

## **Ruidoso, New Mexico Summary of Questions/Issues**

### **What are the most critical issues that the Cohesive Strategy for Wildland Fire Management must address?**

- Inability and /or limitations to forming local operating agreements/MOUs between local fire districts and Federal partners for doing joint prescribed burning and fire suppression operations on lands within one another's jurisdictions
- Inadequate processes and fiscal mechanism for exchanging of funds between local Fed, State, Tribal and Fire District entities. Need an easier process to transfer funds between entities.
- Inadequate recognition of qualifications between Fed/State/Tribal/Fire Districts. Failure of the training and experience "crosswalk" process and no recognition of prior learning resulting in skills going unused
- Biomass opportunities are quickly diminishing due to lack of processing infrastructure and transportation costs to haul long distances
- Process of planning cross-boundary treatment projects needs to be streamlined. It's still too cumbersome and costly. Stopping projects at some boundaries increases expense
- Values cannot be identified nationally; they must be identified locally. Values are place and culture specific. Values cannot be compared from one place to another
- Value is more than \$. The most important things have no dollar value.
- Priorities must also be local. Can't compare MT with NM, totally different situation, values, culture, etc.
- Focus on spending all funds in WUI is inconsistent with some agency missions to protect and enhance wildlife habitat, watersheds, etc.
- Science can only take us so far. We need to rely on experienced field managers and professionals to make good decisions
- Air quality can be a major barrier to prescribed burning. Crystal clear air is not natural all the time but the public thinks it is. Can't wait for the day when the public says "why is the air so clear today, you guys should be out burning!"
- Hiring new positions has become too slow and burdensome. Sometimes it takes 9 months to fill a critical position...and by then fire season is over!
- The current Fed Quals system is much too restrictive. Takes too long for fire employees to get qualified at higher levels. Some quals rely on decades of experience and training, not so much on education.
- Need for a collaborative understanding of suppression strategies and the use of wildfire to achieve sustainable, resilient wildland conditions.
- New approaches are needed to deal with NEPA requirements and addressing air quality standards.
- Many State forest practices acts are out-of-date and need revision. Why do they require planting dense, monoculture plantations that only contribute to the fire problem?
- We still have no performance measure for fuel treatment effectiveness!

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- Need to address what happens after fire; noxious weed invasion, watershed function,
- We can do lots more with the same budgets if local agreements and jurisdictional liability issues were resolved. Too many managers fear liability; both governmental and personal.
- Restoring resilient and sustainable ecosystems vs historical reference conditions
- Long-term ecological benefits vs short-term benefit of community protection
- Education on the ecological benefits of wildfires
- Increasing cost of suppression
- Each agencies has their own priorities and goals (mission). The CS need to facilitate agency's abilities to accomplish them.
- Firefighter labor force maintenance
- Assess the potential for erratic fire seasons from climate change (asymmetric fire)
- Involving and engaging all of the stakeholders.
- Providing guidance for local communities pre-emergency, and a more established format for transition into larger events that require delegations of authority.
- Prioritize values across governmental levels to ensure assistance and funding at the level at which it can have the most impact.
- Address Congress and GAO concerns/taskings.
- Provide a strategy for both fuels treatments and the use of wildfire. The 2006 strategy was primarily a fuels treatment strategy.
- The Cohesive Strategy (CS) should provide overall strategic guidance while providing opportunities to address local priorities. The importance of some local projects/fuels treatments are frequently masked by large scale risk assessment/project prioritization efforts. There are high priority projects everywhere. However, high priority treatment areas are generally more limited. The CS must provide direction for some portion of the funding streams to be focused on high priority projects outside high priority areas.
- A budgetary process that can assist the interagency transfer of money for fuels and other non suppression activities.
- Recognize the progress that has been made over the last decade in fuels management in non-WUI areas and retain the ability to continue the important work using fire to treat and maintain fire dependant ecosystems.
- RX treatments are not a one-time fix, we need to maintain the investments that have been made.
- To identify areas that the National Fire Plan has failed to or not sufficiently addressed in the past ten years (most of the critical issues were identified in the National Fire Plan).
- Communication, Capability, Quick Rapid response, Restoration, Better planning and Budget Process
- Cost effective means for allocating fire management budgets.

