

WFLC Meeting
Tuesday, October 6, 2015
Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.
Meeting Minutes

Meeting Purpose:

To finalize the national WFLC priorities for the next two years that drive impactful change at national and regional levels and; To provide a forum in which representatives from all WFLC member organizations and partners engaging in aspects of wildland fire management can collaborate. Specific goals included:

Refine and complete the key components and WFLC actions of the following 4 priorities:

1. Smoke Management and Air Quality
2. Reducing Risks to Communities
3. Landscape Level Collaboration
4. Environmental Compliance

Provide guidance to the National Strategic Committee and RSCs for moving the priorities forward, including the formation of task groups as necessary, working with key partners, and further leveraging work and focus around the priorities.

Action Items and Next Steps:

See “**Next Steps**” for each issue area

Attendees:

Council Members (or alternates)

Kim Thorsen (DOI), Ann Kinsinger (USGS), Robert Bonnie (USDA), Steve Ellis (BLM), Jim Karels (NASF) *on phone*, Steve Guertin (FWS), Ernie Mitchell (FEMA), Erik Litzenberg (IAFC), Louis Rowe (NPS), Kris Sarri (DOI), Dan Shoun (NACo), Tom Tidwell (USFS), Mike Zupko (Executive Manager)

Support Staff: Jim Douglas, Jim Hubbard, David McCoy, Jim Lyons, Vicki Christiansen, Dan Olsen, Shari Eckhoff, Tommie Herbert (PMF), Paul Steblein, Jim Lyons

National Strategy Committee (NSC): Pete Anderson (*on phone*), Patti Blankenship, Katie Lighthall, Matt Rollins, John Ruhs

Local Partners and Public: Tom Lacrosse (DoD), Jay Farrell, Eryn Hurley, Joe Freeland, Chris Topik, Pete Lahm, Caitlyn Pollihan, Cecelia Clavet, Denise Blankenship, Shawn Stokes, Lexi Coulson, Maureen Brooks, Larry Mastic (*on phone*), Tom Quigley (*on phone*),

Meeting Summary:

Robert Bonnie and Kim Thorsen welcomed everyone to the meeting and had everyone introduce themselves. They then gave an overview of the meeting agenda and turned it over to Mike Zupko to review the agenda, meeting purpose and goals of the meeting. The council then began addressing each of the priority issues one at a time.

Smoke Management and Air Quality

Issue: *Minimize air quality impacts from wildland fire over the long-term, improve the resiliency of landscapes to wildfire, and increase the health and safety of communities, firefighters and the public by using fire as a land management tool.*

Mike Zupko and Jim Karels opened the issue by giving a brief overview of activity to date. They helped to frame the issue then turned it over to Pete Lahm and Paul Steblein to give an update of the technical aspects and policy engagement opportunities upcoming (ATTACHMENT IIa and IIb).

Discussion:

- Reiteration of commitment to basing actions off of sound science. WFLC needs to message with EPA and others hand in hand with the use of fire.
- In committing to the long-run approach to wildland fire management, lawmakers, administrators, and citizens will need to be convinced that taking on some risk regarding smoke and health impacts up front will mitigate the more damaging health and environmental impacts in the future as we reduce devastation from large wildfires through prescribed burning and other fuel reduction management techniques.
- Defining the role of the NSC is as a strategic assister – they don't necessarily have in depth knowledge but are capable of helping to leverage that subject matter expertise.
 - For instance, NSC identified public service professionals with communication and marketing backgrounds to connect with and shepherd local and state initiatives.
- Increase engagement between all levels of government hierarchy, (e.g. working with prescribed fire councils and working with States through the NSC and other coordination groups).
- Utilize relationships between WFLC members and RSCs, and RSC relationships locally.
- Urgent need for a system of communication and collaboration that allows for non-federal partners to provide feedback that is used, as this will be a part of mobilizing community-based management initiatives regarding fire adapted communities.
- The Council was in agreement with the priority issue paper as a framework to move forward.

