

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

NATIONAL COHESIVE WILDLAND FIRE STRATEGY

Podcast: Cohesive Strategy with Ann Walker Western Governors Association

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NARRATOR: You are listening to an *In Brief* podcast –reporting progress toward a National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy.

In this podcast, we hear Ann Walker– representing the Western Governors’ Association and their 60 member Forest Health Advisory Committee –talk about the importance of restoring and maintaining landscape resiliency and the value of collaboration to improve forest health.

In her position with the Western Governors’ Association, She works to build consensus among diverse groups on the topics of forest health, wildfire, invasive species, and biomass utilization from forest residues. She explains what restoring and maintaining landscape resiliency means to the Western Governors.

Ann: Well, to the western governors, it means healthy and functioning forests and rangelands. Forests are vitally important across the nation, and active land management with that landscape resiliency goal would improve forest health and environmental values while increasing economic stability in our western communities. And, the rural communities have been really hit hard with declining timber harvests and the loss of shared revenues from federal lands.

NARRATOR: Ann, describe why this is so important.

ANN: Restoring and maintaining landscape resiliency is very important to the Western Governors, because you can look anywhere across the West, there’s millions of acres of dead and dying trees. And, they’re evidence that our western landscapes are in very poor ecological health.

The governors believe there is an urgent need for a dialogue among state and federal leaders to reform the management processes and policies on our federal public lands, the majority of which are in the West. And, what is very promising, and we’ve seen throughout the development of the National Cohesive Strategy, and the Western Regional Assessment, that there has been very strong, collaborative, inclusive leadership provided by the Forest Service, and the Department of Interior bureaus: the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.

And now, as we move into Phase III of the Cohesive Strategy, and the National Trade-Off Analysis, we anticipate and are hopeful that more involvement from non-Governmental organizations will be involved in that.

NARRATOR: Identifying ways to do large-scale restoration projects is a key benefit of the Cohesive Strategy.

ANN: I really believe that the Cohesive Strategy will help us to identify ways to do larger-scale forest restoration projects and treatments on the land, and improving collaborative processes, and working through some of the barriers that, you know, we've been experiencing across the West for many years.

NARRATOR: What has impressed Ann is the dedication and commitment from those involved in the Cohesive Strategy development.

ANN: I've seen a commitment by every agency, every interested stakeholder, whether they were attending a listening session in Phase I, and that information went into Phase II. There's just this very high level of commitment and dedication to collaborating, to working through these issues, understanding people's values, agency missions, trying to figure out a way to address the wildland fire problem, and high fire suppression costs.

NARRATOR: The Cohesive Strategy's approach to involve non-federal agencies and organizations is a big change from Ann's view.

ANN: The biggest change in the nation's wildland fire organizational structure, which is directly a result from the FLAME Act and the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, is the non-federal participation on the Wildland Fire Executive Council.

That is probably the biggest step forward and change in how the nation addresses these, you know, issues. Whether it's fire-adapted communities, or resilient landscapes, and wildfire response, having that non-federal participation at that high level is a huge step forward, and a huge change in how we've done business in the past.

NARRATOR: This concludes our interview with Ann Walker representing the Western Governors Association. Other national, state, and local agency and non-government organization perspectives can be heard at www.forestsandrangelands.gov under Cohesive Strategy Podcasts.