

**Wildland Fire Leadership Council
Conference Call – VIA ZOOM
January 26, 2022. 100 pm – 400 pm EDT**

**CALL SUMMARY – via ZOOM
Council Members (Principals or alternates)**

Eric Werwa (DOI), Meryl Harrell (USDA), Aaron Baldwin (BIA), Michael Nedd (BLM), Cynthia Martinez (USFWS), Jennifer Flynn (NPS), David Applegate (USGS), Nicole LaRosa (FEMA), Tonya Hoover, Laura McCarthy (NGA), Matt Kinglsey (NACo), Vernon Stearns (ITC), Erik Litzenberg (IAFC) Rich Elliot (IAFC), George Geissler (NASF), Mayor John Suthers (NLC), Troy Timmons (WGA), Ryan Orndorff (DOD), Nate Fisher (Governor Little's Office), and Mike Zupko (WFLC Executive Director). RSC representatives, senior staff and other interested participants were also on the call.

Meeting Objective: The meeting was focused on allowing the WFLC principals or their designated alternates to discuss the multilayer responsibility of government and opportunities and hurdles to overcome in implementation of the infrastructure law.

Opening Remarks – Chair, Meryl Harrell, Deputy Under Secretary, USDA, and Co-Chair, Eric Werwa, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, DOI offered welcome remarks.

Roll Call of Principals/Alternates by organization – Mike Zupko, Executive Director, WFLC, conducted the roll-call for the principals for each organization represented.

Agenda Review and Call/Zoom process – Zupko briefly reviewed the agenda, the intent of the meeting to focus on the infrastructure law and National Invasive Species Council and gave a brief overview of how to use the Zoom technology to help in facilitation of presentations and discussions of the WFLC principals.

Approval of Past WFLC Meeting and Call Minutes and Notes – There was a motion, second and unanimous approval of the following WFLC minutes and notes from the previous WFLC engagement:

WFLC Call April 8, 2021

WFLC Call October 18, 2021

Infrastructure Package Implementation and Consideration of additional Upcoming Wildland Fire Opportunities

Objective: To gain an understanding as to how each WFLC member department and organization is approaching their opportunity for implementing new sources of funding from the infrastructure package and other potential additional funding sources. To gain feedback from partners and non-WFLC members from their expertise in the field as to engagement points and potential challenges in the implementation of funding juxtaposed with current staffing and other factors external to government.

Outcomes: To identify opportunities to overcome hurdles and challenges to implementation. To develop methods to jointly move implementation forward while minimizing impacts to existing supply chains and efficiently utilizing and building capacity as appropriate. To build collective strategies within WFLC members as well as external to WFLC representation with partners and others to create the greatest impact.

Overview of agency and organizational approaches to infrastructure implementation and other relevant legislative/funding opportunities (45 minutes):

Each WFLC member had the opportunity to discuss how their department, agency/bureau or organization is approaching implementation of infrastructure funding to best utilize relationships and leverage implementation strategies across all levels of government (federal, state, tribal and local) and with partners. *Detailed notes available upon request.*

Currently Identified Hurdles and Challenges (1 hour): Partner organizations shared their perspectives on implementation strategies and opportunities from NGO, industry and community perspectives. There were brief presentations from a panel followed by conversation between the panel and WFLC members to further explore joint opportunities and to design approaches to overcome challenges and issues identified during the discussion.

Panelists:

- Forest Resources Association, Deb Hawkinson, President and Tim O'Hara, VP of Government Affairs
 - The Nature Conservancy, Alix Murdoch, Senior Policy Advisor
 - American Forest Resource Council, Travis Joseph, President
 - Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, Becca Shively, Program Manager
 - Sustainable Northwest, Dylan Kruse, Vice President
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- Deb Hawkinson, Forest Resources Association: In looking to the best implementation plan for these funds, some factors for consideration include workforce and trucking challenges. The private sector is facing a lack of workers and supply chains are struggling. Guest worker visas are needed for replanting, management, and wildfire prevention. These guest workers are responsible for 85% of seedling replanting and this needs to be taken into account when planning the reforestation and other elements of the IIA. IIA will also cause a greater demand on saw mills and many

