



WILDLAND FIRE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Wildland Fire Leadership Council Meeting

October 17-18, 2023

Tenaya at Yosemite

1122 CA-41, Fish Camp, CA 93623

Attendees

Council Members or Alternates:

Joan Mooney (DOI), Homer Wilkes (USDA), Meryl Harrell (USDA), Johnna Blackhair (BIA), Ara Andrea (WGA), Erika Sasser (EPA), Nicole LaRosa (FEMA-USFA), Erik Svendsen (CDC), Jennifer Flynn (NPS), Rich Elliot (IAFC), George Geissler (NASF), Matt Kinglsey (NACo), Cody Desautel (ITC), David Applegate (USGS), Tami DeFries (BLM), Ed Christopher (FWS), David Lytle (USFS), Eric Letvin (FEMA), Anne Jewell (DoD), Mike Zupko (WFLC Executive Director), RSC representatives, senior staff and other interested participants were also in attendance.

Opening Remarks and Introductions

Chair, Joan Mooney, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, DOI

Co-Chair, Meryl Harrell, Deputy Under Secretary, USDA

Homer Wilkes, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, USDA

Jenn Flynn, Associate Director of Visitor and Resource Protection, NPS

Mike Zupko, Executive Director, WFLC

Welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the local leaders for the fire tour of Yosemite on the 17th. Mike Zupko asked everyone to go around the room and introduce themselves.

Agenda Review and Administration

- WFLC Executive Director Mike Zupko reviewed the meeting agenda, intentions, and goals.
- The June 6, 2023, minutes from the meeting in Washington, D.C. were unanimously approved.



Yosemite Fire Tour Reflections and Take Aways

- The tour highlighted the importance of relationships incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into fire mitigation and management.
- The NPS fire program could serve as an excellent model for fuels management that could be replicated in other areas of the federal government.
- Participants were impressed by the level of scientific and technical knowledge on display with the prescribed burn in Yosemite Valley on October 17, 2023.
- The tour demonstrated how effective fire is for achieving multiple goals
- The tour highlighted the massive scale of the problem we are facing and the sheer number of acres that we need to burn to protect communities.
- The Park is able to show domestic and international visitors the importance of prescribed burning for land management to gain further social acceptance of prescribed burning.
 - Discussion topic during the field trip: How can we create this awareness across the country? How can we spread the message to communities that don't live with fire?

Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Overview and Discussion

Speakers: Annie Schmidt and Tyson Bertone-Riggs, Commission Coordinators

The commission coordinators provided an overview of the Commission's report. A number of WFLC members also served on the Commission. This presentation helped all members to understand the overall themes of the findings and recommendations in the report. The presenters reported that there has been bipartisan support for the Commission's report to Congress: the coordinators are seeing interest from several Congressional offices and the fire caucuses. Commission members remain empaneled from September 2023 until March 2024 (6 months after the report was submitted to Congress).

During the meeting a number of WFLC members expressed interest in action, and in identifying ways to support action. The co-chair agencies discussed recent actions their respective departments have taken to activate on the Commission's work, and discussed additional ways that agencies and partners can work with others, including within WFLC, to use the report's findings and recommendations to inspire action.

Members discussed identifying WFLC-related recommendations included in the report and how to move those forward, and identifying alignment between the Commission report and WFLC ongoing strategic priorities. Members discussed how WFLC can support and further the work of the Commission related to ongoing WFLC priorities. One federal agency suggested that all



federal agencies could coordinate on a budget request related to the Commission's recommendations.

The discussion also highlighted that the departments are currently resourced for the existing requirements, and that the report's 148 recommendations to Congress are a cohesive set of recommendations that will require action from Congress. "No unfunded mandates" was a key component of the report.

The discussion as a whole highlighted that WFLC's workplan for the next year can anchor to both Commission recommendations and findings, and to the Cohesive Strategy. WFLC leadership will continue to stay engaged with the Commission so actions are complementary.

