

Responding to an Escalating National Problem

Over the past two decades, there has been an escalation of severe fire behavior, with home and property losses, higher suppression costs, increased threats to communities, and worsening conditions on the land. Congress, the fire community and the public have recognized the need for a new strategy — one that incorporates a broad-based, collaborative and cohesive response to wildland fire response and mitigation.

From that acknowledgement, Congress directed that a National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (Cohesive Strategy) be developed, ultimately paving the way for national wildland fire management policy. Beginning in 2010, hundreds of stakeholders from the fire community, landowners and managers, federal agencies, as well as Tribal, state and local governments across the nation have been working toward that end. Starting with a consensus of shared values, the Cohesive Strategy is in its third and final phase of development.

A New National Strategy

Through work completed to date, the Cohesive Strategy has already identified a shared vision among all stakeholders, a vision that is guiding the next steps in the strategy development. As a nation, we must:

- ✓ **Safely and effectively, extinguish fire when needed.**
- ✓ **Use fire where allowable.**
- ✓ **Manage our natural resources.**
- ✓ **Live with wildland fire.**

As a result of that vision, the Cohesive Strategy is structured on three key components:

- ✓ **Restoring and maintaining resilient landscapes -- a recognition of the lack of ecosystem health within many of our forests and rangelands across the country and the need to address it.**
- ✓ **Creating fire-adapted communities – acknowledging the need to develop options and opportunities to engage communities at the lowest level to help them become more resistant to wildfire threat.**
- ✓ **Effectively responding to wildfire -- a critical component to insure all levels of government, local, state, tribal, and federal, work together when wildland fire happens.**

More than Just a Fire Issue

Wildfire is more than a fire management issue – it's a larger land management, urban interface and societal issue. The Cohesive Strategy is an 'all-lands, all-hands' approach to improved

wildland fire management, centered on working together. It doesn't start from scratch, but builds upon success. Key to its long-term sustainability is the strategy's ability to address the wide diversity of situations within our country, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach cannot work.

The Cohesive Strategy seeks to reflect and incorporate the values and concerns of the public and all governments. We must recognize the differences and tensions that exist among partners and stakeholders and why those differences exist. Success depends on stronger relationships. In addition, we are building those relationships at both the national and regional levels through the wide range of dedicated people working diligently to find long-term solutions to wildland fire mitigation and response.

A Shared Responsibility

In order to oversee this national effort, Congress and the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior have established two governing boards made up of representatives of federal, tribal, state and local governments and agencies, as well as other key stakeholders. The Wildland Fire Leadership Council and the Wildland Fire Executive Council are working with hundreds of people nationwide to make sure the Cohesive Strategy is a unified approach.

Our country is made up of many jurisdictions and land ownerships, which is why an all lands approach is so important. State, federal, and tribal lands are expansive in many states, but equally important are private landowners and communities because they have a responsibility to make their own properties fire-resistant as well. To date, the Cohesive Strategy has established goals; developed regional action plans; and is in the process of scientifically analyzing options to help identify long-term solutions. Accomplishing those solutions will require involvement from both the public and private sectors. Actions and policies must be implemented at the federal, tribal, state, and local levels.

Take Action

To become more involved, or simply to learn more about the background, phases, updates, and successes surrounding the cohesive strategy effort, visit www.forestsandrangelands.gov.