

Guidelines for the defence of rural populations, settlements and other assets against wildfires and smoke pollution

DURATION : 2012 – 2013

TARGET COUNTRIES :

PARTNERS INVOLVED :

Coordinating centre: ECFF Athens, Greece

Other centres: GFMC Freiburg, Germany

Other partners: Regional Fire Monitoring Centre (RFMC), Skopje, FYROM

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

Global objective for 2012-2013 :

Collaborative work between the 3 Centres will result in the development and first publication (ENG) of "Guidelines for Defence of Rural Populations, Settlements and other Assets Against Wildfires". This project will address the wildfire threats of rural settlements (villages, towns, scattered farmsteads) and other rural assets (agricultural fields / crops, infrastructures and other values at risk), which in some regions of Europe / Mediterranean are increasingly endangered by wildfires due to rural exodus, weakening of rural work force and self-protection ability, and increasing wildfire hazard on abandoned lands. Vice-versa, increasing industrialization and concentration of populations in some areas exert a high pressure on natural resources for land use change, which is reflected by the high frequency of arson and 'unknown'-cause fires in the wildlands. The intermix of human settlements with natural ecosystems in many places create severe wildland / urban interface fire problems, which have become a major issue of political debate and confrontation. The Guidelines will be designed to provide information to local inhabitants (incl. farmers, community leaders / mayors, local fire service units, volunteer fire-fighters and village defence committees) with state-of-the-art information on wildfire damage prevention measures, and defence of wildfires threatening settlements and rural assets. Furthermore, the guidelines will provide information to the residents how to apply all fire safety regulations for their house (clearing vegetation, provide extra sources of water, use appropriate building materials, etc.) and to protect the communities against the adverse effects of vegetation fire smoke pollution on human health and security. Also, the issue of unexploded ordnance (UXO) will be addressed since many forest sites and non-forest lands in SE Europe and the Balkan region are contaminated by land mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) stemming from recent conflicts. The relevance of the expected outcomes will be high for all CIS member states.

Specific yearly objectives :

2012 :

Collection of materials to be processed for the development of guidelines, bringing fire experts from SE Europe together in a regional workshop, co-organized by the 3 centres.

2013 :

Production of guidelines, with a second final workshop in the region

EXPECTED RESULTS

2012 :

State-of-the-art material collected; expert inputs by Workshop I are solicited.

2013 :

Final product of Guidelines (ENG) will be reviewed by experts from Greece, FYROM, Russia, Bulgaria, Turkey, and from specialists from other countries, including one or several invited specialists from North America (t.b.d.) (Workshop II). The Guidelines will be accompanied by a homeowner checklist ("How to make your home forest fire safe") and by a 10-minutes video presenting home & health protection guidelines. The Guidelines will also be accompanied by an example of a map of distribution of UXO and land mines (wherever exist), and instructions about precautionary measures and to how to respond during the wildfires.

RESULTS OBTAINED PREVIOUSLY (if any)

General expertise available. Mediterranean: Aristotelion University, Thessaloniki, Greece. Eastern Europe / EECCA: Specific human health threats by fire smoke emissions have been addressed by ECFF. Community-Based Fire Management: GFMC expertise from countries worldwide. Cooperation between state agencies and civil society organizations including volunteers: RFMC.

RESULTS OBTAINED IN 2012

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

Description:

Development of the guidelines

Associated deliverables:

State of the art draft material

The development of the Guidelines is a collaborative project between the Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC) with and through its associated Regional Southeast Europe / Caucasus Fire Monitoring Centre (RFMC) and the European Centre for Forest Fires (ECFF). The Guidelines will address the wildfire threats of rural settlements (villages, towns, scattered farmsteads) and other rural assets (agricultural fields / crops, infrastructures and other values at risk),

which in some regions of Europe / Mediterranean are increasingly endangered by wildfires due to rural exodus, weakening of rural work force and self-protection ability, and increasing wildfire hazard on abandoned lands. Vice versa, increasing industrialization and concentration of populations in some areas exert a high pressure on natural resources for land use change, which is reflected by the high frequency of arson and 'unknown'-cause fires in the wildlands. The intermix of human settlements with natural ecosystems in many places create severe wildland / urban interface fire problems, which have become a major issue of political debate and confrontation. The Guidelines will be designed to provide information to local inhabitants (incl. farmers, community leaders / mayors, local fire service units, volunteer fire-fighters and village defence committees) with state-of-the-art information on wildfire damage prevention measures, and defence of wildfires threatening settlements and rural assets.

Furthermore, the guidelines will provide information to the residents how to apply all fire safety regulations for their house (clearing vegetation, provide extra sources of water, use appropriate building materials, etc.) and to protect the communities against the adverse effects of vegetation fire smoke pollution on human health and security. Also,



the issue of unexploded ordnance (UXO) will be addressed since many forest sites and non-forest lands in SE Europe and the Balkan region are contaminated by land mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) stemming from recent conflicts. The relevance of the expected outcomes will be high for all CIS member states. Detailed background and rationale for the project "Guidelines for Defence of Rural Populations, Settlements and other Assets Against Wildfires", which will provide guidance and assistance to rural populations to defend their assets and ensure security of people against wildfires are provided in ANNEX I.

