes:** Identification of additional opportunities for jointly understanding of tradeoffs between prescribed fire versus wildfire, increased opportunity for supporting and providing insight into state and national engagements around increased use of prescribed fire across the national, daylighting and considering ways to increase quality and consistency of data that drives decision making processes both nationally and locally to prepare communities for smoke.

#### **EPA Comparative Assessment of the Impacts of Prescribed Fire Versus Wildfire (CAIF): A Case Study in the Western U.S.**

**Objective:** General understanding of CAIF including structure, status, findings, timeline and an opportunity to provide feedback and reflection as EPA goes out with peer review process for publishing.

**Outcomes:** Introduction to the study for newer WFLC members, update for existing WFLC members and an opportunity to provide feedback to EPA key staff and ability to offer insight into land management and federal, state, tribal and local needs, concerns, and ability to utilize the findings post peer review.

- Dr. Wayne Cascio, EPA, gave an overview of the CAIF report, opening remarks on the intent of the assessment and their perspective for use and coordination going forward.

**(ATTACHMENT X)**

- Jason Sacks, EPA, described the 4 sections of the CAIF report (context, modeling, analysis, and interpretation/integration). The direct fire effects, smoke impacts, and potential mitigation were discussed as well as the approach of the analysis.
- Some of the key insights of the case study analysis include: smoke impacts are dependent on proximity to population centers, predicted concentrations of PM2.5 from prescribed fires are smaller in magnitude and shorter in duration than hypothetical scenarios or actual wildfires, ozone had minimal air quality and public health impacts in case study areas, short duration/size wildfires not near large population centers can still result in public health impacts, well designed prescribed fires targeted for specific locations can potentially reduce the size and resulting air quality and public health impacts of future wildfires, and communicating the benefits of actions and interventions that can be used to mitigate or reduce PM2.5 exposures can contribute to reducing the public health impacts attributed to wildland fire smoke.
- Nedd: Comment on consideration of incorporating non-forested areas (rangelands).
- One of the hopes in the beginning is how we can mitigate better. Developing some scenarios of the impact of coordinated messaging campaigns.
- Comment on bringing in invasive species and cheatgrass into the modeling.
- McCarthy: It will take new partnerships than WFLC current has to get this messaging out to a broader audience (American Lung Association and medical associations for example). Through the America Burning project there have been new partnerships with planning organizations which are very productive and we can learn from bringing in early other partners to enhance impact.
- Potential linkage to chemical composition for WUI smoke.
- Q: if the ideal level of treatments had occurred what would be the impact on wildfire? Not yet looked at.
- Additional extensions to the study and findings will be consolidated in the coming month.

#### **CDC Health Impact Assessment:**

- Dr. Pat Breyse provided a status update, overview, and discussed coordination with WFLC members going forward on the CDC Health Impact Assessment for smoke impacts. **(ATTACHMENT X)**
- Full results in 12-18 months are expected.

#### **State Engagements:**

- Pete Lahm, USFS, discussed the Regional Haze Rule and State Implementation Plan Submittal.
- McCarthy, NM/NGA, discussed the politics of smoke and how this work was able to combat the misnomers from political actors.
- Geissler, WA/NASF, discussed the smoke management plans and the shifting social license for prescribed burning.

#### **• National Engagement opportunities:**

- Continued communication opportunities (*Attachment*)
- Smoke Ready opportunities, Air Quality Awareness Week
- American Thoracic Society Wildfire and Smoke Conference (Cascio, Rupert)

- Rupert discussed a previous report on the respiratory impacts of smoke and the importance of having partnerships outside of wildland fire. Reinforcing that we are on the right trajectory of expanding partnerships.

### **Importance of Wildland Fire Activity Data and Emissions**

- Zupko gave an overview WFLC data nuances workgroup and upcoming recommendations in the coming months.
- Pete Lahm discussed the data nuance issue regarding emissions. These impacts do not solely stay here, but impacts are felt internationally as well.

### **Administration Priorities:**

**Objective:** Share administration vision for key priorities and explore opportunities for WFLC to help facilitate expansion of the vision across federal, state, tribal and local partners.

**Outcomes:** Develop a broad understanding of where the administration plans to take several relevant priorities in the upcoming months and years and identify potential intersect with WFLC existing activities or begin designing new opportunities for WFLC in the development of these issues.

- Taylor discussed the President's Job Plan and budget. There is tremendous opportunity, but lacking details at this juncture. Placeholder conversation for big picture priorities.
- Important to think about wildland fire through the job creation lens. Professionalization of firefighters, climate change, etc. These are good opportunities but very important to focus on collaboration in light of the challenges.
- Bonnie stated the Administration has asked for fire briefing. There is White House interest in this topic because of the scale of the problem, but also the link to climate change. We all know this is an expensive endeavor. This has to be all hands all lands.
- Taylor discussed the need to look at how we can provide technical assistance for growth in the Tribal sector and the enthusiasm on the Hill. Robert Bonnie discussed the growing conversations around resources and the CCC. There is more to come on this.
- Bonnie stated from USDA standpoint the resources around NRCS and Joint Chiefs there is going to be a lot of interest in working with conservation districts and across landscapes including tribes. Looking to continue to build these partnerships and upon the work of Shared Stewardship.
- Stearns discussed the Secretarial Orders occur and that knowing who to communicate with for Tribes would be helpful to ensure the success or partnerships. Rachael Taylor indicated connecting with Jeff Rupert and her for a connection at DOI. Robert Bonnie indicated they prepared to work with them to ensure this success as well.
- Question related to the Cohesive Strategy was posed regarding communications. Robert Bonnie indicated a need to avoid the polarizing rhetoric and to center around the commonalities and bring the public along and all work together.
- Litzenberg discussed the opportunity to leverage technology to get this accomplished on a mass scale if we prioritize communications to communities.
- Kinsinger indicated the resilient landscape goal of the Cohesive Strategy is very relevant to the economy, environmental justice, and other priorities of the Administration.
- McCarthy posed a question around homelessness and water supply impacts, and more generally about the lack of direct funding streams for those disproportionately impacted by wildfires. Rachael Taylor indicated this issue seems to reach into FEMA and other partners beyond land

management to look at that. She also pointed to EO 13994 on data collection to be able to pinpoint the disparities in potential decisions. Getting the right data and crossing it with the resources available is key to this issue.

- Christiansen commented that mapping risk in the rural areas versus the urban areas is very different. We need to have a more common interest and understanding of where disadvantage and disengaged communities are. Good work being done here that this group should continue to engage on.

### **Additional WFLC Policy Priorities – Status Update**

- America Burning: WUI
- National Invasive Species Council coordination
- Mitigating Post Fire Impacts
- Large Landscape, Cross-boundary framework and criteria

Due to limited time, Zupko will provide a brief written status report for the above WFLC policy priorities in lieu of reporting out.

**Public Comment:** There was no public comment brought forth from non-WFLC participants.

Zupko closed out describing the America Burning project which might be the topic of the next WFLC engagement over the upcoming month or so. The co-chairs thanked everyone for their participation and look forward to future engagement. The meeting was then adjourned.