

Proposal of a Regional Agreement on Fire Management Transboundary Cooperation

DURATION: 2012 – 2013

TARGET COUNTRIES : CoE and UNECE Member States

PARTNERS INVOLVED :

Coordinating Centre : GFMC Freiburg, Germany

Other Centres: ECFF Athens, Greece

Other Partners : Regional Fire Monitoring Centre (RFMC), Skopje, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

Global objective for 2012-2013 :

In 2010-2011 first suggestions have been developed by fire management experts from CoE and UNECE member states to develop a proposal for "Regional Agreement on Cross-Boundary Cooperation in Fire Management". This proposal has to be seen under the light of changes of land use, climate and socio-economic conditions in the past decade in the member States of the region, which have resulted in an increasing vulnerability of forests and open landscapes, including actively managed or abandoned agricultural and pasture lands, as well as wetlands / pit lands ecosystems. At the same time an increasing vulnerability of society to become affected by fires burning at the interface of urban and other residential areas is noted. Air pollution generated by wildfires is an increasing problem for human health and security in many UNECE member states. In order to meet the increasing threats of wildfires CoE / UNECE member states need to address the challenges arising from the consequences of changing environmental, climate and socio-economic conditions on forests. Public policies affecting forest fires need to be reviewed and adapted to changing and changed environmental and socio-economic conditions. International cooperation in fire management offers solutions to exchange expertise and enhance effectiveness of international collaboration during emergency situations. Together with the UNECE Forestry and Timber Section (Geneva) and the UNECE / FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire (which is chaired by GFMC) a Forum will be prepared and convened in Geneva in which Team members and delegates from governments will discuss and agree on a proposal for an agreement.

Specific yearly objectives:

2012:

Continuation of the preparatory process, which was initiated in 2010-11. Some selected delegates from member countries will meet at GFMC in 2012 in the frame of the Joint Meetings of the Global Wildland Fire Network / UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group. ECFF and RFMC staff to work for short periods at GFMC to support preparatory process.

2013:

The Forum "Cross-Boundary Cooperation in Fire Management" will be held and followed up.

EXPECTED RESULTS

2012:

Advisory support by fire management experts from the region will be solicited at the Meeting in Freiburg (GFMC) in June/July 2012.

2013:

The Forum "Cross-Boundary Cooperation in Fire Management" has been held and resulted in a proposal on a voluntary agreement, which may become a voluntary or a legal agreement, or a chapter to a convention.

RESULTS OBTAINED PREVIOUSLY

Various meetings have been held by GFMC in 2010-2011 to solicit statements, proposals, etc. towards developing a regional agreement. A questionnaire has been drafted to be circulated to CoE / UNECE member states in preparation of the Forum.

RESULTS OBTAINED IN 2012

Work package 1 (prepared by GFMC, ECFF, RFMC):

Description:

Preparing / organizing (with the support of . ECFF and RFMC) the different steps in convening the Forum in 2013 at the UN in Geneva. Additional fire management experts from Council of Europe / UNECE member states will also be called in (FYROM, Russia, Ukraine), as well as three or four experts from South Asia, Central America and Africa where regional strategies for fire management are in place or developed.

Associated deliverables:

Recommendation of the consultation to be forwarded to UNECE for the next steps of preparing the Forum.

The Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC) continued to prepare the concept for the development of a regional voluntary or legal agreement on transboundary cooperation in fire management, a multi-year endeavour.

The activities concentrated on the final preparation for the project "UNECE-FAO / CoE Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management" which is aiming at the development for a proposal for a "Regional Agreement on Cross-boundary Cooperation in Fire Management in the UNECE Region", to be associated with EUR-OPA agreement, UNISDR and OSCE.

This proposal has to be seen under the light of changes of land use, climate and socio-economic conditions in the past decade in the member States of the region, which have resulted in an increasing vulnerability of forests and open landscapes, including actively managed or abandoned agricultural and pasture lands, as well as wetlands / peatland ecosystems. At the same time an increasing vulnerability of society to become affected by fires burning at the interface of urban and other residential areas is noted. Air pollution generated by wildfires is an increasing problem for human health and security in many UNECE member states.

In order to meet the increasing threats of wildfires CoE / UNECE member states need to address the challenges arising from the consequences of changing environmental, climate and socio-economic conditions on forests. Public policies affecting forest fires need to be reviewed and adapted to changing and changed environmental and socio-economic conditions. International cooperation in fire management offers solutions to exchange expertise and enhance effectiveness of international collaboration during emergency situations. Together with the UNECE Forestry and Timber Section (Geneva) and the UNECE / FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire (which is chaired by GFMC) a Forum will be prepared and convened in Geneva in which Team members and delegates from governments will discuss and agree on a proposal for an agreement.

In June 2012, in conjunction with the biennial meeting of the UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group, the GFMC invited experts from the Council of Europe member states as well as additional resource persons experienced in the development of border-crossing agreements for cooperation in fire management from outside Europe, to finalize the proposal for the Forum and the development of the agreement.

A revised proposal has been formulated now by the delegates and submitted, through the UNECE/FAO Timber Section, Geneva, to the Government of Germany. Based on the comments by the German GIZ (on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Agriculture) another revision of the proposal and financial matrix is underway in November 2012.

