



Outline of a UNISDR Regional South Asia Wildland Fire Network Foundation Meeting

Kathmandu, Nepal, 2-3 April 2007

1. Background Information

1.1 Setting up Regional South Asia Wildland Fire Network (RSAFN)

An increasing frequency and destructive force of unwanted wildfires worldwide -- including the excessive use of fire in the conversion of forests into other land uses in the tropical countries -- is affecting human lives, health and well-being, economic assets, property, biodiversity, water resources, soil, atmosphere and climate.

Fire management strategies which include preparedness and early warning cannot be generalized due to the multidirectional and -dimensional effects of fire in the different vegetation types and the large variety of cultural, social, and economic factors influencing them. However, unlike the majority of the geological and hydro-meteorological hazards, wildfires represent a natural but predominantly human-influenced hazard, which can be predicted, controlled and, in many cases, prevented.

The current state of wildland fire science and atmospheric sciences research of the last two decades potentially provide sufficient knowledge for fire management decision support and development of policies affecting the occurrence and consequences of human-caused fires. However, in many countries or localities, the requisite knowledge is either lacking or is not readily accessible for developing adequate measures in fire policies and management.

In response to the strategic goals of the UN Convention on Combat of Desertification (CCD), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF), the Millennium Declaration of the UN General Assembly, and the objectives of the work of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the UN-ISDR Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction in 2001 established a Working Group on Wildland Fire (WG-4). This Working Group was coordinated by the GFMC.

One of the priority fields addressed by the Working Group on Wildland Fire was the establishment of, and operational procedures for, a global network of regional- to national-level focal points and network structures for early warning of wildland fire, fire monitoring and impact assessment, aimed at enhancing existing global fire monitoring capabilities and facilitation of a global fire management working programme or network.

The UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network is created in 2002 and is recognized as an activity of UNISDR since 2004. GFMC is serving as secretariat of the Global Wildland Fire Network and the Wildland Fire Advisory Group of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR).

At the 2nd meeting of UN-ISDR Working Group on Wildland Fire (WG-4) (3-4 December 2001) it was decided to give priority to the establishment of the "Global Network of Regional Wildland Fire Networks".

The strategy agreed by the International Wildland Fire Summit (Sydney, 3-6 and 8 October 2003) (“Strategy for Future Development of International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management”) includes the following agreement:

“The Regional Wildland Fire Networks will be consolidated, developed and promoted through active networking in information sharing, capacity building, preparation of bilateral and multilateral agreements, etc. This process will be facilitated through regional Wildland Fire Conferences and Summits in cooperation with the International Liaison Committee and the UN-ISDR Working Group on Wildland Fire”.

At the first meeting of UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network (3-4 December 2004) it was recommended to endorse the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network and official recognition of Regional Wildland Fire Networks under the auspices of the United Nations ISDR, FAO, and GFMC, among others; to instrumentalize the networks as effective platforms for dialogue and communication to achieve a level of mutual cooperation and synergy within regions, between regions, as well as between the Rio conventions UNCCD, UNCBD, and UNFCCC; and to support the Regional Wildland Fire Networks.

This South Asia (SA) Wildland Fire Network Foundation is in line with several declarations made in international conferences/ summit and the decision made in the meetings of UN-ISDR Working Group on Wildland Fire (WG-4), UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network during the last five years and is intended to bring together both the technical members of the fire community and the authorities concerned with policy and national practices in wildland fire management to realize their common interests of fire risk management and disaster reduction at global scale.

Following discussions with representatives from Nepal and India in 2006 and earlier offers by the Department of Forests, Nepal is recognized as the convener of the network by the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network/ GFMC.

1.2 Vision, Mission and Goals of a Regional South Asia Wildland Fire Network

The vision of this regional network is to enhance and strengthen bilateral / multilateral and international cooperation in wildland fire management for creating synergies and sharing knowledge, technical and human resources between countries in the region by accepting and promoting principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures within a guiding framework agreed upon by individual countries.

Mechanisms of cooperation in wildland fire management in the region will include:

- Bilateral / multilateral cooperation between two or more countries at national level within the region: This type of cooperation generally includes mechanisms for assistance in major emergencies to suppress fires, and technical assistance in specific cases. Cooperation should be extended to other areas of wildland fire management, such as wildland fire prevention, establishment of common databases, training programmes, etc.
- International (including inter-regional) between international donors and countries in the region: This type of cooperation will require financial and technical assistance mechanisms. Other elements of international cooperation may include the development of strategies, guidelines, norms and rules that would require least additional finances.

