

Newsletter n°9: Editorial of *Silva Mediterranea* Secretariat

The demand to extend the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) to all the countries of the Mediterranean Basin, including countries not belonging to the European Union, dates back to 2008 (*Sabaudia Workshop*). The Working Group on Forest Fires of *Silva Mediterranea* made officially this request to the Joint Research Center (JRC) of the European Commission in 2009. **This extension of EFFIS was considered especially important to develop common relevant strategies and policies for adaptation of Mediterranean Forest to Climate Change.**

In order to implement this priority an agenda for the period 2011/2012 was approved by all the participants attending the Session on the Extension of EFFIS during the Second Mediterranean Forest Week held in Avignon (April 2011).

This programme of actions included the organization of a regional workshop on the extension of EFFIS to the MENA Countries (*Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia*).

As the Secretary-General of the Haut Commissariat aux Eaux et Forêts et à la Lutte contre Désertification (HCEFLCD), I was very pleased to host this Workshop in Morocco and to collaborate for its organization with the Joint Research Center (JRC) of the European Commission, the FAO Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions - *Silva Mediterranea* and GIZ (*German Development Cooperation*). **The event, held in Rabat on October from 25 to 28, 2011, brought together about 30 participants which included experts from the MENA countries**



(Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey), the European Commission, GIZ, FAO, Spain and Italy. It was opened by an high level presentation involving more than 100 stakeholders, mainly from Morocco.

The Workshop had clear and relevant objectives that were successfully achieved such as: (i) design a preliminary programme for working with partner countries to improve their capacity for data collection, elaboration and transmission in order to meet the requirements needed to become active members of EFFIS; (ii) estimate costs and benefits - discuss on being/becoming a member of EFFIS.

The workshop was held with several sessions:

First day

- Global presentation of the regional context and reasons for having the workshop on EFFIS;
- Presentation of EFFIS and the several EFFIS databases by JRC of the European Commission.

Second day:

- Presentation of the situation of forest fires and review of the systems, processes and methods currently used in each country (*Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey*) for collection and organization of data on fires;
- Presentation of the potential, mutual advantages/benefits to be a member of EFFIS;
- Presentation of the requirements needed by a country to become a member of EFFIS;
- Presentation of the National Information System by a recent EFFIS member, Turkey, and by two historical members: Italy and Spain;
- Discussion on the actual possibility for each country to meet EFFIS eligibility requirements.

Third day: Field trip in the forest of Tétouan.

Fourth day

- Identification of the needs of the different countries to become a new EFFIS member;
- Country-working groups to work together with EFFIS, FAO, GIZ and State experts in making a diagnosis of their actual state in order to develop a method to improve their capacity and finally meet the requirements needed to join EFFIS;
- Presentation of the definitive analysis of each working group to all participants..



On the last day of the workshop, the MENA countries (Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia), which were wishing for a possible incorporation to EFFIS, concluded to join the system and approved several actions to be taken from now to year 2013. Those actions and the main conclusions of the workshop will be further detailed in this newsletter of *Silva Mediterranea*.

Abderrahim HOUMY

General Secretary

Haut Commissariat des Eaux, des Forêts et de la Lutte Contre la Désertification

Rabat - MOROCCO

News of *Silva Mediterranea* partners:

Conference on climate change and forest fires in the Mediterranean - Nir Etzion - Israel (24-26 January 2012).

20th Near East Regional Forestry Commission in Antalya Turkey (29 January 2012 to 2 February 2012).

21st Session of the Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions - *Silva Mediterranea* in Antalya - Turkey (2-3 February 2012).

The Workshop on the extension of the European Forest Fires Information System (EFFIS) to the MENA countries (Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia)

The opening session of the Workshop was chaired by Mr. Abderrahim Houmy from the "Haut Commissariat aux Eaux et Forêts et à la Lutte contre Désertification" of Morocco (HCEFLCD) and registered more than 100 participants. During this opening session three welcome speeches were also given by the Country Director of GIZ in Morocco, Mr. Tilman HERBERG, the FAO *Silva Mediterranea* Secretariat, Mr. Christophe BESACIER, and the European Commission representative Mr. Ernst SCHULTE.



