

## Cohesive Strategy Forum Comment Summary

June 30, 2010

From mid April to early June, a series of forums were held across the country as listening sessions or informal conversations with small groups of agency, partner, and stakeholders. These forums were an initial step in a collaborative effort chartered by WFLC- the Wildland Fire Leadership Council to develop the Cohesive Strategy required by the Flame Act for balancing wildland fire response, fire adapted human communities, and landscape restoration within wildland fire management. Specifically, The legislations calls for the Strategy to encompass seven Elements that provide for:

- *“the identification of the most cost-effective means for allocating fire management budget resources;*
- *the reinvestment in non-fire programs by the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture;*
- *employing the appropriate management response to wildfires;*
- *assessing the level of risk to communities;*
- *the allocation of hazardous fuels reduction funds based on the priority of hazardous fuels reduction projects;*
- *assessing the impacts of climate change on the frequency and severity of wildfire; and*
- *Studying the effects of invasive species on wildfire risk”.*

The Strategy is directed to be revised at least once during each five year period beginning on the date of the submission to address any changes affecting the strategy, including changes with respect to landscape, vegetation, climate, and weather. There is an additional requirement that the Strategy address the recommendations described in recent reports of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in that it “lay out various potential approaches for addressing the growing wildland fire threat, estimated costs associated with each approach, and the tradeoffs involved.” (GAO-09-877) In addition, the GAO has identified several key areas addressing cost effectiveness of suppression and mitigation, the efficacy of treatments for fuels and fire-adapted communities and establishment of meaningful performance measures that should be addressed by the Cohesive Strategy.

WFLC chartered a panel- the Cohesive Strategy Oversight Committee (CSOC) – to host the forums and explore with various partners, stakeholders, and other citizens the issues and values that the Cohesive strategy needs to encompass. Obviously, even with more than a dozen forums (14 were actually conducted and a net forum was even held using the internet) there was no real way to reach more than a good cross-section of stakeholders and partners. But, CSOC’s hope was to conduct enough sessions and reach a large enough audience to provide some assurance that the views presented in these audiences reflected a wide range of issues and diversity of

perspectives that should be considered in assessing risks and balancing investments in wildfire prevention, mitigation, fuels treatments, and ecosystem restoration and management.

