

A Call to Action

A New Wildland Fire Accord: It is in your Hands

This “Call to Action” reflects the thoughts of a small cadre of federal, state and local wildland fire agency leaders and is meant to stimulate Presidential, Congressional and Gubernatorial Leadership on what it will take for all of us collectively to fix our wildland fire problem.

Business as usual is not working!

Problem Statements:

- **For the state, tribal and local wildfire protection entity** “An expanding Wildland Urban Interface, continued droughts, a warming climate, and an increasing forest and rangeland health crisis have created a perfect storm that threatens to overwhelm our response capabilities to protect communities and resources.”
- **For the federal land manager** “An expanding Wildland Urban Interface, continued droughts, a warming climate, and an increasing forest health and rangeland crisis have left large swaths of our landscapes in need of restoration, have overwhelmed our budgets and compromised our other mission areas, and made it difficult to work effectively with our wildland fire partners to put out unwanted fires and protect communities.”
- **To the U.S. citizen** “The nation’s fire service is about to lose its ability to put out unwanted wildfires and help you protect yourself and your properties.”

Problem In-Depth: More people in fire-prone landscapes, more and larger wildland fires, a warming climate, and unhealthy landscapes have created a wildland fire situation that overwhelms traditional fire management efforts, creates tension and conflict between fire management entities, and results in billions of dollars in suppression costs each year. These issues are conspiring against cooperative wildfire management and eroding a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities. The future is expected to bring more of the same. If nothing changes, more communities and resources will be at risk, fire-prone landscapes will spiral further into decline, and budgets will be overwhelmed. We must also understand that the true costs of wildland fires are estimated to be as high as thirty times the suppression costs due to economic, resource and environmental losses. It is time to take a hard look at the way we live with wildland fire in this country. We must all assume the mantle of leadership and make some new choices and changes as we have the ability to determine our own outcome.

Vision: Effective partnerships, with shared responsibility held by all stakeholders¹ of the wildland fire problem, will create well-prepared, fire-adapted communities and healthy, resilient landscapes at the most efficient cost.

¹ “All stakeholders” includes everyone with an interest in wildland fire: federal, state, tribal and local agencies, communities and individual citizens, non-governmental organizations and institutions, academia and more.

Shared Assumptions:

- Addressing wildland fire is not simply a fire management, fire operations or wildland-urban interface problem – it is a much larger, much more complex land management and societal issue.
- While we have achieved significant successes in fire management in the last decade, new challenges around an expanding WUI, dryer climate and forest health mean we can no longer afford to conduct business as usual.
- The wildland fire problem is a national one with the potential to impact every area of the country. It cannot be solved locally or regionally. It requires a national solution that includes all stakeholders. Successful wildland fire management requires partnerships among federal, tribal, state, and local fire organizations – and individuals.
- Wildfire protection and management has become an increasingly expensive endeavor, and is expected to continue to grow more so each year.
- Resources to combat wildland fires are limited which creates significant strain on cooperative wildfire management response and management.
- Solutions to the problem must come from all stakeholders, including the public.

Solution: Just as the report “America Burning” solidified, and still continues to coalesce efforts around structural fire protection, the crafting of an “America’s Wildlands Burning” report is needed for wildland fires. A report such as this will set the stage for collaboratively developing an accord of principles, strategic direction, and a framework for roles and responsibilities for federal, state, tribal and local agencies and individuals that will help us better manage and live with wildland fire as a nation. Such a collectively crafted and owned vision is the best way for the many varied interests to rally around and work cooperatively together.

Presidential, Congressional and Gubernatorial sanctioning will be needed to focus energies at the table. Further, this new accord must recognize and build upon our past successes under the National Fire Plan and the 10-year Comprehensive Wildfire Strategy. It is about renewing and updating our commitment. To this end, we offer a similar framing:

- **Suppression / Preparedness** – attention is needed on roles and responsibilities in dealing with wildfire interface issues to reinforce cooperative wildfire operations.
- **Hazardous Fuel Reduction** – recognizes the need for a vigorous and sustainable landscape-scale land management and fuels reduction strategy and program.
- **Pre-Fire Restoration / Post-Fire Rehabilitation** – if America is to learn to live with wildland fire, significant attention is needed on restoring healthy, resilient landscapes through active land management to minimize impacts.
- **Community Capacity Building** – because no one entity has the where-with-all to address all wildland fire, attention is needed to build community fire capacity where insurance, building codes, markets and other factors come together to reinforce a new sense of individual responsibility.
- **Accountability** – as always, accountability measures that guarantee transparency and oversight are required.

Collaboratively undertaking the development of an “America’s Wildland Burning” report will provide the means to craft this accord - a shared vision for how to safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed, use fire where we can, manage our natural resources, and live with wildland fire as a Nation.