

Wildland Fire Management Working Group: *Strategic Directions 2014-2019*

WFMWG Strategic Directions 2014-2019

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Canadian Council
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Introduction

At the 2005 meeting of Canadian Council of Forest Ministers (CCFM), the *Canadian Wildland Fire Strategy (CWFS)* 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.

Associated with these goals are several Strategic Objectives (See Appendix A). The CCFM at this time also formed the Wildland Fire Management Working Group (WFMWG) to provide strategic advice and policy guidance on wildland fire management in Canada, and to guide the implementation of the CWFS. The WFMWG has been working toward these goals and, since 2011, has sponsored a series of projects specifically focused on (see Appendix B for details):

- Improved resource capacity and resource exchange capability
- Improved coordination of community wildfire protection programs
- Improved coordination of fuels management programs
- Information management and decision support systems strategy
- Measuring effectiveness and assessing risk in the future resource sharing environment

The WFMWG met in September 2013 to evaluate progress and necessary re-alignments in strategic directions. Based on the evaluation by the WFMWG, the CWFS and its goals and strategic objectives are seen as still relevant and broad enough to encompass our emerging needs to improve management of wildland fire in Canada.

Furthermore, in its assessment of progress on the implementation of the CWFS, the WFMWG has identified several current challenges and opportunities:

- The partnership of wildland fire agencies continues to support the goals of the CWFS, however capacity issues have affected the ability to advance the strategic priorities and need to be addressed. (i.e., the challenge is not *what* needs to be done or *why*, but *how* to advance the agenda.)
- Canadian preparedness for a major fire event continues to be a priority; the capacity of the agencies must be best applied to protect public safety and reduce damages at both jurisdictional and pan-Canadian scales. The credibility of wildland fire agencies and Canadian cooperation will be tested in such a situation; the need for a National Response Plan to prepare for future wildland fire management challenges was identified in the CWFS but development of such a plan has yet to begin.
- Budget pressures and constraints are being experienced by many agencies, (the WFMWG recognizes that the necessary focus of all governments on economic issues following the 2008 world financial crises has reduced both senior management focus on this work and capacity to expand our efforts);
- Project work undertaken by the WFMWG in recent years has been important and relevant, but some projects have begun to transition from strategic into more operational areas. The WFMWG will maintain its strategic focus, and a review of internal governance and project management has been completed to ensure that project results and operational improvements are successfully transferred into operational practice and maintained through the CIFFC partnership.
- Project work has benefited from deliberate efforts to work in partnership with CIFFC and use CIFFC project management structures to engage with agency staff in project delivery. This effort has resulted in some overlap in project activities, and a heavy workload on key staff, and should be clarified in a harmonized integrated work plan.

The WFMWG discussed a number of other challenges including climate change and expanding wildfire/urban interface; coordination and building awareness of prevention; better integration of science into wildland fire decisions; and better consideration of wildland fire in land use decisions. Litigation and worker safety were also discussed as current additions to the Canadian conversation for cooperative effort that were not profiled in the CWFS, but these can be addressed within existing work plans without a shift in strategic priorities.

Refocusing Our Efforts

The WFMWG will address these challenges and opportunities by:

- focusing more resources on a few key strategic priorities to ensure delivery on the highest priority needs;
- harmonizing work planning between WFMWG and CIFFC structures so that there is better understanding of linkages between WFMWG and CIFFC activities, better balancing of resource requirements, and a clear path to transfer WFMWG project results into operational management. (At the February 2014 CIFFC Council of Directors (CoD) meeting, the CoD agreed to begin to harmonize work plans with a target for completion of fall 2014. A refreshed project governance model has also been adopted in 2014.)

Long term planning is conducted under both the WFMWG and CIFFC structures¹. For better clarity it is proposed that the role and focus of the two groups should be:

Strategic Focus of WFMWG

Projects that:

- aim to investigate and influence the wildfire environment and management framework, including the context in which wildfire management agencies operate;
- are intended to develop measurable change in the way wildland fire is managed/mitigated/prevented over the long term;
- support change in program design (refocusing or adding effort or funding at the program level across many agencies);
- support long-term research, science and technology development to address strategic national needs ; and/or
- have a strategic interaction with the public, key Canadian stakeholders, and/or political/other levels of government.