- federal lands do not have existing infrastructure anymore. Workers, trucks, forestry infrastructure generally, and what impact these funds will have on the whole system need to be examined and FRA can be a resource in this effort.
- Alex Murdoch, TNC: Their report, [Wildfire Resilience Funding: Building Blocks for a Paradigm Shift](#), is the lens for how they are looking at this opportunity. Partners play a major role in bringing about this shift and the 10-year framework is an important step in bringing partners into this work. There is an interest in shifting from simply managing the land to managing relationships and the dynamics with the land.
 - Travis Joseph, American Forest Resource Council: There is an opportunity here to grow infrastructure and critical workforce, but a real-world challenge is the restricted land base of where we operate. IJA does not open up a single acre of management that was not technically already available and does not change the hurdles already existing within the system. There is a need to match infrastructure and existing workforce where it needs to be and address issues such as housing shortages and supply chain congestion. Successful implementation would require a cultural change in federal agencies to motivate and incentivize new partnerships.
 - Becca Shively, RVCC: Commends the forward thinking USFS 10-year strategy and wants to be sure these priorities are implemented into specific activities. There is an opportunity to modernize performance measures to be more outcome instead of output based and to include partners in the full lifecycle from prioritization through implementation. Increasing the scale of prescribed fire treatments can be accomplished by working creatively with partners to increase capacity and build on existing collaborative efforts.
 - Dylan Kruse, Sustainable Northwest: Shifting to a new paradigm cannot be business as usual. Change must be embraced from the Washington Office to the regional level. For prioritization and implementation, the decision making across different levels is unclear and partners are very eager to learn what the roles are and where they can specifically engage. There is a need to look at prioritized areas and resources locally so the workforce complements where work is being targeted. The roundtables are a good start, but more robust engagement will be needed to fully engage collaboratives, NGOs, and other partners.

Facilitated Questions and Dialogue: (Harrell and Zupko)

- How should private stakeholders that can add to capacity for the 10-year strategy, Cohesive Strategy, etc. engage?
 - Looking at all the regions and asking where the staffing issues exist and how they can fill those.
 - Coming to the private sector prepared with specific asks of where help is needed can be more helpful.
 - It is critical to make private partners and industry part of the conversation. Look to NEPA ready projects and then match it up with the private sector in those areas and make them part of the planning process.
- Can you clarify the need for cultural change in agencies?
 - There need to be clear expectations on how each region will implement due to the decentralized setup. Regions need to be educated on the tools available and provided clear guidance and expectation of outcomes.

- There is a culture of risk aversion and project planning can therefore be slow. There is a need to accelerate to match the level of crisis we are facing.
 - RVCC completed a research project on prescribed fire and even if technically qualified, liability, risk aversion, etc. can be a barrier to partnering.
 - There is the potential to miss needed work in areas already neglected due to lack of capacity. We need to think about how to bring capacity to these areas in a thoughtful way.
- Chief Moore reflected on the need to be aware of potential unintended consequences. If not mindful in their approach, they may not be able to get to all of the ‘random acts of restoration’ because they are looking to the landscape level. They must fully embrace Shared Stewardship and talk collectively about what needs to happen, with the Forest Service not at the head of the table but one of the partners at the table.
 - There is a need to boil things down to the regional level.
 - Need to look at infrastructure dollars and regular program of work and think about the color and purposes of those funds. High level expectations and timelines on each set of funds should be clear.
 - There is no need to reinvent the wheel since these shared frameworks and priorities already exist. Venues exist at the state and regional levels- embrace what is already there and tap into these levels for additional refinement.
 - Private lands are already managed for the highest sustained yields. The only way for additional timber to support additional infrastructure is through the largest landowner- USFS. We need to make sure we are supporting the partners and their needs to be able to be in business.
 - GNA, stewardship contracting, HFRA, etc. are tools we already have to get the most out of investments.
 - We need to look at the category of skills that are the gaps in overall capacity. This can be used for training and education to address this.
 - Critical gaps include truck drivers to haul this off; logging community generally. PATTH program has helped with some of the challenges in trying to operate through a pandemic. Many places have the demand needed to build a saw mill but then no guarantee to be able to supply workers. Supply can also be inconsistent.
 - Reforestation workforce and pipeline is another important capacity consideration.
 - Prescribed fire and fuels managers are another need. Even if training component is in place, there can be a struggle to get insurance or other liability issues.
 - More partnership coordinators are needed within federal agencies specifically to work on these efforts and to engage partners to help fill in training and capacity gaps.
 - Need to look at markets and biomass and see what role biomass energy can play.
 - Need to use technology at the right place and right time. Can increase safety for workforce, and create greater efficiencies, including expediting the management process.
 - Importance of partnerships from every step from prioritization and planning through implementation.