Discussion of Specific Potential Action Items from Three WFLC Priorities

During this session, WFLC members worked to define and refine specific potential actions under three of the WFLC priorities (*Cohesive Strategy Messaging, Proactive Use of Fire, and Science, Data and Technology*). Discussion focused on the following:

- 1. Cohesive Strategy**
 - a. National and Regional Outreach and Engagement (1 year plan)
- 2. Proactive Use of Fire**
 - a. Smoke and public health messaging – messengers (science/research)
 - b. Understanding and building from cultural burning knowledge (shared learning/cross jurisdictional)
 - c. Scaling up the size and pace of prescribed fire (shared learning/cross jurisdictional)
 - d. Better integration of public health with wildland fire (collaboration/possible co-convening)
- 3. Science, Data and Technology**
 - a. Identification of specific topics for urgent coordination within WFLC scope (possible feeder to a workshop)

Cohesive Strategy Problem Statement Discussion Highlights:

- There are gaps in exposure to and understanding of the Cohesive Strategy.
- How can we operationalize the Cohesive Strategy? How are we measuring accomplishments?
- There are no shared agreements on language or how we talk about things in this space.
- There are opportunities for local departments to interact with the Cohesive Strategy to close knowledge gaps.



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Cohesive Strategy Outcomes:

- WFLC serves as the “custodian” of the Cohesive Strategy. To convene around a shared direction and agree upon desired outcomes.
- Opportunity to build joint products that members can utilize including talking points and brief presentations that members can utilize.
- Development of a CS “Implementation Guide”
- Shared/agreed upon language and how we talk about things is one of the most important agreements that can come out of WFLC, so we do not confuse the public or other entities.
- There is a responsibility of each WFLC member/alternate to take back agreed upon language/messaging and work to integrate it into their agency/organization. Expectations must be set at the leadership level.
- Engagement opportunities can anchor to the Commission report and Cohesive Strategy areas for focus, including engaging across the natural and built environment and focusing on equity in engaging communities to support operationalizing the Cohesive Strategy.

DECISIONS: Cohesive Strategy outreach and engagement:

- **SUPPORTED:** Create a package of 5–10-minute presentations that can be tailored to specific audiences to close the gaps in exposure to and understanding of the Cohesive Strategy and how it can be operationalized. Test out the newly created package of presentations on a couple audiences and incorporate feedback into the presentations. (Example audiences include: line leadership, local fire departments, etc.)
- **SUPPORTED:** Create a terminology/key terms worksheet that can be used as a reference and folded into the newly created package of presentations.
- **SUPPORTED:** Create a one-pager of talking points and FAQs for people not familiar with the Cohesive Strategy to reduce the gaps in understanding and also how to operationalize CS.
- **SUPPORTED:** Create a 2024 calendar year rollout plan that members can activate with constituents.

Proactive Use of Fire Problem Statement Discussion Highlights:

- There are gaps in exposure to and understanding of the proactive use of fire in general.
- There are gaps in exposure to and understanding of the proactive use of fire by Tribes.
- There are opportunities for shared messaging around public health impacts of the proactive use of fire.
- There are opportunities to create access to prescribed fire qualifications and training.

Proactive Use of Fire Outcomes:

- WFLC can create space for a shared understanding of cultural burning – what is it? How is it different from prescribed burning? What are the variety of values and purposes upheld through cultural burning?



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- WFLC can create space for discussing and sharing learning about current enabling conditions for cultural burning within different jurisdictions and in different geographies, including identifying successes and barriers. WFLC can also highlight the capacity and needs of Tribes related to the proactive use of fire.
- WFLC can engage with technical experts that can translate the scientific research of public health impacts of increased use of fire into communication packages. The desired outcome would be to help WFLC members (1) communicate the impacts of different types of smoke, (2) create a framework of consistent messages around proactive use of fire, (3) identify the investments that would make the biggest impact for people and communities in the short term.
- WFLC can work with academic partners to support a pilot research concept in OR to test out if and how different messaging and messengers for smoke readiness can: 1) create changes in behavior that in fact reduce potential health impacts from smoke; and 2) enable positive relationships with communities and increase the ability to use beneficial fire.

DECISIONS: Proactive Use of Fire:

- **SUPPORTED - Smoke and public health messaging:** Create a small subgroup of WFLC members that will work with Cass Mosley et al. to help the group better understand what questions would benefit from research around consistent, effective messaging around smoke (e.g. “many voices” to reach the public in support of prescribed fire and understanding how to mitigate the impacts of smoke with preplanning).

