



EDITORIAL – RUSSIAN FEDERATION SPECIAL ISSUE

Although fires are now commonly recognized as an important element of natural ecosystem dynamics, they remain the single most important factor threatening Russia's forest resources and ecosystems, especially in Siberia and the Far East with their low population density and large distances, and need to be properly managed. The period of transition from centrally-planned to market-based economy in the 1990s and early 2000s has substantially weakened viability of the formerly strong and highly centralized system of forest management and conservation in Russia, including its fire management system that previously had been targeted at full fire suppression. The on-going economic and administrative reforms include a redistribution of public forest management responsibilities between federal, regional and local levels of government – including in fire management. The Government has already realized the need to focus more strongly on fire prevention in its public financing priorities. It has also recognized the importance of ecological functions of natural fires and shifted from the previous policy of total fire suppression to a more modern policy of fire prioritization. All these changes were spelled out in the decisions a high-level international conference “New Approaches to Fire Management at an Ecoregional Level” jointly held by the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Bank in Khabarovsk in September 2003 and subsequently reflected in the new “Concept of Forest Fire Protection in the Russian Federation” that was adopted by the Ministry for Natural Resources in 2004.

At the conference the ‘intellectual’ launch of the design of the project “Fire Management in High Conservation Value Forests of the Amur-Sikhote-Alin Ecoregion” took place. The objective of the proposed project is to strengthen conservation of critical, non-economically accessible forests of high conservation value in the Amur-Sikhote-Alin Ecoregion of the Russian Far East through improved forest fire management, and reducing frequency, size and intensity of catastrophic fires. The Project – to be financed by the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) – will cover all protected areas and other forest areas managed for conservation purposes in the ecoregion, including Primorsky Krai, Khabarovsk Krai, and Jewish Autonomous Oblast.

The complete set of conference contributions by Russian and international fire scientists and managers has been edited by Valentin V. Furyaev and been published in Russian language in the following volume:

Fire management at an ecoregional level. International experience and new approaches in forest sector reforms. World Bank and Program on Forests (PROFOR). Alex Publishers, Moscow (ISBN 5-9618-0007-5.)

This special issue of International Forest Fire News publishes the English versions of key presentations given at the conference and focussing on the region. They were edited by the Johann G. Goldammer, Editor of IFFN, with the kind support by Marina I. Smetanina and Andrey V. Kushlin, both World Bank, Moscow.

In addition the full project concept “Fire Management in High Conservation Value Forests of the Amur-Sikhote-Alin Ecoregion” is published in this special IFFN issue. Most importantly, IFFN is publishing exclusively the new “Concept of Forest Fire Protection in the Russian Federation”. A significant contribution of Sergey Dusha-Gudym on “Transport of Radioactive Materials by Wildland fires in the Chernobyl Accident Zone”, a paper presented at the 3rd International Wildland Fire Conference (Sydney, 2003), has been edited for publication in this issue. Finally, Nikolay A. Kovalev is reflecting about the History of Russia's Aerial Forest Protection Service Avialesookhrana at the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of Avialesookhrana's Air Fleet celebrated at Avialesookhrana's Headquarters, Pushkino, 15 September 2004. This contribution is complemented by an address to the anniversary presented by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC).