



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 12-01

Wildland Fire Management and Resilient Landscapes

A. BACKGROUND

1. The health of the national forests and range lands has deteriorated due to a reduction in management and changing climate conditions which contribute to the vast expansion of catastrophic wildfire, damaging insects, diseases and invasive species. The wildfire season is longer, more extreme, and wildfires are larger.
2. Active management, such as thinning, prescribed fire, and road maintenance, has been used successfully to improve the health of forest and range ecosystems. This type of active management can provide significant benefits to ecosystem function, while protecting and promoting development of healthy, resilient landscapes.
3. In severe wildfire seasons, the U.S. Forest Service has “borrowed” from other program areas, such as community assistance and hazardous fuels reduction, to pay the costs of wildland fire suppression. In 2009, Congress passed the Federal Land Assistance and Management Enhancement Act (FLAME Act) which established a split fund to cover U.S. Forest Service and DOI wildland fire suppression costs.
4. The FLAME Act directed the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, acting jointly, to develop a new National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (Strategy). The Strategy is expected to be completed early 2013.
5. More than 85% of the lands being managed under the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule are in the West. In April, 2012, a Final Record of Decision was issued.
6. The use of “Good Neighbor Authority” was approved by Congress in 2009 for projects in Colorado and Utah. The Authority enables state agencies to act as an agent for the federal agency to complete similar or complementary forest and land management activities across state, federal and private landowner boundaries. The Authority has not been widely used due to limited application and problematic contracting requirements.
7. Federal and state land “checkerboard” land ownership pattern in the West often deprives states of the ability to use state trust lands for their original purpose – to provide revenue for public education. In Alaska, explicit sideboards were placed on statehood land selections¹ that limited the amount of land the state could select from national forest jurisdictions, under the premise that the federal land management agencies would provide economic opportunities via active management of the forest resources in the region.

¹ Public Law 85-508, not to exceed 400,000 acres and for community development lands, Sec. 6a.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors support adequate funding and full implementation of the FLAME Act to accomplish the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.
2. Western Governors support reform to federal land management policies and processes that encourage use of active forest and land management where appropriate to improve forest function and landscape resiliency while simultaneously promoting economic activity related to natural resources.
3. Western Governors call on USDA to include in directives developed to implement the Forest Planning Rule that new Forest Plans:
 - a. recognize State authorities and incorporate management priorities from State Action Plans that were completed by all states as part of the 2008 Farm Bill;
 - b. be flexible enough to accommodate regional differences in forest system units across the west;
 - c. simplify the planning process and provide for a clear, simple and brief appeals process that will reduce costs and frustration for both the agency and public; and
 - d. use crucial wildlife habitat and corridor information in the new western states regional Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool in their updates to forest and land management plans.
4. Western Governors support funding and direction for state agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the NOAA Fisheries to coordinate consultation requirements under the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act or the Clean Air Act, and other environmental laws to ensure timely review and approval of needed restoration work.
5. Western Governors support the Good Neighbor Authority Act and broadening the use of the Act's provisions to other states where local interest and support exists.
6. Western Governors endorse the Western States Lands Commissioners Association legislative proposal to grant indemnity for selections of state trust lands in federal conservation areas.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. WGA is directed to work with local, state, tribal and federal agencies to advocate, facilitate and coordinate implementation of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. WGA will represent the Governors' interests as requested on the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and other committees. WGA staff will provide a regular status report on progress and policy obstacles toward achieving success to the Governors.
2. WGA is directed to provide assistance to the states and to state representation on the National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land

Management Planning Rule. WGA will encourage the U.S. Forest Service to include state representation early in planning processes and to recognize their shared roles and responsibilities for forest and land management.

3. WGA staff is directed to work with the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to facilitate use of state crucial habitat and corridor information into forest and land management guidance.
4. WGA is directed to support efforts to draft legislation which expands the Good Neighbor Authority and expedites cross-boundary project identification and implementation.
5. WGA is directed to assist the states and coordinate with the Western States Lands Commissioners to support proposed federal legislation to grant indemnity for selections of state trust lands in federal conservation areas.
6. WGA is directed to manage the WGA Forest Health Advisory Committee as it provides advice to the WGA and the Governors on implementation of their policies.
7. WGA is authorized to request and support funding from the Administration to assist it with the implementation of this resolution.

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