Next Steps:

- Create a flow diagram for how to execute an outreach campaign of the selected EPA's regions
 - In creating a message crafted to educate stakeholders about risk, the communications group will need to define who the targeted audiences are, and they will have to tailor this message for each audience
 - While this discussion on smoke and air quality is ultimately about reducing risk and reducing the threat of wildfire, this group should be careful about how it uses the word 'risk'
- Create a "play book" with the messages and when to plug in for each WFLC member organization.
- Zupko continue to work with Lahm and Steblein to map out the national and regional strategy.
- Bonnie and Sarri continue discussions with EPA leadership on the rollout of rules and regulations.
- Each WFLC member to identify potential participants or key contacts within organizations for Zupko and coordinating group to utilize on specific items in the priority issue paper.

Reducing Risk to Communities

Issues: *Build a suite of enabling conditions for the creation and enhancement of fire adapted communities across the country.*

Erik Litzenberg introduced the priority and gave insight into the importance of local engagement. He then introduced Sarah McCaffrey, PhD., a Research Social Scientist with the Forest Service, to give an overview of existing research on the topic. McCaffrey presented a power point remotely (ATTACHMENT III). Next, Shawn Stokes, the current chair of the Fire Adapted Communities Coalition gave an overview of the coalition coordination function and facilitated a discussion with several members (Pam Leschak, Tim Melchert) as well as a discussion around the FAC Learning Network (Nick Goulette).

Discussion:

- Creating an environment which is conducive to creating and strengthening already existing fire adapted communities is key. Reducing risk is an important juggling act and fire chiefs and local officials as well as social scientists can play a pivotal role, with the goal of bolstering communities around concepts like risk reduction and becoming fire adapted.
- Understanding the planning process for fire use is a key element to creating stronger support for this approach to fuels reduction.
- Informal flexible framework to work together and stay in contact to better leverage work that we are doing – no real overarching requirements – group allowed connections and expansion of initiatives not possible otherwise (Headwaters Economics opportunity).
- Build successful partnerships with insurance companies to support programs like *Ready, Set, Go!*
- How can WFLC and its supporting bodies elevate and further some of these opportunities, opening them to a broader audience and utility?
- Good work being done to scale FAC networks to work effectively at the local and “inter”-local level.
- Each community needs one sparkplug – doesn’t matter where it comes from to get people in the community to start to pay attention.
- What can WFLC do?
 - Competitive grants for county level coordinators or whatever appropriate scale.
 - Community assistance is often in acres treated, acres and outcomes flow from collaboration, invest in collaboration and coordination.
 - How you offer resources can also communicate values and priorities.
 - Need to think of different measures of success and how to communicate them (i.e., diversity of partners, interactive outreach). Use these metrics and others to tell these stories of success to lawmakers in Congress.
- The Council was in agreement with the priority issue paper as a framework to move forward.

Next Steps:

- No need to create a new task group, we can use existing channels, but NSC will need assistance with leader’s intent from WFLC to feel empowered to participate in the discussion.
- Develop methods to upscale current work and multiply successes in local communities.
- WFLC members to send feedback or suggestions to presenters.
- Messaging is very important. Part of the messaging should be this isn’t just a forest issue, but the conditions we face on the landscape are around all vegetation types. Engage both forest & rangelands
- There is an opportunity to better engage FEMA regions. Chief Mitchell and USFA will help create ways to engage.
- Zupko and NSC will determine key participants to work with existing coalitions (e.g. FAC Coalition and FAC LN) and determine how best to engage existing structures.

Large Landscape Collaboration

Issues: *Increase the number and area of wildfire resilient and healthy landscapes, resilient communities, and efficiency of wildland fire response by expanding cross-landscape, cross-ownership collaboration.*

Robert Bonnie and Jim Lyons opened the discussion on strengthening resilience, as a forward looking concept, as well as the ability of collaboratives to put something forward that has buy-in from broad stakeholder groups. There is also an opportunity for internal messaging within agencies and organization to change the established way of thinking in order to broaden collaborations and merging multiple ideas/options/programs (collectively going through an evolution as to how we collaboratively operate). They also discussed the need to take work around collaboration to a much larger scale for greater impact.