Potential Next Steps: Identification of WFLC working group(s) to develop areas of opportunity. Further collecting of input from non-governmental organizations. Additional coordination opportunities identified during the dialogue.

Proposed Joint WFLC Leaders' Intent for coordination at the state level (bringing together all levels of government at the state level) – George Geissler, NASF. Laura McCarthy, NGA. **(ATTACHMENT X)**

- The working draft of the leaders' intent memo was presented for consideration.
- There is a shared obligation to have an agreed upon intent of how to do this and to communicate it down the agencies, starting at that regional and state level.
- There is a need to not just get the work done, but do so in a meaningful way where underserved communities are emphasized.
- This work should build on state level plans and agreements, leverage national funding, and utilize local knowledge.
- Investment in science-based tools to use good information to make decisions, with all tribes and localities involved.
- Importance of taking on leadership role in ensuring that this goes all the way through respective organizations.
- Zupko and Geissler will discuss with WFLC members on the potential for adoption at the next meeting.

National Invasive Species Council coordination and opportunities roll up (Stas Burgiel, NISC and Zupko)

Objective: Presenting prioritized ranking of key opportunities as identified by the joint NISC/WFLC Task Team for consideration and use by WFLC members. Reviewing next steps as identified by WFLC and NISC executive staff and task team members.

Outcomes: Understanding the potential for WFLC members to utilize the joint opportunities document produced by the task team. Identification of key priorities for the task team to focus next steps. Consideration to additional external engagements where NISC and WFLC can build on the intersect between invasives and wildland fire and how each WFLC member organization can utilize the prioritized opportunities to help set organizational strategy.

- For the full list of identified priorities, please see **(ATTACHMENT X)**
- Priorities in the categories of proactive and pre-fire management, wildfire response, wildfire recovery and restoration, funding, information, data and management tools, and research and development were identified.
- This effort recognizes the relationship between invasives and wildfire and created a prioritized list of key opportunity areas- 13 highest priority. Priorities included a mix of strategic, programmatic, and tactical elements. Task team concluded:
 - Leadership engagement and support is necessary for agencies to move forward;
 - More information is needed on how priorities intersect with existing agency programs and activities; and
 - Non-federal stakeholders need to be engaged as soon as possible.

Facilitated Questions and Dialogue: (Werwa, Burgiel and Zupko)

- David Applegate, USGS, emphasized that the key word here is intersection because you cannot look at these issues in isolation. There is an opportunity for the JFSP to take the work being done by the working group and see how they can get that aligned with the science needs JFSP is moving forward.
- There is an opportunity here to marry these with the individual priorities of agencies. Looking at both high risk fireheds and what is being developed here for invasives for example. A cross-reference has not yet been done, but one of the early places to start looking at marrying up this data and different tools.

Additional WFLC Policy Priorities – Status Update

- **America Burning: WUI (Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell, USFA):**
 - Nearing completion and currently in final review and approval process with the title of report now: Wildland Urban Interface: A Look at Issues and Resolutions.
 - Early discussions indicated a need to elevate the WUI problem at the same level that the Americas Burning reports did for structure fire. This being a WFLC initiated effort rather than congressionally commissioned, this was a better strategic fit for a title.
 - There will be a written report and they are working on products to help market the report for the public, such as webinars. It was noted that a dynamic visual report would be helpful.
- **WFLC Strategic Annual Leadership Review Working Group (Gap ID and lessons learned)**
 - *Zupko provided the following written report post-meeting:* The Council has had several conversations around making sure we are responsive to interagency challenges and issues that might be identified in annual reporting/reviews, but may not be effectively elevated to the strategic WFLC level. Our collective charge will be to determine if we should approach WFLC with any trends or specifically identified issues that are strategic in nature and that WFLC may be able to collectively address. Our intent is to approach all three goals of the Cohesive Strategy, not just response, although the response system does create the most annual reviews. *We have identified a core group that is a cross-section of WFLC member senior staff as well as key partners.*
- **WFLC Cohesive Strategy Refresh Task Force**
 - *Zupko provided the following written report post-meeting:* We are in the process of forming a task force to review both what we have learned in the past 10 years since the initial development of the Cohesive Strategy, as well as evaluate changes and inputs to the entire wildland fire and land management system. There have been many stressors and drivers that have altered the trajectory of wildland fire in those years and we owe it to the public (and our community) to consider how we might “refresh” the Cohesive Strategy. *We have identified a*

core group that is a cross-section of WFLC member senior staff as well as key partners.

