



Regional Session IV: European EFFIS Network, Mediterranean Network (Silva Mediterranea Forest Fire Working Group), Near East (NENFIRE), Sub-Regional Euro-Alpine Network

11 May 2011, 15:50 – 18:00

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Wildfires are a social, economic, and environmental issue more and more frequently tackled by technical and scientific world, taking into account the new climatic scenarios that point out the increase of burnt areas and the rise in the frequency, intensity and severity of wildfires. Wildfires destroy the protective functions of the forests and can lead to increased soil erosion, reduced water retention, rock-fall, and biodiversity loss.

In the last years several events regarding wildfires have taken place where it has been highlighted the raising concern, especially in the Mediterranean Basin. Several conclusions and recommendations have been pointed out as result of these events. The main ones have been the following:

- IV International Wildland Fire Conference, Sevilla, Spain, May 2007
- Workshop on Forest Fires in the Mediterranean Region: prevention and regional cooperation, Sabaudia, Italy, 2008
- Regional Workshop on Forest Fires in the Near-East, Latakia, Syria, 2009
- Workshop on the Assessment of Forest Fire Risks and Innovative Strategies for Fire Prevention, Rhodes, Greece, May 2010
- Council Conclusions on prevention of forest fires in the European Union
- II Mediterranean Forest Week, Avignon, France, April 2011
- ALPFFIRS INTERREG project general meeting, May 2011

The objectives of the Regional session are to discuss preventive measures for the regions, to discuss opportunities to improve the international cooperation and identify opportunities for further collaboration.

2. Determining factors

The main key factors related to wildfires its causes and consequences have been highlighted in the documents resulting from the previously mention events:

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

- Abandonment of rural lands and rural activities, aging of rural population
- Intense urbanization of societies and population concentrated in coastal areas and some built-in urban areas inland
- Increased population from tourism
- Rapidly expanding of wildland urban interface

ECONOMIC FACTORS

- Low economic value and profitability of Forests. Social and economic expenditures of dealing with the sprouted fires and post-fire restoration are not in accordance with a sustainable development.

ECOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- Changing conditions in many European rural areas, changes in land uses and production models, increasing fire risk.
- Climate change influence wildfires due to p
- Different meteorological gradients cause regional fire weather situations periods of higher temperature and longer drought
- Fire-dependent character of Mediterranean ecosystems which demand for its management technical use of fire as prescribed burnings.

SCIENTIFIC FACTORS

- Scientific research sometimes disconnected from management.

POLITICAL FACTORS

- Political decisions not made based in long term integral programs.
- Not enough transparency on wildfire management by public administrations, no data on investments made to protect forest fires and forest policies
- Defense against wildfires policy not enough coordinated with urban and rural policy
- Not enough fire land management, wildfire education and awareness to society.

3. International cooperation

Due to the transboundary nature of wildfires, the planning for their prevention should be addressed from a regional perspective. The “Green Paper on Forest Protection and Forest Information in the European Union” notes, significant prevention efforts made by the European Union and its member states have been focused on training, investigation, awareness and structural prevention. However, these efforts need to be intensified to deal with the consequences of climate change, as the Avignon Prevention Position Paper has pointed out.

Due to the existence of several international networks working at international level they should combine and coordinate efforts to prevent and fight wildfires using synergies between networks.

Inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination between fire fighting agencies and environmental services is needed.

Mutual assistance on suppression operations demands protocols to dispatch resources and to set operational procedures based on technical criteria, standardization and harmonisation of terminology and training.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

FIRE PREVENTION

1. Of special priority is the prevention of wildfires caused by socio-economic changes in the land use, traditional practices of burning for agricultural and farming purposes and wildland-urban interface fires.
2. Local population must be involved in the design and establishment of forest fire prevention policies, as they are primary players in making effective prevention.
3. Wildfire prevention strategies should be integrated in national and regional sustainable environmental policies. Forest policies should pursue optimizing social welfare including payment for ecosystems services.
4. Forest fire related policies should consider landscape approach taking into account different land uses. These must be coordinated with urban, rural and agricultural policies and take into account adverse effects due to climate change.
5. Prevention needs a continuous management that integrates among many other activities fuel treatment, silvicultural measures and prescribed burning planning.
6. Wildland -urban interface fires require specific preventive measures as specific legislation at local level.

7. Appropriate knowledge of fire risk and strategic planning of fuel treatment are key factors to decrease impacts of wildfires.
8. Adaptation strategies for forest management should be worked out to reduce the vulnerability of forest ecosystems against extreme wildfires.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

9. Disseminate and share experiences, build up and replicate the best practices in wildfire management, namely by promoting international exchanges between fire professionals of all levels.
10. Promote exchange programs on good practices and develop risk assessment voluntary guidelines and risk cartography with an adequate spatial and temporal resolution, as well as prevention voluntary guidelines.
11. Mutual assistance on suppression operations demands protocols to dispatch resources and to set operational procedures based on technical criteria, standardization and harmonization of terminology and training. Enhancement of joint activities supporting cross border cooperation between countries.
12. Inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination between fire fighting agencies and environmental services is needed.
13. Regarding international cooperation, networks working at international level should combine and coordinate efforts to prevent and fight wildfires using synergies between networks. The joint activities should be supported by bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements between countries resulting in collaborative third party funded projects.
14. Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines should be supported by agencies. In particular, Incident Command System and standardized training is recommended to be implemented by countries, considering different languages, in order to share resources safely and effectively.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

15. Build on the information in EFFIS to establish guidelines for forest fire risk mapping at European level.
16. Continue the work on harmonization of data and information through the exchange of data in EFFIS.
17. Planned actions in the Silva Mediterranea and NENFIRE networks for the extension of EFFIS should be implemented.
18. Enhance Information on prevention and suppression investments to be incorporated in EFFIS; data are needed for the assessment of their efficiency.
19. Operational warning systems for wildfires should be further developed at regional level and linked to the EFFIS Forest Fire Warning System.
20. Promotion and funding of activities to study the effects of wildfires on ecosystem services paying particular attention on climate change

FIRE MANAGEMENT

21. Wildfire management need to be considered as a long term policy by the decision makers.
22. The principle of total fire extinguishment should be questioned in specific cases, balancing economic efficiency, ecosystem value and other land management objectives.
23. To achieve the goals of wildfire prevention forests must be profitable. It is important to promote the payment for forest goods and environmental services. Education and awareness on this issue has to be integrated in educational programs.
24. Countries are encouraged to adopt the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Fire Management.