Discussion:

- Innovation at the local level in thinking about bigger landscapes, new collaborations, across boundaries. We are seeing trends moving away from polarization around forest management and land management and bringing broad constituents together.
 - We do a great job of cross-jurisdiction fire suppression; can we apply this business model to what we do to prevent and recover from fire?
 - Working across ownership will be important, especially how to integrate private lands into this framework. How do we share information and encourage action at the local level?
- We are not starting from zero, there are many initiatives at the local level that we can take stock of:
 - Joint initiatives from fire chiefs
 - Bruce Babbitt and Jim Lyons worked collaboratively with the community on changing fire policy in Clinton Administration.
 - The Forest Service has been able to increase its scale of managing landscapes through collaboratives – there is a social science piece that is critical to how you empower those collaboratives around different management entities across landscapes
- The Council was in agreement with the priority issue paper as a framework to move forward with several minor additions around conducting analysis across ownerships to identify potential projects and utilizing pilot projects to model success.

Next Steps:

- WFLC plays a seeding role for ideas in order to continue building large landscape collaboration capacity:
 - Promote cohesive strategy across landscapes; and
 - Gathering lessons learned that endure through multiple partners.
- Identify the following information:
 - Needed for making scientifically sound decisions;
 - Opportunities ripe for collaboration, e.g., sage grouse habitat, Apalachicola;
 - Surrounding which foundations and groups to work with as far as helping us to identify key individuals to gather into WFLC efforts.
- Develop (or at least coordinate) a common data platform (USGS can help facilitate).
- Develop a workshop in order to encourage information sharing and establish a best practices clearing house, similar to the NRCS Carbon and Climate Projects Group.
- Consider the ability to film case studies of Cohesive Strategy implementation and distribute these success stories to communities and collaboratives across the nation.
- Zupko and the NSC to identify individuals to serve on a task group with input from WFLC members.

Environmental Compliance

Issues: *Conduct project planning and analysis in a timely, coordinated and efficient manner to expedite fuels management, restoration and maintenance of healthy, resilient landscapes.*

Chief Tidwell and Kim Thorsen began the discussion by stating NEPA (and other regulatory compliance regulations) is not the issue, it is the solution. Essentially, how can the existing set of rules and regulations be used the most efficiently.

Discussion:

- We are not looking to legislatively change ESA or NEPA, the goal is to take what we have and partner, streamline practices, and develop efficient programmatic approaches.
- Contextualizing the challenge using the specific case of the secretarial order regarding rangelands, how can we move forward with restoring ecosystems, breaking down process barriers, and connecting those to landscape collaboration in the sage grouse region?
- Rim and King Fire restoration included salvaging and removing biomass that had tremendous support from CEQ to use alternative arrangements and work on an adaptive approach. Black Hales Project, a 250,000 acre EIS, is another case where CEQ helped USFS do that adaptively under NEPA so that within the next 50 years we have flexibility to get back into the landscape and build resilience.
- A willingness to try something different is critical. This can only occur with trust present across stakeholders. This is what gives us the confidence to be innovative and to rely on community capacity to take on the work, e.g., utilizing mill owners.
- We need to continue to ask ourselves, how can we be more effective with our environmental process? USFS is doing a series on training and networking with line officers on how to work in collaboratives.
- We need to find more ways to share lessons beyond agencies. We need to share with federal partners, states and counties what is available and what is possible. Often there is tremendous benefit to have a neutral party involved (e.g. TNC engaging management of our natural landscapes).
- The Council was in agreement with the priority issue paper as a framework to move forward with a few additions: a concept around building community support, evaluating the impact of short-term expedience versus long-term relationship building and key messages capturing leader's intent.