The project objectives include:

1. Prepare an in-depth analysis of:
 - the key factors determining contemporary and expected future forest fire problems in the UNECE region, e.g. those that are newly arising from changes in land use, socioeconomical conditions and climate and which are threatening sustainable forest management;
 - the state of current and need for future public policies to address the underlying causes of fire problems in the region
2. Development of guidelines for international cooperation in fire management (ground, aerial)
3. Representatives of UNECE / CoE member states to discuss the analysis and the draft guidelines in a Forum and to develop recommendations for national action and international response, e.g. for a regional agreement on cross-boundary cooperation in fire management.
4. Representatives of other regions to provide expertise in developing formal and informal bilateral and multilateral agreements on transboundary cooperation in fire management.

The Government of Germany has indicated in October 2012 to provide up to ca. € 370,000 for this project for implementation between January 2013 and June 2014.

While the report of the CoE-sponsored meeting in Freiburg is not yet ready, one of the major outputs was the discussion, modification and endorsement of the draft paper "Integrating the Management of Wildfire-related Risks in Rural Land and Forest Management Legislation and Policies" discussed and in its draft version endorsed by the WFAG meeting (Annex I). This paper has been submitted to FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO), the governing body of the FAO Forestry Department, in September 2012.

As pointed out in the proposal for this 2012 activity, in 2010-2011 first suggestions have been developed by fire management experts from CoE and UNECE member states to develop a proposal for "Regional Agreement on Cross-Boundary Cooperation in Fire Management".

The decision to postpone "UNECE-FAO / CoE Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management" to 2013 brought a delay of the political process but has not slowed down the preparatory work. With the submission of the revised financing proposal by UNECE to the German Government for preparing and organizing the Forum in Geneva or Krasnoyarsk (Russian Federation) in November 2013, there is a progress towards implementation of the plans developed since 2010. Once again, the interim financing of the dedicated work through the Administrative Arrangement by EUR-OPA was important and instrumental in order to further develop this process was successful in 2012.

Embedding the UNECE / CoE activities and Forum in the global context

It is clearly envisaged to utilize the upcoming Forum to take the lead globally in the development of a regional agreement and to embed this activity in the global development that is facilitated by GFMC. Besides inviting representatives from other regions (cf. bullet 4 on top) it is now considered to call for an attached 1-day International Wildland fire Summit.

To prepare the Summit a dedicated Special Event is now requested to be held at the GPDRR in Geneva, May 2013. This Special event, tentatively entitled "Strengthening Cooperation of the United Nations and International Organizations in Wildland Fire Management" would follow the first informal UN Interagency Meeting on Cooperation in Fire Management, which was held 29 June 2012 at the United Nations Geneva and preceded the WFAG meeting in Freiburg (CoE was invited but had to apologize; the Secretary General of the EUR-OPA had provided a letter [dated 27 June 2012] to the meeting in which he proposed that the 2013 Forum would become a global character [cf. separate Attachment 01]). For the preparation of the Special Event the GFMC has reviewed the role of UN agencies and international organizations in the field of fire management (cf. separate Attachment 02, CoE / EUR-OPA activities mentioned in several contexts and in detail in section 3.2. [p. 19]).

At this event the "UN White Paper on Vegetation Fires and Global Change", which is now in its final stage of preparation, will be presented publicly.

This White Paper, for which the UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group (WFAG) members contributed significantly, will be published by Springer (Dordrecht, Netherlands) in late 2012 or early 2013, and represent a contribution of WFAG to the UN and the international community (Annex II).

Work package 2 (prepared by GFMC):

Description:

Provision of seed funding to establish the REEFM in a room at the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine (Kiev), basic renovation, furniture and IT (PCs, internet connection).

In order to support and facilitate the dialogue with Eastern European countries, at the same time by strengthening the overall capacity of regional fire monitoring and policy support in Eastern Europe, a small nucleus for the establishment of a Regional Eastern European Fire Monitoring Centre (REEFMC) was proposed to be established at the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine (Kiev, Ukraine). The Centre would follow the successful example of the building the Regional Fire Monitoring Centre in SE Europe / Caucasus (Skopje, FYROM) through EUR-OPA funding in 2010.

Parts of the 2012 budget were used to prepare the designated leader of the REEFMC, Prof. Dr. Sergiy Zibtsev, to familiarize himself with the administrative and conceptual environment of the UN and international organizations. A modest contribution of 1225 Euro has been made available to the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine to set up a special space for the REEFMC (by investing in infrastructure).

The establishment of the REEFMC fuelled the discussion about the need and prospects of establishing similar Centres in other regions of the world. The request by South Africa and the on-going work to build a Regional Fire Monitoring Centre for Central Asia (in Mongolia) was the reason to develop a paper on the roles and mandates of Regional Fire Monitoring Centres, following the examples of the EUR-OPA-sponsored Centres in SE Europe and Eastern Europe.

ACTIVITIES PLANNED IN 2013 (split by partner)

Working package 1 (prepared by GFMC):

Description:

The three Centres will work together in the organization / realization of the Forum and the follow up. All travel costs covered by this project will be administered by GFMC.

Associated deliverables:

Forum has been held and report delivered to Council of Europe and UNECE.