- **CWPP Enhancement Work Group concept**

- *Zupko provided the following written report post-meeting:* With the heightened interest in greater utilization of CWPPs as a core planning and coordination document at the local level, there have been multiple discussions as to how we can collectively identify ways to continue to increase the utility of CWPPs, both in their development/enhancement as well as a living document. Several groups are in the early phases of review as well as new funding streams will be further driving development (e.g. CWDG) with agencies and organizations needing to better specify grant requirements. As WFLC represents the breadth of government across the spectrum and not just one agency or organization, we feel it is our collective responsibility to coordinate across the membership and partner groups and create an updated guide to the CWPP process including enhanced considerations for communities as they update and build even stronger opportunities for coordination and action at the local level. Input from WFLC members and senior staff as we begin to identify key players and form a task force will be key.

- **Smoke Management and Air Quality**

- *Zupko provided the following written report post-meeting:* With increased use of prescribed fire identified in the infrastructure package as well as recognized as a core underutilized management tool, coordination across the land management community with our public health and air quality partners will be key. Tomas Carbonell with EPA stated it early in our call, but we must communicate together to the public to help them understand the opportunities for using prescribed fire while also offering information on steps people can take to reduce their exposure and protect their health from smoke. WFLC remains committed to working closely with EPA, CDC and public health agencies on joint communications, research and implementation opportunities.
- **Smoke Management Planning** - There continues to be challenges in some states through the planning process. We will continue to monitor and strive to understand the challenges while offering insights and subject matter experts as appropriate, especially with the opportunity for increased use of prescribed fire afforded through infrastructure funding.
- **Biochar and Air Curtain Incinerators** - As an alternative to burning in some locations, these are both appropriate alternatives to minimizing smoke. There is an opportunity to both educate on their benefits while also understanding potential impacts policies may have on their ability to be used.
- WFLC will continue to utilize both the joint smoke management and air quality communications team as well as the data nuance team to help coordinate and facilitate these issues and opportunities.

Member Roundtable - Individual member updates as time may permit.

- Jonathon Shuffield, NaCo, mentioned the E&E article on the wildfire management and proposed NACo suppression resolution. The one referenced in the article is different than the current resolution. There will be a debate in the public lands steering committee to finalize the language on this.
 - The huge social science component that relates to this science-based decision was highlighted.
- Update that the IAFC WUI Conference is still scheduled to occur March 22-24 in Reno.
- Nicole LaRosa mentioned National Security Council is exploring a pilot project regarding mitigation with underground utilities. Suggestion that WFLC may be able to help facilitate making connections with the right partners.
- Ann Kinsinger, USGS: Several executive level Earth Observation interagency councils with OMB asked USGS National Land Imaging program to conduct a Fire Rapid Needs Assessment - many federal and non-federal fire staff were interviewed for input, and agency/organization strategic documents are contributing to the assessment. While there is an emphasis on observations like satellite source, it covers application in models, maps and operational use. Results are due to be shared with the sponsor organizations mid-March.

Public Comment – *No requests by participants at the start of the meeting.*

Misc. Items

- WFLC MOU Status (Zupko)
 - Planning to add new members. Working through review process with each Secretary office. Hoping to have this complete in coming months.
- Federal Interagency Wildfire Resilience Working Group key issues (Harrell)
 - 17 agencies involved in this all federal approach to partnering to address this crisis. Looking at risk reduction and resilience and post-fire recovery.
 - Monthly meetings are taking place. A federal workshop to map out the federal dollars to create efficiency to share investments across jurisdictions. They are working on developing a science and partner roundtable.
 - Potential to add to the next or the following WFLC meeting to provide report-out to the group.
- Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission status (Harrell / Zupko)
 - A subgroup of the interagency workgroup is tasked with identifying next steps on membership. USDA working close with DOI and FEMA and others on next steps.
- Next WFLC meeting, March field meeting, Washington State (Zupko/Harrell/Geissler)
 - Week of March 28th

The co-chairs thanked everyone for their participation and look forward to future engagement.

The meeting was then adjourned.