Continuous Improvement focus of CIFFC Council of Directors

Projects that:

- support the improvement of the resource sharing mandate of CIFFC and partner agencies through operational protocols, standards, training, sharing of best practices, etc. ;
- focus technical expertise on improvements to fire operations and program delivery, including suppression systems, equipment evaluation, technology improvement and data standards and information systems;
- promote a coordinated approach to program delivery in areas such as prevention, fuels management and support services such as meteorology, fire behaviour, science and information technology ; and/or
- are key to improving the internal governance or workings of the CIFFC corporation.

¹ A separate task team under the WFMWG and CIFFC is further distinguishing the governance interactions, roles, and work planning processes of WFMWG and CIFFC.

Strategic Priorities 2014-2019

The WFMWG has reviewed the range of activities currently under its sponsorship. The Working Group has identified the need to place greater focus and resourcing on fewer strategic priorities. These efforts will continue to support the goals of the CWFS, while recognizing the emerging challenges facing wildland fire management agencies.

The WFMWG has two strategic priorities:

1. To develop a Canadian Wildland Fire Response Plan to address risks associated with extreme fire load situations.
2. To build community protection and prevention programs such that partners, residents, and communities are engaged in wildfire prevention and loss mitigation

A number of existing WFMWG-supported projects are already aligned to support these two outcomes (refer to items 1,2, and 5 of Appendix B). Other WFMWG activities which are more operational in nature (refer to items 3 and 4 of Appendix B) will be referred to the CIFFC CoD.

1. Canadian Wildland Fire Preparedness and Response Plan

The CWFS anticipated that limited resources, shifting demographics, climate change, and increased reliance on resource sharing through CIFFC would require a strategic approach to pan-Canadian response to critical fire situations that would stretch normally available capacity. Several of the current WFMWG projects are already explicitly exploring the impact of changing fire load, declining resource capacity, and workforce demographics on future resource sharing capability – all foundational elements designed to support development of a *Canadian Wildland Fire Preparedness and Response Plan (CWFPRP)*.

Early attempts to collect information on fire load, trends, workforce demographics, and resource capacity identified a problem with information management and data standards. While pan-Canadian work on improved information management to support both strategic and operational decisions is important, information is a means to the goal of the CWFPRP. Development of the Preparedness and Response Plan will identify the priorities for improved information management at a national level.

Preliminary discussions have identified that a science-based approach to measuring the effectiveness of mutual aid resource sharing and development of tools necessary to manage the higher levels of risk anticipated in the future resource sharing environment is required and requires the engagement of (and investment in) science to support analytical approaches to support the CWFPRP.

Expected outcome	By 2016, Canada has an evidence-based plan to proactively mitigate and manage risk associated with an extreme fire load situation. (That is, a situation when multiple agencies have escalated fire load and unsatisfied orders at CIFFC for more than 72 hours. ²) In the longer term, Canadian wildland fire agencies are better able to work together, engage other partners (e.g., the emergency management
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² Recent history demonstrates Canada reaches this level of escalation two or three times a decade. Analysis will verify the thresholds for extreme events and forecast their likelihood.

	community) and mitigate risk through proactive pre-suppression and response strategies.
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Once the first CWFRP is developed, it should become a focus for ongoing evaluation of preparedness and continuous improvement.

CWFRP Action Plan:

Action	Accountable	Target Date	Status
Establish a team to write a Canadian Wildland Fire Response Plan (CWFRP) to address the issues. Team must scope the plan and identify the remaining work required.	Not assigned	March 2015	TBD
Survey of Wildland Fire Management Agency workforce demographics, and recommendations to address the impact of workforce issues on future resource capacity.	Contracted to G Gordon	April 2014	Report delivered
Synthesis of science and research related to changing fire load in Canada, and further review of agency observed fire load trends and responses	Contracted to B Stocks	April 2014	Report delivered
Developing more standardized language and terminology related to fire load, fire classification, and other areas where a lack of data and terminology standards inhibits a coordinated approach to addressing common issues.	Contracted to G Gordon	April 2014	Report delivered
Action plan to address the findings and recommendations from the above three reports.	CoD to be assigned	Sept 2014 to influence information gathered 2015 and 2016	TBD
Identify Information management priorities to support decision-making in support of the CWFRP	Not assigned	Unclear	TBD
Support science-based projects to measure the effectiveness of current mutual aid resource sharing, and to develop tools necessary to manage risk Small project team of research partners and agency representatives.	Looking for Lead...	Unclear	held Initial meeting, looking for resources
Wildland Fire 2014 seen as an opportunity to engage in this discussion among agencies and researchers. Develop an action plan to engage?	Sal Rasheed and Kim Connors	Oct 2014	TBD

2. Community Protection, Prevention and Education

The first goal of the CWFS, *Resilient communities and an empowered public*, remains a priority of the WFMMWG. The WFMMWG aims to foster *a strategic shift in perception of home/community risk and roles and responsibilities (i.e., an engaged public and partners)*. Considerable effort has been completed to outline broad possibilities of Community Protection programs, including those under the *FireSmart* brand.