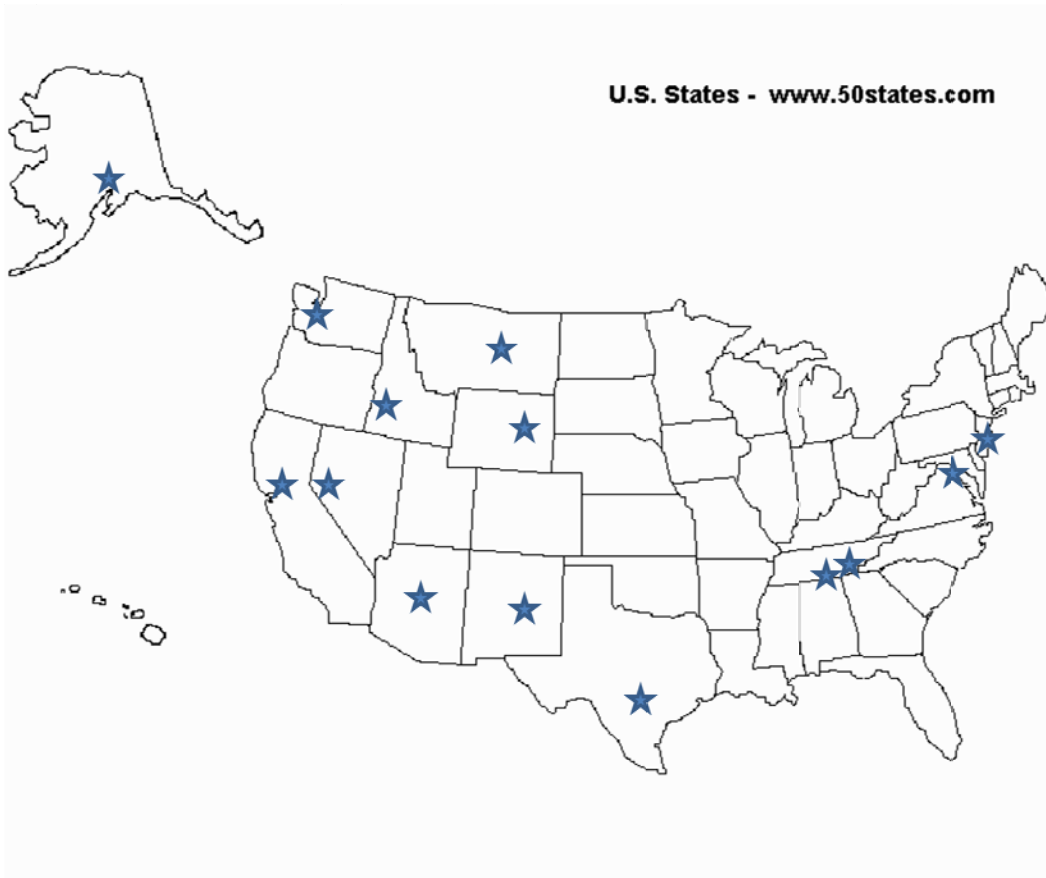
### **The Forums at a glance**

The sessions were conducted as facilitated discussions lasting between 2 to 4 hours in small group settings (between 15-40 individuals usually) to allow participants to talk over both what they felt was important in terms of social, economic, and ecological values and attributes and to identify questions that needed to be addressed in developing a risk framework that to adequately consider these values and objectives. Each participant was asked to augment their viewpoints on a forum commentary form- basically an open-ended question list of the following discussion questions which were also used as the agenda for the session.

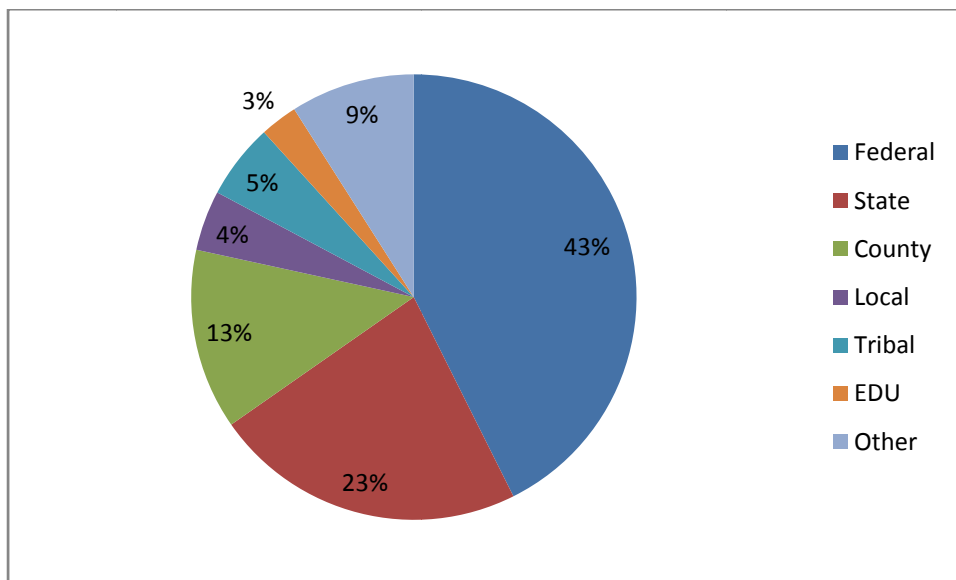
- What are the most critical issues that the Cohesive Strategy for Wildland Fire Management must address?
- What questions should the Cohesive Strategy consider to identify priority values, attributes, and other concerns?
- What questions should the Cohesive Strategy consider in order to rate and incorporate risk? (Definition, Weights, Rankings/Priorities?)
- What time frame should the Cohesive Strategy encompass..? Why?
- 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?
- All things considered- what is the single most significant issue that that the Cohesive Strategy must address

On the following page, details of the locations of the forums which were attended by over 450 individuals are mapped out. A figure below the map shows a break out of just those participants – 366 in total - who submitted comments at the end of the session. No attempt was made to require every participant to submit their ideas in writing and the forms asked that the individual identify themselves and their organization so they were not anonymous. They were further asked if they would be interested commenting on further drafts of the Cohesive strategy. (The large majority – over 85% indicated that would be interested in reviewing further work). Finally, following the session- the comments were compiled within question categories and sent back to the participants as follow up so they could see all the written comments of their own forum, theirs included.

# Forum Locations



Forum Participants Providing Comments by Sector Affiliation



This Forum summary report attempts to provide a further, though brief overview of the comments. No claim is made that the viewpoints presented are definitive, just as the forums are not billed as anything more than a convenience sample of different groups of public and private interested parties. Neither was the comment form intended to be a survey or any such instrument claiming to be social science. It is only what it attempted to be – a modest effort to capture an idea of the range of issues and diversity of perspectives that should be considered as the Cohesive Strategy is developed.

