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NORTH AMERICAN FOREST COMMISSION

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RESPONDING TO INCREASING AND CHANGING DEMANDS IN FIRE MANAGEMENT

Summary

- This paper gives an account of relevant recent activities in the area of fire management. It argues for more balanced and comprehensive wildfire protection approaches that better integrate fire-related considerations into natural resource management strategies at the landscape scale, and presents a proposal for developing a comprehensive programme supported by a Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) to better respond to the needs and recommendations of member countries.

I. RECENT ACTIVITIES IN FIRE MANAGEMENT

1. Since launching the Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines in 2006, the Fire Management Programme of FAO has increased significantly. During several sessions of the Committee on Forestry and the Regional Forestry Commissions, recommendations were made to FAO and member countries regarding fire management.

The 20th Session of the Committee on Forestry and fire management

2. The Committee on Forestry at its 20th session in 2010 invited countries to:
- consider the contribution of forest fires to the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) and the importance of including forest fire management in their programmes for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD-plus);
 - incorporate vegetation fire management in broader sustainable land use and landscape policies, planning and practices;
 - cooperate in wildfire prevention and suppression and develop mutual-aid agreements;
 - involve communities in the prevention of wildfires; and

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- contribute to the existing voluntary trust fund focused on helping developing countries implement the principles and strategic actions of the fire management voluntary guidelines which need to be adapted to local conditions.

3. The Committee also encouraged FAO to further develop activities that promote regional and international cooperation and to promote the exchange of experiences among countries on all aspects of vegetation fires.

In support of and as a response to these recommendations, FAO has developed the following activities:

Global assessment of recent mega-fires

4. The FAO Forestry Department commissioned a global assessment of recent mega-fires, which was presented at the 5th International Wildland Fire Conference (IWFC) in Sun City, South Africa, May 2011.

5. The assessment showed that recent mega-fires were unrelenting against control efforts until firefighters either benefited from a favorable change in weather or a break in natural fuel for the fire (e.g. lack of biomass). Even in countries with the most advanced modern tools and techniques to combat severe wildfires, firefighters were generally forced onto the defensive. Public and political pressures to “do more” were common, no matter how dangerous the situation or how slim the chance for control were. The assessment report recommended that managers must be responsive to an anxious public and a demanding media.

6. The report indicated that the cumulative effects of global warming, the vulnerable condition of fire-prone landscapes, and population shifts into and out of wildland settings are changing the calculus of wildfire protection in many countries. In virtually all of the tropical and temperate cases analyzed, land management and/or land-use actions or omissions (intentional or not) carried significant wildfire-related risks that were not anticipated at the scope and scales that resulted. As wildfire risks intensify, the report suggests the application of more balanced and comprehensive wildfire protection approaches that better integrate fire-related considerations into natural resource management strategies at the landscape scale. In this respect, mega-fires have important implications for land managers and policy-makers. The findings of the assessment provide a basis for more effective alignment of land management policies, plans, and practices across fire-prone landscapes.

The Fifth International Wildland Fire Conference (IWFC), May 2011, Sun City, South Africa

7. As member of the International Liaison Committee, FAO was involved in the organization of this conference, which took place under the auspices of FAO and UNISDR. FAO, as a UN development agency proposed sessions on Community Based fire Management, Fire and poverty alleviation and Traditional Fire Management and Knowledge and supported 15 presentations.

8. The conference made recommendations for increased action on, *inter alia*:
- fire management on radioactive contaminated land and on land containing unexploded landmines or chemical deposits;
 - securing peat bog and wetland ecosystems;
 - reducing the use of fire on agriculture land;
 - public participation;
 - applying international principles;
 - systematic application of advanced technologies for wildland fire science and management;
 - strengthening international cooperation in fire management;
 - integration of fire management in the frame of natural resources/land management at landscape level;

- further involvement of the six FAO Regional Forestry Commissions in the implementation of the principles of the International Fire Management Guidelines and of the Hyogo Framework.