This Priority requires a firm commitment to an achievable action plan. Two Directors (Young and McTavish) agreed to champion this initiative at the 2014 CIFFC CoD meeting.

Expected outcome or measurable improvement	<p>Residents and communities are engaged in wildfire prevention and loss mitigation.</p> <p>Short term: build momentum, through a broad partnership, and stabilized capacity toward long term goal. i.e., undertake a cooperative pan-Canadian prevention and loss mitigation campaign to raise awareness and engage additional partners in 2015/16.</p> <p>Each Province/Territory/Agency will set targets for public engagement related to planned activities.</p>
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Community Protection, Prevention and Education Action Plan:

Action	Who Doing /Accountable	Target Date	Status
Directors will work with leadership of the Prevention and Mitigation Working Group to refine the expectations of this priority and redirect it towards completion	E. Young and B. McTavish	November 2014	Red
Scope FireSmart to its core program (Home Owner and Community loss mitigation)	CoD	Done	Yellow
Develop a governance model to implement activities in partnership with FireSmart Canada.	Prevention and Mitigation Working Group	January 2015	Red
Develop an appropriate model to provide dedicated staff resources to work with FireSmart Canada and the agencies to guide implementation.			Red
Build Commitment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire Agencies (early 2014) • Fire Agencies take to agency partners or national groups and ask them to sign on (through 2014). 			Red
WG to work with FireSmart Canada (formerly Partners in Protection) to develop a Canadian campaign for 2015 with two key messages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FireSmart your home/community • Wildfire Prevention (theme TBD) 		January 2015	Red

Transition/Implementation Issues

There are several current WFMWG-funded projects that are important and relevant, but not a strong fit within the proposed WFMWG strategic priorities framework. These projects are a better fit within CIFFC's operational focus and should be transitioned there within the proposed coordinated work plan. In 2014, CIFFC and the WFMWG have agreed on a governance framework to organize this work.

- The WFMWG secretariat will transition existing work on data collection and benchmarking to CIFFC Working Groups:
 - fire load and resource capacity analysis,
 - a study of workforce demographic issues, and
 - the development of more common language and data standards.

During 2014/15, WFMWG will support a smooth transition of these projects to an operational basis through wrap-up of Task Team meetings, publication and translation of final reports, and integration of this work into CIFFC's project management structures.

- The Fuels Management project structure will move to CIFFC working groups. Minimal WFMWG seed money will be provided in 2014/15 for transition activities.

WFMWG project management and funding is supporting a high-level strategy for the management of wildland fire information and information systems to create synergies in the management of information and systems for both strategic and operational decision-making. While this work supports the strategic priorities, it is of strategic value in achieving the priorities of the WFMWG. As a new CIFFC-based working group and leadership become established during 2014/15, WFMWG funding and project management work will continue to support:

- Developing a national information management strategy, using consulting resources as required.
- Completing requirements analysis for strengthening information and decision tools needed to support national situation analysis and mutual aid resource sharing decisions in the future. Undertake a survey of the current state of information and decision support systems and conduct SWOT analysis of the functionality and effectiveness of current fire information systems available within agencies and on a national basis.
- Completing a pilot data integration project among CIFFC and a limited number of agencies to streamline, automate and standardize certain elements of daily and annual information exchange.
- Developing a strategy/framework to guide the development of a multi-agency approach to information sharing and decision support systems that will provide greater availability, timeliness and integration of information and decision tools to support future mutual aid resource sharing needs.