### **Identifying Critical Issues**

Perhaps because it was the first question on the comment form or the most general, the response to what are the most critical issues in developing a cohesive strategy elicited the largest number of responses – both in numbers of answers and length. A Content Analysis review identified 15 different (though some were related and could be applied across categories) issue areas within three general domains:

- Managing Wildfire Response,
- Promoting Fire Adapted Communities
- Sustaining Landscapes (Resiliency/restoration).

Table 1 provides a more complete description of the issue categories including in some cases sub issues and additional components within the three domains. One issue area – (5) worst case scenarios has three components that cross each of the domains. There is also an Other Category – a grouping of organizational & budget issues that are an inevitable part of any discussion process involving stakeholders and partners on complex issues.

These issues in Issue Area IV are very familiar and were found in nearly every forum. Problems with inadequate budgets under anticipated greater fiscal stress in the future, the litany of workforce problems in most modern organizations, and of course the never-ending problems with IT systems and data issues are not insignificant. But for this summary review, they are recorded as dependant variables and put to the side so the focus can be placed on major driving forces and issues within the three major domains.

The criterion for selecting these issue areas as “critical” was simply: were these issues included in written comments or statements during the discussions in the majority of the forums. These 15 issue area all satisfied that test. In terms of showing diversity of viewpoint, follow on tables for the CSOC working group sessions will be used to identify examples of actual comments from different forums as illustrations of the concerns raised.

## **Table 1 Cohesive Strategy Forums – Critical Issues**

### **I – Wildfire Response**

- 1. Balancing investments in prevention, planning, and education needs** with fire management suppression and response capabilities.
- 2. Preplanning and coordination to balance all agencies fire management mandates & goals-** resolving Conflicting Priorities/Legal Requirements in Protection/Suppression Actions among federal & tribal & state & local entities.
- 3. Building partnerships between federal, state, tribal, and local resources** into seamless wildland fire management workforce/systems - jurisdictions to include Inclusion of State & Local response resources & capacity building.
- 4. Managing Impacts of large, high severity fires.**
- 5. Planning for Response to Worst Case Suppression Scenarios**(high consequence-low probability) (i) Catastrophic Loss of Human Life , (ii) Irreplaceable Eco-systems or Habitat Loss, (iii) Losses of irreplaceable Cultural resources, Economic values, or traditional lifestyles.

### **II – Fire Adapted Communities**

- 6. Land owner Responsibilities (Private & Public)** --A system of laws, ordinances and codes guides homeowners toward responsible management of their own property leading to fire adapted conditions in communities. This must be grass roots, neighbor to neighbor concept that includes landowner education and the active participation of the local fire departments.
- 7. Economic Development & Renewal – (Economic Sustainability)** To include Protection of critical infrastructure like power, water and transportation corridors, Stewardship contracting as part of the economic development opportunities, Fire-adapted communities integrate wildfire with minimal impact to other businesses, Community and rural development is integrated with tourism and industries that use biomass from land management activities. A sustainable supply of commodities to address community needs to sustain jobs and economic stability.
- 8. Community Values & Attributes –** To Include Traditional ecological knowledge, Issues over Landowner fragmentation & development of new WUI areas, Community understanding of fire & its interaction with their values and attributes, Community common and shared vision of what “fire adapted” means , Values expressed in the CWPP and other interlinked plans , Public education and the role of the local fire department is critical.

- 9. Fuels Management over Multiple Ownerships** – Moving to Landscape Scales to include CWPP identify, coordinate, collaborate and sequence high priority fuels projects, Collaboration must be sustainable beyond membership changes.
- 10. Smoke & Air Quality Issues** This issue area encompasses human health, visibility, quality of life, with frequency and duration of smoke impacts key to public perception – to include Communication, timing, sequencing of Rx Fire burning is important, as well as continuing to seek alternative methodologies to reduce fuels, CWPPS encompassing individual smoke management strategies or expectations for individual communities.

### **III. Sustainability for Fire-Adapted Landscapes**

Integrate Land Use Plans across federal, state, tribal, & local jurisdictions to achieve fire-adapted and resilient landscapes which provides for sustaining bio-diversity and healthy watersheds and riparian areas all within the context of changing climate Five sub-issue areas were most commonly mentioned:

- 11. Fire Adapted Ecosystems** – Building More Fire “Resilient” landscapes - Fire Return Intervals.
- 12. Integrated Land Resource Management Plans** across multiple land ownerships – NEPA Issues – Linkage to CWPP/SRA, planning rule, state resource assessments, etc.
- 13. Effects on Watersheds & Riparian Zones** (other species effects).
- 14. Sustaining Bio-diversity – Coping with Invasives, Insect & Disease, Next Generation Eco-systems.**
- 15. Climate Change & Carbon Sequestration** – Bio-mass stewardship implications.