**What questions should the Cohesive Strategy consider to identify priority values, attributes, and other concerns?**

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- Consideration and acknowledgement of place specific values
- Values are emotionally and culturally driven
- Values need to make sense on the ground; they vary from place to place
- Some should have input into Nationally recognized values so values aren't conflicting, identify prior to having to apply
- Relationships are a value
- What is the role/responsibility of the private property owner?
- What about socially dependent values; like subsistence
- Is air quality a value? or a desire?
- Budget priorities are placing a higher value on communities, at the expense of natural resources.
- Emphasize ecosystems over individual homes or communities
- What are the best and most sustainable ways of sequestering carbon across the landscape
- Are we accomplishing the mission of the Agencies?
- Employment related to fire management
- How can we ensure that firefighter and public safety remain the absolutely top priority? What other values and priorities are we willing to minimize to keep the above at the forefront?
- How can we most effectively engage local governments and communities since this is where the potential resource pool is the greatest?
- Are our management plans going to cause issues into the future?
- How can local fire authorities (FED/State/Tribal/Fire Districts) be empowered to have adequate authority work together effectively.
- What is the appropriate split of funding stream mix for fuels dollars between the WUI and wildland? Current 90% focus on WUI is not appropriate. We must focus efforts on the wildland as well and not rely on wildfire use primarily.
- How to better invest prevention efforts? We must start transferring risk of building homes in the WUI to the homeowners. Firefighters cannot be everywhere at once or even successful in all places. Homeowners must understand that and accept risk and responsibility.
- What are the realistic management options available in each area/jurisdiction to meet the objectives of the CS? Example, don't automatically expect using wildfires for meeting resource objectives as something that can/will be applied to all lands. Design a realistic strategic around current constraints.
- Are local measures (definitions) of risk and consequences similar (close enough for comparison) across all jurisdictions?
- The federal governments fiduciary trust responsibility for Indian trust lands must be considered.
- Individual tribal cultural values must be considered and addressed.
- Where is the data that all the agencies came up with in identifying priority values in the first phase of FPA? Much of that data should be used as a significant amount of time was spent on it and although there was a great deal of disagreement amongst the agencies at the local level about how different values

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should be weighted those same issues would most likely still remain if the process were re-initiated today.

- What are other existing databases that such information can be extracted from?
- Do all interested parties have a voice somewhere in the process?
- How do we account for the intangible values that have importance to some groups and not others?
- Values vary
- Attributes-use good science
- Priority values-commercial forests need to be valued greater than forests that are not available for harvest

### **What questions should the Cohesive Strategy consider in order to rate and incorporate risk? (Definition, Weights, Rankings/Priorities?)**

- A serious consideration should be given to the risks associated with no action or delayed action
- Noxious weeds, the greater risk is in taking no action
- We only assess risk on those things that are easy to place a monetary value on. e.g houses, commercial timber. It's an accounts view of the world. How do we include other values that cannot be assigned a dollar value?
- Better define what is an acceptable risk, otherwise decision makers will always choose the no-risk option.
- What about competing risks? Action vs no action...air quality from Rx fire vs increased threat of fire from not burning?
- Need risk determinations that are transparent so people can understand why decisions are made.
- Allow flexibility for local assessment and management of risks
- National approach may be to use the consistent risk assessment tools but assess all risks at local level
- Different risks must be assessed and different geographic scales
- Risk to natural resources always loses out to risk to homes and communities. This is short-sighted.
- Individuals and property owners must assume the risk for their actions and decisions. Currently all risk is transferred to government agencies from local up to Federal.
- The financial incentive is to develop private owned wildlands rather than to maintain them. This increases and transfers risk.
- What about the risk of not including biomass feed stocks in the National Energy Policy?
- How to prioritize WUI mitigation treatments by Fire Regime/Condition Class or other measures to compare current conditions against the natural role of fire in a given ecosystem (departure from natural system)? I don't feel that homes built in lodgepole pine forests deserve the same mitigation focus as homes in ponderosa pine forests. The natural role of fire and fire behavior are too different.

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- What are the realistic management options available to meet the objectives of the CS? Example, don't automatically expect using wildfires for meeting resource objectives as something that can/will be applied to all lands. Design a realistic strategy around current constraints.
- Are local measures (definitions) of risk and consequences similar (close enough for comparison) across all jurisdictions? There must be **strategic national** guidelines rather than each area developing their own. Granted different fuel types and environmental factors exist that require modification of risk factors across the country. However, they should tie off national guidelines or process.
- What is an acceptable risk? Here are a few examples: What level of smoke is the public willing to accept? There is some very good science out there that would quantify what levels of smoke are a health risk and from there what if anything are we prepared to do to mitigate those impacts to the most sensitive populations?
- Aviation assets are vital to modern wildland suppression efforts but they also come with significant risk and loss, should there be a formalized process for utilization of such assets?
- Fitness levels of fire fighters are declining this is a significant safety issue should there be higher fitness standards, if not then we are already accepting a known risk.
- Long term—land health and sustainability
- What are the values at risk? A fire in the WUI has more values to lose than one in wilderness.