Appendix A: Canadian Wildland Fire Strategy

Resilient communities and an empowered public

- Inform and engage the public through wildland fire awareness and information initiatives and communicate the appropriate response concept to professionals, politicians, and the public;
- Share responsibility through development of integrated government policies clearly defining the risks, roles, and responsibilities of all constituencies (individuals, communities, industries, and governments);
- Minimize the risk to public safety and property by developing and implementing a pan-Canadian FireSmart initiative with distinct components addressing mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery;
- Initiate a directed and integrated program of physical and social science research and technology transfer to ensure the Canadian public is kept continually informed on the evolving role of fire and fire management in Canada, with specific emphasis on the WUI.

Healthy and productive forest ecosystems

- Integrate land, forest, and fire management policies and practices such that fire management policies and actions are derived from explicit land and forest management objectives. In addition, ensure that land and forest management policies consider the biological, ecological, and physical characteristics of wildland fire;
- Reintroduce and/or maintain fire on parts of the landscape by appropriate means, including prescribed fire and the judicious use of wildfire, with the goal of maximizing biodiversity, ecological integrity, and productivity in fire-dependent ecosystems.

Modern Business Practices

- Maintain an economically efficient and world-class wildland fire preparedness and response capability through long-term replacement of deteriorating equipment and infrastructure, implementing Canadian training standards, and recruiting and training personnel at universities and community colleges;
- Develop innovative risk- and cost-sharing approaches consistent with insurance principles;
- Build effective partnerships and innovative institutional arrangements for reducing inter-annual variability of wildland fire management expenditures through the development and use of a Canadian interagency operational preparedness system, and foster effective communication and adaptive management through Canada-wide workshops and information-sharing sessions;
- Adopt a culture of continuous improvement in policy and practice by establishing a collaborative analysis group to carry out policy assessments and analyses of level of protection, and initiate a directed program of fire science and innovation coupled with a comprehensive program of technology transfer.

Appendix B: Recent WFMWG Activities

The WFMWG has been working toward these goals and, since 2011, has sponsored a series of projects specifically focused on:

- 1) Improved resource capacity and resource exchange capability**
 - Survey of Wildland Fire Management Agency workforce demographics, and impact of workforce issues on future resource capacity.
 - Documenting recent observed and forecast trends in agency resource capacity.
 - Synthesis of science and research related to changing fire load in Canada, and further review of agency observed fire load trends and responses.
 - Developing more standardized language and terminology related to fire load, fire classification, and other areas where a lack of data and terminology standards.
- 2) Improved coordination of community wildfire protection programs**
 - Resources from the WFMWG were provided to the CIFFC Wildfire Prevention Community of Practice (WPCOP) to develop a national community wildfire protection/FireSmart expansion strategy. A subset of the Directors on the Oversight Team has been working with leadership on the WPCOP to refine the expectations of the Strategy and redirect it towards completion.
 - A revised strategy is to be completed by the end of calendar 2013.
 - WFMWG funding has been used to develop the framework and materials for a series of FireSmart Community Recognition Workshops, held cooperatively between wildland fire management agencies and partner communities. Workshops have been held or scheduled in multiple communities in BC, AB, SK, ON and NT, jointly funded by the agencies and their community partners.
- 3) Improved coordination of fuels management programs**
 - A national fuels management workshop will be held in January 2014 (Hinton, AB) to further the fuels management objectives laid out in the WFMWG workplan and to address issues identified in the National Fuels Management Survey from 2012.
 - This will include sharing of best practices, developing case studies and gap analysis, and developing methods for assessing fuel treatment productivity and the effectiveness of fuel management approaches.
- 4) Information management and decision support systems strategy**
 - Both the WFMWG and CIFFC have identified the need for improved information management and decision support tools to improve the availability and timeliness of the information required to support future situation assessment, resource sharing and risk management, and the need for a guiding strategy to achieve this goal.
 - A preliminary Information Management Core Group has been formed, with representatives from CIFFC and several agencies. A broader Task Team, with variable membership over time will be formed as the project moves through its formative stages.
 - A national fire load/resource capacity database is being maintained, and a data integration project is underway to develop approaches to improved automation and accessibility of standardized data from across the agencies.
- 5) Measuring effectiveness and assessing risk in the future resource sharing environment**
 - Two workshops have been held to examine current functioning of the resource sharing system, and analysis of future challenges, involving senior agency operations managers and representation from academia. A proposal for a multi-disciplinary science program to examine current processes and provide decision support tools for resource sharing and risk management has been developed for the 2014/15 WFMWG work plan.

Appendix C: References

- Canadian Wildland Fire Strategy
- Report on WFMWG strategic directions workshop held September 2013, Toronto.