



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Serving the Governors of 19 States and 3 US-Flag Pacific Islands

Forest Health & Wildfire

Resolutions

Future Assessment and Management of Western Forests

State Emergency Response and Aerial Support

Improving the Health of Western Forests and Rangelands

Restoring and Maintaining a Sustainable Road System on Federal Lands

Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act

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Reports

Collaborative Conservation Strategies: Legislative Case Studies from Across the West

A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment: 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan

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Background

American forests directly and positively influence the social, economic and ecological conditions of the nation. The threats our forests face and the inadequacy of our current response to these threats have caused concern as to whether the nation's forests are sustainable.

The values at risk are not trivial – a clean and healthy environment for our communities, employment and economic opportunities for our citizens, and the energy self-sufficiency of our nation.

The West is home to the majority of the Nation's forests and public lands. Millions of acres of forest and rangeland ecosystems are in poor ecological health and at an unacceptable risk from large and devastating wildfires, insects, disease and invasive species. The increase in wildfires adds carbon emissions to our atmosphere, accelerating the buildup of greenhouse gases. By not properly addressing these issues, wildfires will continue to burn into communities and place life, property and valuable natural resources at unacceptable risk.



Wildfire - State Emergency Response

Western states are experiencing a devastating economic downturn and must work together to be prepared to respond to increased risks to life, natural resources, and property. Over the next two decades a general increase in fire occurrence, size and severity is expected. These wildland fires will be more complex and present higher risks to the public and firefighters. This increase is largely due to historic accumulations of fuel, apparent trends in climate and weather patterns and increasing human development in fire-prone areas. Increased development has already converged with weather patterns, resulting in many more fires in the wildland-urban interface.

Western Governors recognize increased coordination is vital to maintaining an effective response to critical needs and can result in reduced financial impact to the taxpaying public. Through improvements in coordination and communication with all emergency response organizations, additional resources can be made available for use to local communities and neighboring states.

Summary

- Pursuit of a national policy on sustainable forests, which has an all-lands approach to sustainable forest management and restoration practices that lead to clean water, clean air, improved wildlife habitat, and energy production from woody biomass.
- Promote regional collaboration and coordination of financial and human resources to support programs that build state and local capacity to plan and prepare, respond, and recover from natural hazard incidents.
- Support increased coordination for wildfire prevention, suppression and post-fire rehabilitation.

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Sustainable Forests

Western Governors believe the country needs to look at new, more effective models for government and societal involvement aimed at sustaining America's forests for future generations. By clarifying and enhancing the roles of federal, state and local governments in relation to defining and measuring sustainable forest management, promoting regional collaboration, joint planning and coordination, we can meet our goals as well as generate new markets in the forest products and energy industries to utilize the small-diameter material removed from the land in the course of forest health treatments. Increased coordination with the national Roundtable on Sustainable Forests has occurred as the governors begin to work on developing recommendations for a Western set of indicators of environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable forest management.

Invasive Species

Invasive species are a global problem. The annual cost of impacts and control efforts equals five percent of the world's economy. Invasive species influence the productivity, value and management of a broad range of land and water resources in the West, ultimately limiting the direct and indirect goods and services these ecosystems are capable of producing. More than 100 million acres (an area roughly the size of California) in the United States are suffering from invasive plant infestations. Western Governors urge full funding support for invasive species management programs, which provide valuable services in the detection and elimination of invasive species.

The Western Governors' Forest Health Advisory Committee

The FHAC is made up of representatives appointed by each participating Governor and a range of experts from across the nation. At the request of the Congress, the FHAC worked with the federal agencies, tribes, state foresters, counties, and interested stakeholders to develop a historic national 10-year Comprehensive Strategy to reduce wildland fire risks to communities and the environment. Today, FHAC members continue to play a key role in providing leadership for local groups to convene and collaborate on forest health treatment projects.

Instrumental in facilitating information sharing between government and stakeholders throughout the West, the FHAC members are often involved in presenting to the Wildland Fire Leadership Council. Most recent activities of the FHAC include:

- providing review and comments on the development of the new National Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy/Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act - Report to Congress; and
- conducting a workshop on identifying the barriers and recommendations for large landscape-scale fuels treatment projects.

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