Volunteers include:

- Joan Mooney, DOI
 - Meryl Harrell, USDA
 - Jeff Rupert, DOI-OWF
 - Johnna Blackhair, DOI-BIA
 - Erika Sasser, EPA
 - Cody Desautel, ITC
 - George Geissler, NASF
 - Erik Svendsen, CDC
- **SUPPORTED – Cultural burning knowledge:** For the Spring WFLC meeting, create space for shared learning about what cultural burning is (including the multiple purposes of cultural burning) and examples of successes and barriers to enabling cultural burning in different jurisdictions, most immediately through a panel or panels. (In developing the agenda, Johnna Blackhair and Cody Desautel offered their knowledge, also volunteering Bill Tripp who was not present at this meeting.) There is also potential to build on the Spring meeting and hold a future WFLC meeting in a place that will allow for additional shared learning about Tribal practices. BIA offered to provide a portfolio of locations



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where Tribes are working to build green infrastructure, have carbon credits, and other related pieces as possible locations.

SUPPORTED – Scaling up the size and pace - Enabling cross-boundary support for prescribed fire: Identify a shared leaders' intent that their organizations work together to overcome barriers to resource ordering and other operational challenges to working across jurisdictional boundaries on prescribed fire. Collectively members present at the fall meeting shared initial support for shared leaders' intent to (1) find pathways for resource sharing, (2) map out barriers to resource sharing, and (3) create solutions to address the identified barriers. The members committed to following up with any other leadership as needed before the December meeting to formally confirm that shared leader's intent. Additionally, members agreed to initiate a conversation around the training and qualifications systems related to the proactive use of fire with a proposed work plan of actions that can be taken in the next year to be started, and discussed at the December meeting.

- George Geissler, NASF volunteered to be the leader in this effort in coordination with the Department of the Interior's Office of Wildland Fire and the US Forest Service.
- WFLC members asked to send subject matter experts to Geissler.
- Anyone else who wants to be part of this workgroup should reach out to Geissler.

SUPPORTED – Better integration of public health with wildland fire: Members agreed that connecting public health across the phases of the cohesive strategy and as it relates to workforce and communities is important. It was agreed that for the Spring 2024 meeting, instead of having a field trip, we create a day of shared learning with the public health community so that together we can build mutual relationships, share updates on collaborative work related to smoke and prescribed fire, and discuss wildfire-related public health impacts to both communities (e.g., water quality and availability, community displacement, etc.) and the fire workforce (physical and mental health). The EPA and CDC would be tasked with leading the organizing efforts for this meeting. CDC asked for feedback from WFLC members as to what aspects of public health would be of the greatest interest to the group. CDC will connect with Wildfire Commission members from the public health working group as well.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *The WFLC members agreed to two separate plans for the Spring 2024 WFLC meeting – (1) create space during the business meeting focused on Tribal proactive use of fire (BIA to lead the organizing efforts), and (2) have an in-house field trip focused on wildfire-related public health impacts to communities and the fire workforce (EPA and CDC to lead the organizing efforts). At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that the spring meeting would take place in Atlanta, GA, with the “field trip” day focused on the public health gathering, with the CDC/EPA leading the organizing effort, and the cultural burning knowledge session to be scheduled during the business meeting on day two.*



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Science, Data, and Technology Problem Statement Discussion Highlights:

- There are opportunities to improve the ability to identify and coordinate science, data, and technology gaps.
- There are opportunities to better convene data collection and management to provide access to decision-makers.
- There are opportunities to better coordinate research in the wildfire space to leverage resources and not duplicate efforts.
- Artificial intelligence has created new opportunities to accelerate data development, enhance analytics of extensive data sets, and create learning models to support wildland fire decision making.
- There are gaps in knowledge around the current infrastructure in place that allows for data sharing, and model development/application, like agreements or funding.

Science, Data, and Technology Outcomes:

- WFLC can create space for better tracking and understanding currently funded fire science and the ability to share the data across WFLC members.
- FLC can daylight some of the information we have related to complementary and duplicative research efforts.
- WFLC can identify urgent gaps and needs in this space (e.g. top research/information coordination needs as identified by WFLC members).

