

CANADIAN WILDLAND FIRE STRATEGY: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY (2009/2010)

Introduction

This report is prepared on behalf of the Wildland Fire Management Working Group (WFMWG) established under the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers (CCFM). The report outlines the collective activities that Canada's wildland fire management agencies propose to undertake in 2009/10 to further the implementation of the Canadian Wildland Fire Strategy (CWFS).

Background

In the wake of serious and costly fire seasons such as 2003, the CCFM agreed at its 2004 meeting that a new collaborative and strategic approach to wildland fire management based on a risk-management framework was required. An Assistant Deputy Ministers (ADM) Task Group was charged with the development of a strategy to address the following wildland fire issues:

- Managing public risk and expectations in the wildland-urban interface;
- Forests under stress;
- Competition for the forest land base;
- Public expectations in resource management;
- Climate change;
- Aging infrastructure of wildland fire management agencies.

At the 2005 CCFM meeting, the Canadian Wildland Fire Strategy was unveiled and a Declaration of support was signed by Ministers of all Provinces, Territories, and Natural Resources Canada. The Declaration has three primary goals:

- Resilient communities and an empowered public;
- Healthy and productive forest ecosystems;
- Modern business practices.

Subsequently, an implementation plan was developed and modelled on a 50/50 cost sharing arrangement between the federal and provincial/territorial governments respectively. Phase 1 of CWFS implementation, initially planned for the 2005-2008 period, was to focus on selected elements of the following strategic objectives:

- Public education/awareness and policy/risk analysis;
- FireSmart programs for the wildland-urban interface (WUI);
- Preparedness and response capability;
- Innovation (sociology and the humanities, economics, biophysical, and decision support systems).

It was anticipated that an investment of \$350 million over three years would be required to fully implement Phase 1 of the Strategy, which would be continued beyond Phase 1 based on a review of accomplishments.

Despite the relatively active and costly fire seasons of 2006 and 2007, there has been no agreement (cost sharing) on implementation of the CWFS; however, all jurisdictions have made progress on some of its aspects, within their limited resources. The cooperative efforts of the agencies in this regard have been useful, but we are still far from meeting the achievements desired in even Phase 1 of the Strategy. With each passing day, demands on the fire management agencies grow in complexity, as well as the negative consequences of being unable to respond adequately.

CIFFC

The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) is the corporation owned and operated by the federal, provincial and territorial wildland fire management agencies to coordinate resource sharing, mutual aid, and information sharing, and to serve as a collective focus and facilitator of wildland fire cooperation.

New strategic directions for CIFFC were developed and endorsed by CIFFC's Board of Trustees in 2008. They are:

- To enhance the coordination of resource sharing and mutual aid to provide timely, efficient, and effective response to member agencies;
- To provide mutually beneficial opportunities through the development of international arrangements for resource sharing, mutual aid and the exploration of cooperative international opportunities;
- To maintain and enhance creative, dynamic and practical processes for the collection of wildland fire data, information management and communication among the member agencies and others;
- To develop, coordinate and implement a comprehensive pan-Canadian wildland fire training initiative to facilitate interagency resource exchange, increase productivity and enhance safety;
- To adopt value added technologies to improve and enhance the CIFFC effort in resource sharing, mutual aid and information management;
- To provide and maintain long range planning, program delivery, human resource strategies and financial sustainability to ensure efficient and effective service delivery;
- To develop and implement specific strategies to address current and emerging wildland fire issues.

CIFFC maintains a critical strategic role in wildland fire management across Canada. CIFFC provides a forum for pan-Canadian cooperation and coordination in long-range fire management planning, program delivery, human resource strategies, and financial sustainability. This role is expected to continue.

2008 Review

The CCFM-WFMWG directed a task team to undertake a review to capture the extent of implementation of the CWFS from 2004 to 2007. This review determined that all jurisdictions are using the CWFS to some extent as a vision and priority setting guide, and have made some progress in implementation despite the absence of a comprehensive implementation plan and a commitment of resources from the federal government.