A full description of the background to the workshop, the reasons for having this event and its regional context were given by the presentation of Mr. Christophe BESACIER (FAO-*Silva Mediterranea* Secretariat), as this first day included many participants from Morocco who had no previous involvement and/or any knowledge on EFFIS and *Silva Mediterranea* and their history.

He clarified how *Silva Mediterranea* is one of the statutory body covering the Mediterranean region and detailed its objectives and working groups. Further details were given on the working group on Forest Fires and its Work Plan for the period 2009 to 2012 whose first objective is "The incorporation of all Mediterranean countries to EFFIS". Its Agenda for actions in 2011/2012, approved during the Second Mediterranean Forest Week, included also the organization of this regional workshop in Morocco.

During this presentation, it was also highlighted the importance of another objective of the working group on Forest Fires which aims to "Promote initiatives of prevention particularly at local level". In order to achieve this objective a Position Paper on Wildfire Prevention in the Mediterranean was adopted at the Mediterranean level. This topic will be discussed in further detail in this Newsletter (See page 6 of the Newsletter 9).

Afterwards, Mr. Jesus San Miguel (Joint Research Centre - European Commission) explained the role and mode of operation of EFFIS and its Databases. His presentation detailed the background and objectives of EFFIS which aims at providing up-to-date, reliable information on forest fires, assessments during both pre-fire and post-fire phases supporting fire prevention, preparedness, fire fighting and post-fire evaluations. A database on forest fires occurrence has been established thanks to the cooperation with the members and it's currently widely use to carry out such activities at European and national level.



Mr. San Miguel especially highlighted how EFFIS is intended as complementary system, and not a substitution, to national and regional systems in the countries which provides, for instance, harmonized information required for international collaboration on forest fire prevention and fighting and in cases of trans-boundary fire events.

On the same day, the state of information systems on forest fires in the MENA countries was discussed in detail (*Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey*). Each country introduced the importance and diversity of its forest heritage (*surface, species, principal functions*), the vulnerabilities of their forest populations and the link with fires.

A brief description of the Forest fire history was presented by each country, pointing out tendencies, frequency, extension, affected species, high-risk areas and periods of fire outbreaks, underlining gaps and challenges.

In addition, each country presented the latest forest fire situation in its country and indicated its current responses to forest fires, especially in terms of forest fires prevention (*removal of causes, awareness raising of general public, legal measures of deterrence and punishment*), prediction (*fire risk cartography, Forest Fire Defense equipment and installations, fire watching and alarm release procedures*) and fighting (*operation procedures and means*). Each presentation was concluded with expectations and hesitations of the country in joining EFFIS, strengths and usefulness of its application and potential difficulties to become an efficient EFFIS member.



On day two of the technical workshop, the experts of EFFIS detailed the requirements needed for a country to become a member of EFFIS. Mr. Andrea Camia (Joint Research Centre - European Commission) made a presentation on the European Fire Databases and the main data exchanges among EFFIS members. It was explained that each country should provide their fire data, the individual fire event records for the Fire Database, an annual fire statistics (*total burned area and number of fires per year*) and a quarterly fire statistics during the fire campaign. He also highlighted that EFFIS members make an annual contribution to the Forest Fires report in Europe and also give information on fire prevention and fire management activities in the country.



Followed a presentation of the National Information System of a recent member outside the European Union such as Turkey by Mr. Muammer Kol (Ministry of forest and water affairs - Turkey) and of two historical EFFIS members with a high forest cover in the European Union such as Italy by Ms. Lorenza Colletti (Italian Corpo forestale dello Stato) and Spain by Ms. Elsa Enriquez (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, Medio Rural y Marino - Spain).

The countries explained the main strengths and benefits of joining EFFIS and the challenges related to the provision of information to this system.

At the end of the presentations four country-working groups were established (one group for each MENA country with the support of the representatives of FAO, EFFIS, GIZ, Italy, Spain and Turkey) to discuss the actual possibility for each country to meet EFFIS requirements and identify needs and gaps of the country to become a member of EFFIS.

The working groups made for each country a gap analysis of their:

- Capacity building needs (trainings, financial support, expertise, technical assistance, etc...);
- Assets and constraints ;
- Costs and added value of the incorporation into EFFIS scheme.