Development of a corporate disaster risk reduction strategy

9. FAO's Strategic Objective I, "to improve preparedness for and effective response to food and agriculture threats and emergencies" has triggered the development of a new draft corporate strategy for disaster risk reduction in FAO. The strategy proposes an intersectoral approach to disaster risk reduction, including fire management, to better respond to the needs of its member countries.

10. This strategy is built on the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, which is designed to build the resilience of nations and communities to disasters.

Community Based Fire Management

11. FAO has recognized the importance of a Community Based Approach in Fire Management (CBFiM). This approach is present in almost all FAO fire management projects. A publication on the state of art of CBFiM was released end 2011.

12. During the next biennium, an implementation tool for practitioners on CBFiM for the Southern African Development Community will be developed.

13. Together with the South African and the US FireWise Programme, and the Canadian FireSmart programme, FAO is joining efforts to further develop CBFiM and promote it on the agenda for the next International Wildland Fire Conference in South Korea (2015).

Regional FAO fire management activities

14. During the Second Mediterranean Forestry Week in Marseilles, April 2011, a draft position paper on fire prevention was presented by the Forest Fires Working Group of Silva Mediterranea and approved at the event. This paper has high relevance for part of the European/UNECE and Near East Regions and highlighted priorities to:

- prioritize a participatory approach;
- consider fire prevention in the context of climate change;
- consider fire prevention in the broader landscape.

15. During the same Forestry Week, it was decided that the Joint Research Centre of the European Union in Ispra, Italy, would undertake action to include several countries from the Near East region in the European Forest Fire Information System. FAO, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC) and the Silva Mediterranea Secretariat organized a meeting in October 2011 in Morocco to start this process.

16. The FAO-UNECE team of specialists on fire management is preparing a meeting in 2013 on transboundary fire management.

FAO Fire Management projects

17. Since the 20th Session of COFO, FAO fire management projects in Nicaragua and Lebanon have been completed; others in Morocco, Syria, The Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYRM), Chad and Tanzania have started and/or are still ongoing.

18. Under the National Forestry Programme Facility fire management activities are taking place in Benin, Togo and Peru.

19. In a FAO/GEF regional watershed project in the Fouta Djallon region (West Africa) and another in the Kageera (East Africa), fire management has been prioritized as one of the fields to receive more attention.

20. New project proposals are under development for Swaziland, Chad and Indonesia.

FAO Fire Management programme proposal and Multi Donor Trust Fund

21. To better respond to the increasing and changing demands in fire management, the FAO Forestry Department is developing a comprehensive Fire Management Programme Proposal supported by a multi donor trust fund (MDTF) to be implemented in collaboration with other national and international partners.

22. The proposal takes into consideration the recommendations of the above mentioned fora and papers as well as the integrated approach presented in the FAO Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines. It will allow FAO and key partners to more effectively respond to the specific needs identified in each region where improved fire management is considered a priority, building on on-going regional and country-based activities, as mentioned above.

23. The proposal will be based on an Integrated Fire Management approach, including a participatory and community based approach, and aiming at the integration of fire management into the broader landscape management, planning and policy. Once finalized, the proposal will be presented to donors and member countries for their support.

II. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

24. Since the 20th Session of COFO, the FAO Forestry Department has made strong efforts to support the recommendations of the meeting and the increasing demand of member countries in this field.

25. A global assessment of recent megafires suggests the application of more balanced and comprehensive wildfire protection approaches that better integrate fire-related considerations into natural resource management strategies at the landscape scale.

26. The Commission may wish to discuss how to enhance the integration of fire management to broader sustainable land-use and landscape policies within the context of climate change and consider appropriate recommendations in this regard, including to member countries and COFO.

27. FAO's human and financial resources are currently inadequate to respond fully to the recommendations of COFO and the Regional Forestry Commissions related to fire management.

28. The Commission may wish to help set priorities for the programme and to discuss the development of a Multi Donor Trust Fund to allow FAO to more effectively respond to country needs and recommend FAO members to contribute to this fund.