DECISIONS: Science, Data, and Technology

- A proposal was put on the table to convene a WFLC subgroup to plan a synthesis workshop focused on translating science and knowledge to actionable management decisions, in addition to engaging the user communities (understand what is currently being funded, daylight what we know about issues and how to build efficiencies, define the current gaps and top research needs).
- No final decision on that proposal was made: WFLC leadership agreed to take the conversation offline and then continue the discussion about a possible workshop or other next steps during the December WFLC meeting.

Additional WFLC Priorities

- **Mitigating Post Fire Impacts** – The group had a brief sensing conversation about opportunities in the next year to support mitigating post fire impacts, which is another WFLC priority. The group agreed that we should spend time in the December WFLC meeting to further explore WFLC’s comparative advantage and potential engagement points on this topic in the next year. There are also concurrent discussions occurring in the Wildfire Resilience IWG context.



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- **Invasives + Fire** – Brief update on activities since June WFLC meeting (moved to December meeting due to time).
- **All-Lands Workshop and Playbook Development** – Introduction of concept, readout from recent WFLC workshop, sensing of WFLC members.

Speaker: Ara Andrea

- Goal: To help land managers define wildfire resilience planning.
- Problem: We are in a wildfire crisis across all lands. The playbook is a proposed pathway forward to help identify the end goals under the Cohesive Strategy.
- Audience: Everyone who wants to engage in this type of work.
- Next Steps:
 - Steering committee to further synthesize workshop notes.
 - Finalize and implement Playbook Engagement Strategy.
 - Develop a draft playbook.
 - Pilot the draft playbook on a landscape. Incorporate feedback into the revised draft of the playbook.
- Due to time, co-chairs asked that members submit any reflections or recommendations to Mike Zupko via email. Follow up will occur at the December WFLC meeting.

Public Comment

Speaker: Kate Dargan Marquis, Megafire

- Announcement from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation on a new Wildfire Resilience Initiative at the Foundation.
- Initiative is western-US focused, based on the Cohesive Strategy, with the goal of prescribed fire being the primary type of fire in the US. They chose the western-US simply due to the scale of investments needed, the Foundation wanted to target their investments to areas where it will be most useful over the next decade+.
- Core strategies of the initiative:
 - Effective Fire Response - goal by 2028 to deliver real-time fire data within 15 minutes to fire personnel.
 - Resilient Communities – with a focus on counties and cultural issues.
- The intention is to build on existing programs that have proven to be effective, identify gaps in existing programs, report metrics to the Board.
- Offer to extend to WLFC:
 - Offered to enter an MOU between the Moore Foundation and WFLC.
 - Offered to sponsor an executive meeting.

Speaker: Jonathan Bruno, Coalitions and Collaborative in Colorado (COCO)



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- Announcement: COCO is a lead partner for a new program called the Community Navigator's Program through the USFS.
- Intention is to help communities access funding while also providing the tools communities need to be successful in building resilience.

Future Meetings:

- December 2023 meeting:
 - VIRTUAL
- Spring 2024 meeting:
 - In Atlanta, GA
- Summer 2024 meeting:
 - Washington, D.C.
- Fall 2024 meeting:
 - Somewhere in the West

Closing Thoughts:

Speaker: George Geissler, NASF

- Supports Executive Council meeting proposal, we have a lot of momentum on which we could capitalize. We need to take some time to think about the future of WFLC.

Speaker: Erik Svendsen, CDC

- There is data that is available related to the public health impacts of the Canadian wildfires. CDC can work with local communities to quantify the impacts from the Canadian fires.
- He opened the door for anyone to contact the CDC to help coalesce public health impacts from available data.

Speaker: Johnna Blackhair, BIA

- Are there opportunities to better inform our communities of the work being undertaken by WFLC? For example, public announcements of some sort?

Speaker: Ara Andrea, WGA

- On September 6, 2023, the Western Governor's Association sent the House Committee on Agriculture 6 policy briefs and 17 high-priority issues for the WGA, many align with the WFMMC report.
- Co-chair Meryl Harrell asked Ara if she could distribute the 17 high-priority items identified by WGA, and Ara agreed to do so.

Speaker: Joan Mooney, Co-chair, DOI

- One of the things we need to do as WFLC is to pull up the charter that established WFLC to better understand its limits and boundaries. Departments and Agencies are resourced for their current mission, not for the additional tasks from the WFMMC report. We need to build public support if we're going to secure the funding necessary to act on WFMMC recommendations.