### **What time frame should the Cohesive Strategy encompass..? Why?**

- The strategy must look out decades but be responsive to short-term changes in budgets, priorities, political whims
- From an ecological standpoint, 10 years is the minimum to detect any change
- Varies depending on the resource being considered. The CS should have several bands of timeframes for monitoring different risks/expectations
- Think longer rather than shorter. Must get outside the timeframe of the political cycles... otherwise they will drive the process!
- A short-term strategy is easier to throw out during an administration change...it also sends the wrong message to the public about how long this will take to fix.
- It should be a long-term strategy with short-term checkpoints for adjustments
- Implementation needs at least 10 years...measurement of effects needs 100 years
- Performance measures should match timelines and scale
- Many "tools" have not yet been applied on a large scale over long time periods. Rx fire and wildland fire use has never really caught on except in a few, specific areas like the Gila NF.
- Tribes work in the timeframe of sustainable ecosystems, natural disturbance cycles, timber stand rotations
- Long enough to reasonably evaluate the effects of climate change...more than 20 years

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- Ten years should be the planning time frame. However, if five years is desired then the plan should be ten years with a five year review and brief update.
- A cohesive strategy should provide long-term direction/guidance
- This question seems to wide open, the overall strategy should have no time frame associated with it rather once there is a strategy in place do a five year review to assure that the strategy is effective.
- One time related issue that needs to be addressed relates to personnel management. The federal land management agencies can not react quickly to large budget swings in either direction when it comes to hiring permanent employees. It takes time to work through the hiring process and once the employee is on board it takes time for them to understand the issues that were hired to deal with and then act upon, this is especially true for planning type positions.
- 5 years

### **What questions should the Cohesive Strategy include to inform and be informed by existing land unit plans? Intergovernmental compacts, CWPPs and Fire adapted communities, and State risk assessments, and Local land management ordinances and regulations?**

- Involve local communities, incorporate fire planning priorities and decisions @ local level. Use the FPU concept of all agency planning.
- CC @ National level should be restricted to major broad parameters and guidelines. Decision that affect the land should all be made locally
- Plans should identify expected consequences for action, inaction
- CS must differentiate Tribal lands from other lands
- CS should address the value of natural wildfire on the landscape
- Stay to foundational principles for local levels to apply their values
- Fire is place and time specific. Incorporate cultural values and Tribal treaty rights
- CS should place more emphasis on how to implement, not just lead to more planning
- Land Mgt Plans are developed internal to agencies; CS must be a tool to integrate all agency LMP fire aspects...like a national CWPP
- How will previous fire strategies be considered? Included?
- Strategic goals and objectives found within land unit plans.
- What are the realistic management options available to meet the objectives of the CS? Example, don't automatically expect using wildfires for meeting resource objectives as something that can/will be applied to all lands. Design a realistic strategic around current constraints.
- Where are goals, objectives, treatment alternatives and other opportunities and constraints similar to provide opportunities for collaboration on larger landscape scale treatments? The CS must provide a structure to work together across multiple jurisdictions to meet the strategy.
- How well do the objectives mirror adjacent agency lands and if so can efficiencies be realized in the early phases of project planning (NEPA)?

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- Have landscape level RX treatments been given serious consideration so that natural and man-made barriers can be taken advantage of?
- How involved are the land managers, local and state politicians in the process?
- What is the true effectiveness of the processes, programs assessments, etc... that are already in place and how can they be improved upon?
- Is there a common language for the geospatial information that we are sharing?
- We like the concept of FMPs and FPU's. It needs improvement so it more accurately reflects conditions

## **All things considered- what is the single most significant issue that that the Cohesive Strategy must address?**

- Air Quality as a value AND an obstacle
- Carbon sequestration
- Education of public that choose to live in fire prone areas; their acceptance of responsibility
- Recognize the trust responsibility to the Tribes and special nature of Tribal lands
- Recognize the special, specific and unique missions of all govt agencies involved. Feds often get lumped together but they have all been created for different purposes...none of which is to protect communities from fire!
- Youth education and developing the next generation of land managers and fire specialists
- Fix perception that science has THE answer when the real answers are complicated by a mix of issues and values at both the local and national level
- Don't forget about the Energy Bill. How can the CS influence energy policy
- Provide strategic guidance while allowing local land management plans to dictate management actions.
- A synthesis of planning and budgets tools between all partners with a vested interest in wildland fire issues.
- A comprehensive communication/education plan needs to continue to be utilized to inform the public regarding this process and how it directly and indirectly impacts them.
- The success of this or any other project that involves a diverse group of people with differing priorities comes down to "Personality Management" at all levels, perhaps a cadre of Gurus or Monks could be on retainer to assist throughout the process.
- Land health