

December 2011

	منظمة الأغذية والزراعة للأمم المتحدة	联合国 粮食及 农业组织	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture	Продовольственная и сельскохозяйственная организация Объединенных Наций	Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura
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LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Asuncion, Paraguay, 5 – 9 March, 2012

RESPONDING TO INCREASING DEMANDS IN FIRE MANAGEMENT

Secretariat Note

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 Program 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 to 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.

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

Global assessment of recent mega-fires

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

6. The assessment showed that recent mega-fires were unrelenting against control efforts until firefighters either benefited from a favourable change in weather or a break in natural fuel for the fire (e.g. lack of biomass). Even in countries with modern tools and techniques to combat severe wildfires, firefighters were generally forced onto the defensive, taking action where they could.

7. 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

8. 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 the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). 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.

9. Being part of the Conference organizers, FAO made sure that the program was relevant for the fire management needs of developing countries by proposing sessions on Community Based Fire Management, Fire and Poverty Alleviation and Traditional Fire Management and Knowledge. FAO also supported 15 presentations that included four from the Region:

- The FAO Fire Management emergency projects after the hurricane Felix.
- Fire Management in Indigenous Communities in Bolivia.
- Efficiency of Forest Fires Protection in Pinar del Río, Cuba.
- Fire Management and Regional Cooperation in Central America.

Development of a Corporate Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy

10. 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.

11. 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

12. 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 will be released by January 2012.

13. During the next biennium a tool for practitioners on CBFiM for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region will be developed.

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/United Nations Economic Community for Europe (UNECE) and Near East Regions.

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. As recommended in the regional meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean during the Fifth IWFC, the Regional Fire Management Network for Latin America and the Caribbean will meet during a side event of the 27th Session of the Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission, Asuncion, Paraguay, 5-9 March 2012 to:

- search for regional cooperation under the guidance of an institution such as FAO and/or ITTO for a variety of fire issues.
- structure sub-regional cooperation through existing institutions (e.g. Amazon Cooperation Treaty; Southern Cone).
- define priorities for the region, in order to formulate projects and obtain resources from the Inter-American Development Bank, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, United Nations Development Programme, among others.
- create a website (digital work platform) to exchange information, views, and experiences to facilitate communication among members and speed up procedures.
- establish a working task force and regular meetings, both virtual and physical, to move forward successfully in the various projects.

17. The FAO-UNECE team of specialists on fire management is preparing a meeting in 2012 on transboundary fire management.

FAO fire management projects

18. Since the 20th session of COFO fire management projects in Nicaragua and Lebanon have been completed, others in Syria, Macedonia, Chad and Tanzania have started and/or are still ongoing.

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

20. In a FAO/Global Environment Facility (GEF) regional watershed project in the Fouta Djallon region, fire management has been prioritized as one of the fields that should receive more attention.

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

FAO fire management program proposal and multi donor trust fund

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

23. 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.

24. 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. Incorporating fire management in broader sustainable land-use and landscape policies

25. Globally there is a call for the integration of fire-related risks in land and forest management planning using contemporary risk management methods, and for this to be reflected in national policies and laws.

26. Developing and agreeing on a set of guidelines or an international standard on managing wildfire-related risks, based on internationally agreed risk management frameworks, could assist the adoption of fire risk management policies within countries that are consistent with other forms of risk management and assist the integration of wildfire-risk management within land and forest management policies. This will ensure that common approaches are used internationally, leading to better fire management policies and practices and ultimately enhanced protection of forests, natural ecosystems and communities.

III. Conclusions and discussion

27. 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.

28. A global assessment of recent mega-fires 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.

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

30. 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.

31. The Commission may wish to help set priorities for the program and to discuss the development of a Multi Donor Trust Fund to allow FAO to more effectively respond to country needs and recommend FAO member countries to contribute to this Fund.