The Regional Strategy on Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management will give priority to:

- Develop bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms.
- Reach consensus by participating countries on agreed principles, norms, rules and decision making procedures in wildland fire management.
- Create an enabling atmosphere for international cooperation in wildland fire research and management, including international donors.

The mission of the Regional South Asia Wildland Fire Network is to facilitate the enhancement of local, national and regional fire management capabilities by creating synergies of participating scientists, managers and policy makers in accordance with the mandate and scope of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), Working

Group on Wildland Fire, and in collaboration with managers, policy makers, technical experts, and scientists throughout the region and worldwide.

Particular emphasis will be given to reduce the devastating effects of wildfires on property, resources, health, and the environment. The Regional Network will initiate processes and systems of information management and dissemination and facilitate technology transfer with the aim to help prevent and mitigate these effects. The working group will contribute to strengthen institutional fire management capabilities and to bring the world's knowledge and technical expertise to communities suffering the devastating unnatural and unwanted impacts of wildfires.

Long-term goals include:

- Support the development of national policies.
- Support sustainable cooperation between countries of the region.
- Strengthen the Regional South Asian Wildland Fire Network.
- Support the development and implementation of a global strategy and / or the development of an international agreement on cooperation in wildland fire management.

The mid-term goals include:

- Provide a forum for a dialogue between governments, national focal points, NGO's, civil society, and regional and international stakeholders.
- Serve as catalytic and mutually supporting link between national wildland fire strategies.
- Enable sharing of resources between neighbouring countries in the region.
- Reinforce national and regional technical capacities in wildland fire management.

The specific objectives include:

- To contribute to the development and implementation of a national and regional organizational framework with principles, alignments, procedures and technical-operational formats agreed upon between the countries.
- To favour the development and strengthening of national fire management policies and strategies and in keeping with the same, improved legal frameworks regarding the issue.
- To establish a fire information system available, standardized and agreed between the countries of the region to support decision making.
- To develop fire detection early warning systems to enable prompt fire detection and to improve response time in an effective, organized, and safe manner leading to the minimization of effects on countries in the region.
- To develop national emergency control cooperation between countries of the region.
- To support sustainable cooperation between the countries of the region based on a concerted strategy and bilateral or multilateral programmes agreed to in terms of fire prevention, training, extension and research.
- To create an early wildland fire warning system at regional level.
- To support an establishment of early warning systems at national to local levels
- To establish and maintain the network information system on the internet
- To support an establishment or improvement of Integrated Fire Management Systems with emphasis on community participation
- To facilitate transnational synergies in wildland fire research and technology development with regard to fire science and to streamline technology transfer
- To increase/improve access – and the use of – remote sensing and related technology for use in fire monitoring, fuel and fire management planning and wildfire impact assessment
- To assist in wildfire disaster management and mitigation
- To facilitate capacity building at all levels of fire management
- To promote communication between wildland fire disciplines of Asia and from other continents, under the umbrella of the GFMC
- To establish and maintain linkage with GOFC/ GOLD.

1.3 Proposal for Structured Activities of the Regional South Asia Wildland Fire Network

The themes listed below are candidates for the formation of sub-groups or clusters of activities:

- Network Coordination
- Country Focal Points and network members
 - *Regularly updated list on the web, members receive circular mails regularly*
- Wildland Fire Early Warning
- Wildland Fire Monitoring
 - *Linkage with the GOF/GOLD Regional Fire Implementation Team*
- Wildland Fire Management
- Wildland Fire Science
- Wildland Fire Capacity Building
 - *Regional Training Center (joint venture with GFMC)*
- Wildland Fire Policy and Legislation

1.4 The Political Dimension of a Regional Cooperation

It is essential to attain political commitment and support at the national, regional and international level to accomplish the goals of the network and to provide the basis for creating permanent bilateral / multilateral and international cooperation in wildland fire management in the region,

At the national level it is important that the individual countries of the region will adopt the regional strategy as well as the role and mandate of the Regional Wildland Fire Network. Some of the activities addressed by the strategy might require bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements. Others might require informal agreements between countries (agencies, institutions, individual scientists). Preferably the informal agreements should receive official support and adoption by national government agencies. Strengthening or establishment of national structures / capabilities in fire management are prerequisite for efficient cooperation between countries and organizations.