### **IV. Other Issues –**

- Finance & Cost Issues (Budget Factors).
- Human Capital Issues – (Workforce Training, Qualifications, & Succession Issues).
- Information & Technology & Data Problems (Systems Factors).

One another check of the 15 critical issue areas is presented in Table 2. CSOC members asked how the issue categories tracked against the requirements of the FLAME Act. While there is no requirement that the Cohesive Strategy to use the FLAME Act elements as its organizing structure, certainly the elements need to be fully covered. If the Flame Act elements are cross walked to the 15 issue areas, the coverage is nearly complete.

**Table 2 Cross Walk on Flame Act Elements into Forum Critical Issues**

<b><u>Flame Act Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Forum Critical Issues</u></b>
<b>Identification of the most cost-effective means for allocating fire management budget resources;</b>	<b>1. Investments in prevention, planning, and education needs 2. Preplanning and coordination to balance all agencies fire management</b>
<b>Reinvestment in non-fire programs by the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture;</b>	
<b>Employing the appropriate management response to wildfires;</b>	<b>4. Managing Impacts of large, high severity fires 5. Planning for Response to Worst Case Suppression Scenarios 10. Smoke &amp; Air Quality Issues (double)</b>
<b>Assessing the level of risk to communities;</b>	<b>Land owner Responsibilities (Private &amp; Public) 3. Building partnerships between federal, state, tribal, and local 12. Integrated Land Resource Management Plans 7. Economic Development &amp; Renewal – 8. Community Values &amp; Attributes 10. Smoke &amp; Air Quality Issues (double)</b>
<b>Allocation of hazardous fuels reduction funds based on the priority of hazardous fuels reduction projects;</b>	<b>9. Fuels Management over Multiple Ownerships 11. Fire Adapted Ecosystems</b>
<b>Assessing the impacts of climate change on the frequency and severity of wildfire; and</b>	<b>13. Effects on Watersheds &amp; Riparian Zones 15. Climate Change &amp; Carbon Sequestration</b>
<b>Studying the effects of invasive species on wildfire risk.</b>	<b>14. Sustaining Bio-diversity – Coping with Invasives</b>

There is one exception- element ii *Reinvestment in non-fire programs by the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture*. This element will have to be addressed, but it needs to be noted that this issue was barely raised in the forum comments and rarely surfaced as a discussion item, even though all forum participants had a copy of the FLAME Act elements appended to their comment form. In short, the forums provide little insight into tackling this element of the Flame Act.

### **Other Commentary Areas**

The response pattern among the comments fell off after the first general question. Generally, less than a third of the forms returned had detailed notes or comments on the two agenda questions: (1) identifying priority values, attributes, and other concerns and (2) rating, defining and incorporating risk. Rather than attempt to make this appear definitive, these responses were used to amplify the critical issues categories per Table 1.

Another issue area identified by the comments focused on what other agency, tribal, and state and local plans, assessments, and or agreements should the Cohesive Strategy take into account- or in the question asked to participants – what else should the Cohesive Strategy be informed by and seek to inform in its development. There was broad agreement with the direction of this question- that the Cohesive strategy had to encompass existing land management and protection plans and other assessments. The composite list below identifies what was mentioned most often and across nearly all the forums.

- Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP's)
- Statewide forest resource Assessments
- Regional Fire risk assessments
- State Fire Plans
- State Resource Management Plans & Strategies
- Intergovernmental Compacts
- Eco-Regional Assessments
- Federal Land Resource Management Plans<sup>1</sup> and Annual Fire Management Plans
- Planning rule,
- Master coop fire agreements

There were two major themes coming from this comment area. The first is integrating the CWPPs or recognizing their input into the Cohesive Strategy process – which was especially important to many state and local community participants. The second theme was the soon to be released state forest risk assessments required by the Farm Bill. These new assessments – there will be one for each State- represent major planning investments by the states and need to be fully considered by the Cohesive Strategy.