On the third day, a Field trip was organized in the forest of Tétouan in northern Morocco. The headland of Koudiate Taifour was visited by the participants of the workshop. Mr. Driss Misbah, Regional Director of Water and Forests and Combating Desertification in the Rif Region, Mr. Mohammed Guerouji, Provincial Director of Water and Forests and Combating Desertification in Tétouan and Mr. Zouhair Amhaouech, Head of Partnerships Service at the Regional Directorate of Water and Forests and Combating Desertification in the Rif Region, presented their regional strategy for forest fires management.



They also explained their Defense against Forests Fire (DFCI) reestablishment and development plan adopted in Koudiate Taifour forests after a big fire of 2008. Sites affected by fires were visited by the participants, who also had the opportunity to inspect the cleaning and restoration operations carried out in this burnt area. The field trip was concluded with a more detailed visit to the area of Koudiat Taiffour and Jebel Musa, two potential Sites of Biological and Ecological Interest.

Conclusions of the Workshop.

The conclusion of each working group was presented to all participants on the last day of the workshop and the next steps of this process of incorporation to EFFIS were jointly discussed. The Workshop was concluded with a SWOT Analysis of the countries to have a strategic evaluation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to be involved in this project of extension of EFFIS.



The identified Strengths

- 1) It is a regional priority for *Silva Mediterranea* (WG1), inside the Position Paper: "Wildfire Prevention in the Mediterranean" and for the CPMF ;
- 2) There is a common interest for the MENA countries, the EC (JRC and DGE) and the South of Europe to cooperate on this priority of Forest Fires;
- 3) JRC, European Commission, GIZ, FAO, CPMF and the South of Europe are ready to mobilize resources (human/financial/technical) for this process of extension of EFFIS to the MENA countries;
- 4) Existing information systems and basic data are already available in the five MENA countries which are likely to join EFFIS;
- 5) Countries that could be new potential members are currently well informed about the benefits of EFFIS after the workshop organized in Rabat;
- 6) Countries that could be new potential members are currently well informed about the requirements of EFFIS after the workshop organized in Rabat.

The identified Weaknesses

- 1) **Data available in the MENA countries are sometimes incomplete** and in some cases fragmented (*particularly in Algeria and Lebanon*);
- 2) **EFFIS is not a substitute to the national information systems on forest fires** (it is a complement to a national Fire Information System);
- 3) Terminology sheets on forest fires events in the five MENA countries need to be adapted to the EFFIS system;
- 4) **Causes and origin of forest fires sometimes are often not well known and investigated into the five MENA countries** (*needs for training on causes and investigation*);
- 5) The countries that are potential new members are not all at the same level to become an efficient member of EFFIS and to meet all the requirements of EFFIS database;



The identified Opportunities

- 1) **Opportunity to participate in an exchange platform** on the issues of the countries affected by wildfires in the Mediterranean region (*Prevention, Control and Regeneration*);
- 2) **Opportunities to benefit from the achievements of European research and new common models/methods developed by the Joint Research Center in Ispra**;
- 3) Opportunity to improve the quality of national systems and, especially, to cross-check data with satellite images;
- 4) **Opportunity to have a reliable estimation of carbon emissions from forest fires**. These results may be used in the negotiations for REDD+ by countries not listed in the Annex 1 (*Recommendations from Sun City and in coherence with FFEM project on REDD+ and forest fires in South Mediterranean*);
- 5) Opportunities to have more benefit and communication from international cooperation/transborder cooperation for the prevention, control and recovery in a context of increasing risk of fires due to climate change;

The identified Threats

- 1) **Identify a bilingual EFFIS focal point** (*Bi-annual meetings of the European Commission expert group on Forest Fires are organized without translation*) or, if necessary, two experts if the country can support a second expert (*one expert will be supported by JRC for each meeting of the EC expert group on Forest Fires*);
- 2) **Invest in the long term to allow the new countries to collect/adapt/validate their data to meet EFFIS databases requirements**;
- 3) **Mobilize national teams to fill regularly EFFIS databases**;
- 4) **Integrate EFFIS regional investment in the national strategy in order to have a process of permanent improvement of the national information system on Forest Fires of the MENA countries**;
- 5) **Produce an annual national report to contribute to the EFFIS annual report and to the chapter on Forest Fire of the future State of Mediterranean Forests (SoMF)**.