At the regional level it is necessary that the mandated regional institutions or cooperation mechanisms will incorporate the regional strategies (for example SAARC), as well as the Regional Wildland Fire Networks, within their structure and the implementation of their overall work programmes.

At the international level institutions and organizations (for example UNISDR, UNEP, FAO, GFMC, GTZ, World Bank, etc.) must be encouraged to provide financial and technical assistance.

2. Aim of the regional SA network foundation meeting

The main aim of the foundation meeting is to bring together international and regional wildland fire scientists, professionals and managers to discuss on global, regional as well as national level issues and concerns of wildland fire paradigms and build a common consensus for sustainable wildland fire management in the region.

3. Auspices

Following the continuous discussions among national focal points in the region with the secretariat of UN-ISDR Working Group on Wildland Fire/ UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network, the meeting will be held under the auspices of the Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC).

4. Venue and Date

The foundation meeting will be held in the premises of ICIMOD in Kathmandu, Nepal, 2-3 March 2007. A timetable is provided in Annex A.

5. Target Audience / Participants

Representatives from the region, notably those who are already actively involved in the regional network building processes and having a long experience in wildland fire management and/or forest protection, are invited to contribute to the meeting. A list of invitees is provided in Annex B.

ANNEX A: Time table

Day 1: Monday 2 April 2007

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- 10.00 – 10.05 The agenda and programme for the meeting (Mr. Sundar Sharma, Regional Coordinator)
- 10.05 – 10.10 Welcome (Mr. Gopal Sherchan, Chairman, National Organizing Committee)
- 10.10 – 10.40 Opening and Status of the Global Wildland Fire Network (Prof. Dr. Johann G. Goldammer)
- 10.40 – 11.45 Key note remarks (Dr. Madhav Karki, DDG, ICIMOD)
- 10.45 – 10.50 Key note remarks (Mr. Jamuna Tamrakar, Chief Foreign Aid Division, MoFSC)
- 10.50 – 11.15 Country reports Bhutan
- 11.15 – 11.40 Country reports India
- 11:40 – 12:00 Coffee
- 12.00 – 12.25 Country reports Nepal
- 12.25 – 12.50 Country reports Pakistan
- 12:50 -- 13:50 Lunch
- 13.50 – 14.15 Country reports Srilanka
- End of the day

Day 2: Tuesday 3 April 2007

Technical Session

- 09:00 -- 11:00 General discussion for future strategies and draft preparation of "Kathmandu Declaration"
- 11:10 – 11.15 Announcement of the Kathmandu Declaration (JG/ GS/ SK/ PD/ SS)
- 11:15 – Field trip to nearby forests
- 18:30 – 20.30 Closing Dinner

ANNEX B: List of Participants

Resource Persons

GFMC, GERMANY

Prof. Dr. Johann G. Goldammer
The Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC)
Georges-Koehler-Allee 75
D - 79110 Freiburg
Germany

Tel: +49-761-808011
E-mail: johann.goldammer@fire.uni-freiburg.de

INDIA

Mr. Pramod Krishnan,
Joint Director (Wildlife),
Ministry of Environment and Forests,

Government of India,
New Delhi,
India

E-mail: jd-wl@nic.in

Dr. Ravi Chellam
ATREE
Bangalore,
India
E-mail: Ravi.chellam@atree.org

BHUTAN

Kinley Tshering
Forest Fire Management Program
Social Forestry Division
Department of Forests
Thimphu : Bhutan

Email: Kinley Tshering <kinleytshering@gmail.com>

PAKISTAN

Dr. Bashir Ahmed Wani
Inspector General Forests
Ministry of Environment
Government of Pakistan
CDA Block IV, Civic Centre
Islamabad, Pakistan

Te.: +92-51-9202142, 9203726
Fax: +92-51-9202211
e-mail: wani48@hotmail.com
basher.wani@Gmail.com

SRI LANKA

Mr. HWK Jayatilake
Asst. Conservator of Forests
"Sampathpaya"
82, Rajamalwatta Road
Battaramulla, Sri Lanka

Tel: +94-1-866635
Fax: +94-1-866633

HOST COUNTRY NEPAL

Mr. Gopal Raj Sherchan

Mr. Shesh Kant Kafle

Mr. Pradeepmani Dixit

Ms. Krishna Karkee

Mr. Govinda Joshi

Mr. C.R. Rana

Ms. Ripu Kunwar

Mr. Nava Raj Baral

Mr. Sundar P. Sharma