The development of the Guidelines is a 2-years project. In the first year the field work and other preparatory work have been terminated. The RFMC started with collection of all available data, documents, reports etc. in the

region (in regards of the Guidelines). The same was done in the other centres, partners in the project. For that purpose but also for other activities in the frame of the project, a technical person was engaged - Ljubomir Netkov (forestry engineer).

There was a need for harmonization of the next steps for the organization of the first workshop. The first meeting of the centres was held in Freiburg from 30 June to 1 July 2012, in the frame of the UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network / Wildland Fire Advisory Group Meeting 2012 (the meeting was an activity devoted to the preparation of the "UNECE Forum on Transboundary Cooperation in Fire Management", to be held in Geneva, late 2013. The duties were split among the centres and the place for the first workshop was determined - Skopje, FYR Macedonia.

In order to get much more precise data for the circumstances in Macedonia, a short field trip was organized. The region of the National Park "Pelister" (in the region of the border with Greece) was visited. It is very specific area with large number of UXO from I World War, forest fires, villages under threat of fires etc. Very valuable information was collected especially through contacts with the local population.

Work package 2 (prepared by ECFF, GFMC, RFMC):

Description:

Regional workshop(I) of SE Europe forest fire experts (Skopje, FYROM)

Associated deliverables:

Report on the results of Workshop (I)

At a workshop held in Skopje (FYROM) at the RFMC on 9 November 2012, the preparatory work was evaluated and as main results the concept of the Guidelines were drafted and the duties for the next period were shared. Because the Guidelines could be used in the large region of Council of Europe Member States, we decided to invite other specialists in this area to contribute with their work and improve the Guidelines. The Final number of the participants was 9, from the follow countries: Greece, Germany, Turkey, Serbia, Ukraine and Macedonia. In the last moment participation of the representative from Russia was cancelled even if he had contributed remotely.

Between in September and October 2012 an opportunity developed to possibly create synergies with a Greek



Foundation to cooperate in the project. Following the devastating wildfire affecting ecosystems, land-use systems and livelihood of rural inhabitants of Chios Island (Greece) in August 2012 and the subsequent Congress "Our Response to the Fires - Working together for a better Chios", initiated and organized by the "Maria Tsakos Foundation - International Centre of Maritime Research and Tradition N.G.O." (Greece), under the auspices of the Minister of Mercantile Marine and the Aegean and in co-operation with the Chios Municipality and Regional Unit (15-16 October 2012), the GFMC has proposed "Maria Tsakos Foundation" to consider cooperative efforts in testing the concept of the Guidelines on Chios Island and to eventually co-organize the public presentation of the Guidelines in Athens (Greece) in 2013.

The proposed cooperation and possible co-financing of some activities of the Guideline Project in 2013 by the "Maria Tsakos Foundation" is not yet finally agreed upon at the time of writing this report. On 11 December 2012 the "Maria Tsakos Foundation" sent a message that only limited cooperation is possible due to the restrictions by the Charter of the Foundation. However, the CEO of the Foundation offered to act as "intermediary" between our project work and the public authorities in Greece. It is not yet clear at this stage of the Foundation will provide the co-financing and logistical support as indicated at an earlier stage.

Prospects for 2013

The three Fire Centres involved in the project have agreed to swiftly go ahead in the finalization of the guidelines.

Activities will need to be re-budgeted, considering:

- There will be a cut of budget of 10%
- By reducing travel costs (invitees for the final workshop) finances should be foresee for hiring a graphics design specialists to design the drawings / figures / schemes needed for the final (printed and digital) version of the guidelines, for a clear understanding of the guidelines by local administrators and local rural people
- Consider the translation of the Guidelines (ENG) to Greece, to demonstrate / present the guidelines in a first European country that is in urgent need for such guidelines

Annexes

Annex I: Final Draft Outlines of the Guidelines

Annex II: Presentation of GFMC given at the opening of the Skopje Workshop on 9 November 2012

ACTIVITIES PLANNED IN 2013

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

Description:

Workshop II: Guidelines will be reviewed by experts from Greece, FYROM, Russia, Bulgaria, Turkey, and from specialists from other countries (Athens, Greece).

Associated deliverables:

Report on the results of the Workshop II.

Work package 2 (prepared by ECFF, GFMC, RFMC):

Description:

Guidelines development with a homeowner checklist (How to make your home forest fire safe and protect the health of inhabitants against smoke pollution), and a 10 minutes video presenting home protection guidelines. The Guidelines will also be accompanied by an example of a map of distribution of UXO and land mines (wherever exist), and instructions about general precautionary measures and how to respond during the wildfires.

Associated deliverables:

Final guidelines (including DVD + Map)