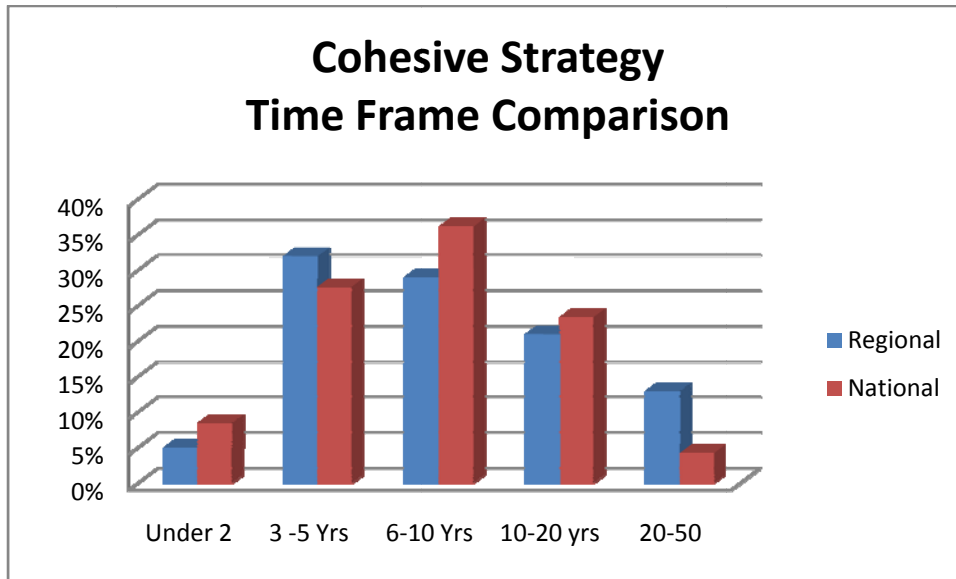
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<sup>1</sup> Several comments noted that the Forest Service's planning rule is currently under revision and that the Cohesive Strategy needed to recognize that emerging process.

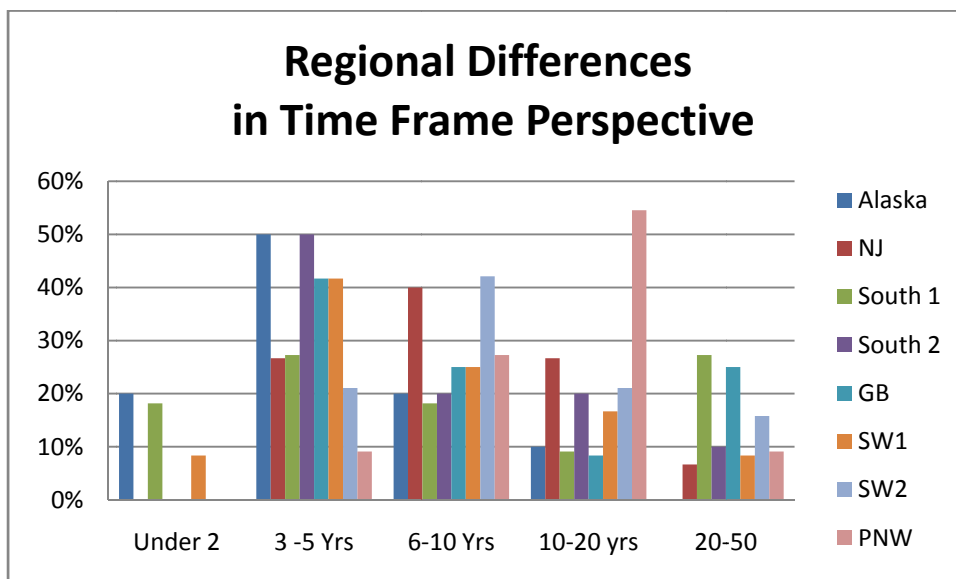


## Forum Perspectives on Time Frames

The final comment area yielded some interesting cross-regional perspectives. Participants were asked to indicate what they thought the time horizon for the Cohesive Strategy should be. The most frequent answer was a multiple between 5-10 years (essentially plan for a decade, implement and review in 5 year intervals). Two graphs below highlight some different perspectives. The forums were divided into two groupings- the 8 regional forums where participants were largely from a specific geographic area- and 6 national forums plus the net-forum where the participants were from all over the country or from Washington.



From a regional viewpoint, the norm was at 5 years while national forums leaned towards 10 years. But among regions, the variance was very high as the graph below illustrates.



## A Concluding Note of Appreciation

The CSOC is very appreciative of the many individuals who attended the forums and shared their viewpoints and concerns about the path the Cohesive Strategy should take. This summary of some of the comments is simply an acknowledgement of that contribution and should not be considered anything more definitive than that. CSOC members, in hosting these sessions, hoped to gather a sense of the community and partners perspectives and to better understand the challenges ahead in forging a truly national cohesive wildfire management strategy. Thanks to all who participated who helped make that possible.