The next actions to be achieved by the end of 2013 were identified by the participants:



- 1) Letter from the European Commission to the General Directorate in charge of Forests of the MENA Countries attending the workshop (*November 2011*).
- 2) Presentation of the main results of the workshop in Rabat during the meeting of the EC Experts Group on Forest Fires in Ispra (*10/11 November 2011*).
- 3) **Official Response of the MENA countries to the European Commission** with a description of the partner organization and the name of the focal point (*By end 2011*).
- 4) Regional training at the JRC in Ispra or in other relevant places (*JRC/EFFIS team*) with designated focal points to start the process of compiling EFFIS databases (*2012*).
- 5) **Regional Training on the causes** of fires and post fire investigation methods (*2012*).
- 6) **Participation of the new MENA focal points to the meetings of the EC Experts Group on Forest Fires in March and November 2011X (2012/2013)**

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27th Meeting of the European Commission Expert Group on Forest Fires

The results of the Workshop on EFFIS extension to the MENA countries were presented in Ispra during the 27th Meeting of the European Commission Experts Group on Forest Fires. All members of this European Commission Expert Group on Forest Fires welcomed all the conclusions of the workshop organized in Rabat.



During the meeting, the experts of the JRC presented EFFIS analysis of 2011 fire campaign. This analysis included: results of the totals burnt areas calculated from EFFIS Rapid Damage Assessment, the evolution of the fire season, burnt areas along the season and fire danger monitoring.

During this current year about 70,000 fire news were analyzed from the web in 23 languages by EFFIS, 4,165 locations were identified and 1,486 fire news referred to 1,123 forest fires were geo-located. According to EFFIS results the five European Mediterranean countries most affected by fire were, as usually happens: France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

A considerable explanation on the common classification of the possible causes of fire was displayed by the EFFIS expert Mr. Andrea Camia. According to the European Union fire classification Scheme there are seven main different categories of causes, which are: (i) Unknown - cause not found. In this class are also coded the wildfires with a cause not specified at all; (ii) Natural - caused by natural origin, with no human involvement in any way; (iii) Accident - unintentionally and indirectly caused by human without use of fire; (iv) Negligence - unintentionally caused by human using fire or glowing object; (v) Voluntary - intentionally caused by human with the use of fire; (vi) Rekindle - caused by re-ignition of a previous fire, due to latent heat or embers; (vii) Uncertain. A different level of precision on the causes is possible according to the level of detail of available information.

In addition, EFFIS experts showed how they are making strides towards in their studies for a methodology of calculation of a “near-real time estimation of smoke plume emissions from forest fires” and to assess wild land fire damages and their economic impacts. Many countries members of EFFIS were attending the meeting and showed to the participants the main results of the fire campaign 2011 in their own country, in general underlining as the fire campaign is extending. Several *Silva Mediterranea* member States gave presentations, in particular:

- 1) **Greece illustrated the Burn Scar mapping over the country in 2011.** Detailed imagines produced by the National Observatory of Athens / Institute for Space Applications & Remote Sensing showed the fire situation in areas affected by fire during this year such as: Aitolokarnania, Evros, Aitolokarnania and Gytheio.
- 2) **The representative of the Ministry of Environment and Forests in Bucharest presented the Forest fires season 2011 in Romania** which led to an increased number of forest fires and burnt surface all over the country, higher than previous years. It seems that during year 2011, as in recent years, **the major number of forest fires was caused by agricultural practices from people of rural areas.** However, the economical losses due to forest fires are not very high, as population and authorities have intervened to extinguish the fire very rapidly.
- 3) **Cyprus showed as the country, throughout the 2011 fire season, suffered of an intensive drought period with very limited precipitations.** However, the preliminary forest fire statistics have demonstrated a slight decrease both to the number of fires and the total burnt area if compared to the previous year. During year 2011, 66 forest fires broke out in Cyprus affecting an area of 1404 ha, of which 1262 ha were forest and other wooded land and 142 ha non-wooded land. Most of the fires (55%) were smaller than 1 ha. **The biggest fire recorded during 2011 fire season was on August in Anogyra village with a total burnt area of 778 hectares.**