The review provided the following summary:

- Provincial and Territorial commitments are well advanced;
- Concern among all that the federal program contributions are not present to date;
- Strong partnerships amongst provinces and territories do exist but more must be done to strengthen these relationships;
- A formal commitment between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments is required to ensure the advancement and success of the CWFS as a truly pan-Canadian initiative;
- Provincial and Territorial funding and commitment increased spending from 2006/07 to 2007/08 and again in 2008/09;
- Recognition of the importance of moving forward with the CWFS.

The Challenge

The CCFM - WFMWG has endorsed the 2008 review and identified the following concerns:

- The situation regarding risks, public education and costs of wildfire remains essentially unchanged from prior to 2004;
- The comprehensive commitment by jurisdictions to implement the CWFS is expected to be limited in the short-term due to fiscal restraints;
- There is a potential for individual jurisdictions to implement standalone initiatives that may result in duplication and other unforeseen consequences;
- There is an absence of continued evaluation, documentation of new drivers, re-evaluation and/or confirmation of the CWFS on a go-forward basis.

To maximize the leveraging and coordination of the limited resources to advance the CWFS by jurisdictions, the WFMWG has requested that this implementation strategy be prepared to guide jurisdictions in their collective implementation of Phase 1 initiatives that can be linked back to the four strategic objectives of the CWFS.

Proposed Key Actions

The practice and evolution of advanced risk management principles are embedded in all actions and activities taken to implement the CWFS. The following actions are intended to reflect Phase 1 initiatives undertaken by Canadian fire management agencies, taking into consideration the new and emerging drivers like climate change, industry transformation and public safety, and work to meet the overall CWFS objectives described on page 1.

Key Action 1: Maximize inter-jurisdiction cooperation and support for the CWFS:

- Make certain that the CWFS and associated actions are well integrated with CCFM working groups and other pan-Canadian initiatives;
- WFMWG members continue to seek federal, provincial and territorial champions at the political level;
- Work toward ensuring that the CWFS is positioned on the First Ministers Conference agenda;
- Ensure that the CWFS is closely integrated with the Canadian climate change agenda;
- Align the CWFS and mutual aid policies to be supportive of all-risk emergency management;
- Encourage the CCFM-WFMWG and CIFFC member agencies to promote and share activities, success stories, and present and future implementation plans;
- Build on existing interagency cooperation to develop a joint, inter-disciplinary policy analysis;
- Develop an analysis comparing CWFS implementation achievements against the increasing demands on fire management agencies.

Key Action 2: Develop an Interagency Wildfire Response Capacity and Advisory System:

- Conduct an analysis of current resource capacity versus pan-Canadian needs;
- Maintain a current inventory of internal and external resources availability;
- Develop a pan-Canadian early warning system to identify critical potential resource shortages;
- Identify mechanisms to leverage resources that agencies cannot normally access.

Key Action 3: Ensure resource availability for response capability:

- Analyze infrastructure availability trends and needs on an ongoing basis;
- Maintain or replace critical infrastructure;
- Develop solutions to human resource challenges.

Key Action 4: Coordinate the implementation of FireSmart and fuel mitigation strategies in the WUI:

- Explore inter-agency coordination and implementation of FireSmart principles;
- Undertake the Canadian branding and marketing of FireSmart;
- Aggressively seek financial and in-kind support from partners who benefit from successful FireSmart programs;
- Establish mechanisms for sharing information and best practices for FireSmart and fuels management.

Key Action 5: Facilitate and enhance mutual aid and resource sharing:

- Complete the pan-Canadian Training Strategy and develop its implementation plan;
- Establish and implement forums for innovation, and funding to support projects.
- Develop and implement specific strategies to address current and emerging wildland fire issues.

Summary

This implementation strategy describes the key activities that Canada's wildland fire management agencies cooperatively propose to undertake in 2009/10 to further the goals and objectives of the CWFS. These activities are a subset of the more complete strategies outlined in the CWFS. Canada's wildland fire management agencies will continue to work with the CCFM's Wildland Fire Management Working Group to achieve the political and public support necessary to achieve full implementation of the CWFS.