Next steps:

- Strategic Communications:
 - WFLC needs to provide clear leaders intent in joint messaging;
 - Without overburdening them, Zupko should work with NSC to identify strategies for the broad and effective distribution of key messages to constituencies and stakeholders;
 - Learn from past experiences where communication products didn't get utilized as much as they could have; create joint messages if most of the partners commit to use them; identify cross-agency and cross-partner ways to communicate;
 - WFLC should focus on communicating the importance of scale and how to be methodical about planning to meet larger scale landscapes faster. Messages should additionally seek to address the concerns of local partners about the extra time needed for good planning.
- Identify resources needed to accomplish our goal of creating situationally appropriate adaptive responses within the current NEPA (and other regulatory process) framework, whether this involves:
 - Identifying what is needed to build a successful communications campaign; or
 - Clearly asking for investments in front end science and collaboration that supports multiple years of work.

Fire Season Lessons Learned

Zupko introduced the topic then turned it over to Jim Douglas and Dan Olsen to discuss the potential need. Olsen and Douglas reiterated the intent is not a review of specific fires or tactics, but what are some big questions WFLC might be able to think about and address at the appropriate level. List those out and in the process of thinking through them we can have some ideas for WFLC engagement. Where can WFLC be value added?

- Intersection of three goals around fire management, with particular focus on FACs.
 - This fire season was lower elevation and closer to communities:
 - Differences in the number of homes saved vs. homes lost;
 - Need to build community risk into how we talk to the press and lawmakers ;
 - We need to educate people on the nature of the fire threat to bring them up to speed.
 - Is this an issue of balancing goals of restoration vs. community protection? How do we prioritize treatment areas?
 - What worked well that can be utilized as a learning opportunity in the future?

Douglas and Olsen teased out the following items for consideration by WFLC as part of a “lessons learned” at the appropriate WFLC level.

- **Looking at broader patterns:** National operational reviews are pretty narrow, we should not focus fire by fire or at the gap level. WFLC should be the forum to identify patterns that are too macroscopic for lower levels of organization to see.
- **Envisioning and Planning for the Future:** Challenge modeling and visioning alternative futures. Where do we want to be, where do we want to go, and what can we do to prevent ourselves from going places we don’t want to be? We should focus on envisioning our preferred 20 year future and how to get there operationally and policy wise.
- **Organizational Management:** Focus on how we organize and manage ourselves so we don’t need a new federal restructure to address fire management challenges.
- **After Action Review:** Needs to reflect the extraordinary amount of work and severity of the conditions the men and women experienced this year. This year our relationships with our partners in the state local and national level were strong. We should identify why it worked so well this year as well as how we can build on it. Report on examples where all three parts of the cohesive strategy were in place and what difference it made
- **Customer Opinion:** Public input is paramount and we want to meet needs: we need to create informed policies, using the tactical and operational perspectives, by engaging men and women on the ground

Next Steps:

Zupko, Olsen and Douglas will continue to refine a simple process to look for themes stemming from calendar year 2015 wildfires that may be of opportunity for WFLC deliberation. An evaluation will take into account annual reviews that occur, thus will not move forward until after the first of the year to utilize those completed reviews.

WFLC Member Round Robin

WFLC members were given time to bring forward any issues or items of interest to the full WFLC. All comments were in support of the four priorities and/or the fire season lessons learned and will be utilized as appropriate (see notes for specifics).

Public Comment

- FYI - The decision was made not to list the greater sage grouse.
- Success - Rubicon volunteer organization on disaster relief took assignments in 2015.
- Success - Military veterans have been trained as hand crews, FFT1

Closeout

- Next meeting will be January 24-25 in North Florida. Jacksonville FL will serve as primary airport for most travelers.
- This is the last meeting for DOI to be the primary chair. The gavel will be turned over to Bonnie/USDA to run in 2016.
- Zupko and NSC did great work – the priorities document pulled together strong ideas, and new ideas discussed during the meeting are great additions.
- Ultimately the only thing that matters is putting it on the ground and we can all work together to make sure that happens.
- Implementing some cross boundary work – and touching multiple ownerships is key.