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For further information, please consult the EFFIS Website: <http://effis.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

The “Position Paper on Wildfire Prevention” in the Mediterranean

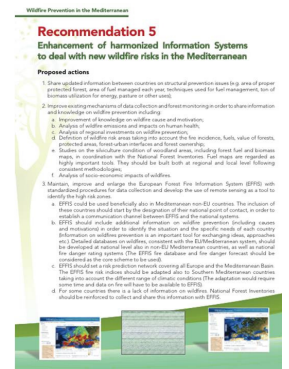
As it was mentioned in the previous pages of this Newsletter, a “Position Paper on Wildfire Prevention in the Mediterranean” has been published in October 2011. This document represents one of the main achievements of the working group 1 of *Silva Mediterranea* on Forest Fires, which aims to “Promote initiatives of prevention particularly at local level”.

It is especially important to quote the recommendation number five of this Position Paper focused on the “Enhancement of harmonized Information Systems to deal with new wildfire risks” and its several proposed actions.



Concerning the “**Enhancement of harmonized Information Systems to deal with new wildfire risks**” the proposed actions recommended in the “position paper on wildfire prevention” are the following:

1. **Share updated information between countries on structural prevention issues** (e.g. area of proper protected forest, area of fuel managed each year, techniques used for fuel management, ton of biomass utilization for energy, pasture or other uses);
2. **Improve existing mechanisms of data collection and forest monitoring in order to share information and knowledge on wildfire prevention** including:
 - a. Improvement of knowledge on wildfire cause and motivation;
 - b. Analysis of wildfire emissions and impacts on human health;
 - c. Analysis of regional investments on wildfire prevention;
 - d. Definition of wildfire risk areas taking into account the fire incidence, fuels, value of forests, protected areas, forest-urban interfaces and forest ownership;
 - e. Studies on the silviculture condition of woodland areas, including forest fuel and biomass maps, in coordination with the National Forest Inventories. Fuel maps are regarded as highly important tools. They should be built both at regional and local level following consistent methodologies;
 - f. Analysis of socio-economic impacts of wildfires.
3. **Maintain, improve and enlarge the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) with standardized procedures for data collection** and develop the use of remote sensing as a tool to identify the high risk zones.
 - a. **EFFIS could be used beneficially also in Mediterranean non-EU countries.** The inclusion of these countries should start by the designation of their national point of contact, in order to establish a communication channel between EFFIS and the national systems.
 - b. **EFFIS should include additional information on wildfire prevention (including causes and motivations) in order to identify the situation and the specific needs of each country** (Information on wildfires prevention is an important tool for exchanging ideas, approaches etc.). Detailed databases on wildfires, consistent with the EU/Mediterranean system, should be developed at national level also in non-EU Mediterranean countries, as well as national fire danger rating systems (The EFFIS fire database and fire danger forecast should be considered as the core scheme to be used).
 - c. **EFFIS should set a risk prediction network covering all Europe and the Mediterranean Basin.** The EFFIS fire risk indices should be adapted also to Southern Mediterranean countries taking into account the different range of climatic conditions (The adaptation would require some time and data on fire will have to be available to EFFIS).
 - d. **For some countries there is a lack of information on wildfires.** National Forest Inventories should be reinforced to collect and share this information with EFFIS.



Since the adoption of this Position Paper during the Second Mediterranean Forest Week in Avignon, the document was introduced and distributed in several events focused on Forest Fires. It was presented as the position of Mediterranean stakeholders during regional sessions of the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference held in Sun City (South Africa) on May 11, 2011. It was also distributed during the European Forestry Commission in Antalya on October 2011, in Rabat (Morocco) during the Workshop on the Extension of EFFIS to the MENA countries and in JRC, Ispra (Italy) during the 27th Meeting of EC Expert Group on Forest Fires. The Position Paper, originally in English, was recently also translated into French and Spanish and will be translated also into Arabic by the end of the year 2012.

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