

Meeting Notes
Special Meeting of the California Fire Alliance
Governor's Office of Emergency Services
July 30, 2002

Fire Alliance Members Attending

Andrea Tuttle (CDF and Chair), Karen Barnette (BLM), Jack Blackwell (USFS), Dallas Jones (OES), Ken McDermond (FWS), Ron Recker (BIA), John Reynolds (NPS), Bruce Turbeville (CFSC), and Mike Wilkinson (LA Co. Fire)

Others Attending

Chris Adams (OES), John Baskette (BIA), Leigh Beck (USFS), Larry Biland (US EPA), Enoch Bell (USFS/PSW), Louis Blumberg (CDF and WGA), Tim Burke (BLM), Mike Chapel (USFS), Erica Bisch (CFSC), Bob Fletcher (CARB), Melisa Frago (CDF), Jim Francis (BLM), Richard Hadley (FWS), Dick Hayes (CDF), Donna Hummel (BLM), Sue Husari (NPS), Marti Leicester (NPS), Pat Kidder (USFS), Tim McDonald (FEMA), Wayne Mitchell (CDF), Ralph Modine (Trinity Co. BOS), Erin Muth (Assemblyman Cogdill), Chris Norem (Senator Feinstein), Michelle Phillips (NCFSC), Dave Reider (USFS), Betty Riley (High Sierra RC&D), Tom Rodriguez (FEMA), Rich Schell (CDF), David Tenny (USDA), Michale Walker (Senator Feinstein), Ed Wehking (BLM), Nancy Wolfe (SFM), Joseph Wright (Congressman Radanovich), Connie Zelinsky (El Dorado Co BOS),

Opening Remarks

Andrea Tuttle

Director Tuttle welcomed the Alliance and guests. She noted that the fires that are occurring around the state today are symptomatic of problems facing all Alliance members. She pointed to a correlation between communities at risk maps and fires burning today. Director Tuttle also thanked the California Fire Safe Council for providing the lunches and refreshments for the meeting.

Jack Blackwell

Mr. Blackwell explained that the purpose for this special meeting is to repeat the presentation done for the Forest Service's National Leadership Team on the National Fire Plan by David Tenny (USDA), Brian Waidmann (USDI) and OMB. In addition, he wanted staff from Washington DC to see the excellent coordination model that was developed for initial attack in California and is now being applied to pre-fire treatment programs. Mr. Blackwell stated that he believes California can help lead the way in developing effective and efficient techniques and programs for implementing the National Fire Plan. He introduced Dave Tenny (Deputy Under Secretary of Ag for Natural Resources and the Environment) who oversees policy matters for the Forest Service.

National and Regional Perspectives on the National Fire Plan

Dave Tenny

Mr. Tenny introduced the Quincy Library Group as a precursor to interest in the National Fire Plan. He summarized the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan. For FY 2002, almost 4 million acres burned (double the national average) in 51,6669 fires. Ninety-nine percent have been controlled by initial attack. FY 2000 fire year spawned interest in the NFP. USDA now has about \$750 million more for fire management. Mr. Tenny explained that the NFP has always been a strongly collaborative approach with its roots in the Forest Service's Cohesive Strategy.

The implementation strategy for the NFP has just been completed. It involves resources from states, locals, tribes as well as the feds. All parties that have signed the Implementation Plan have agreed to place the highest priority on public and firefighters safety while emphasizing active manage and the development of long-term socio-econ and environmental goals. The Implementation Plan has four goals, 18 performance measures and 23 implementation tasks (each with a specific work plan).

Mr. Tenny then explained how the performance measures are inter-related. For example, state and federal goals for burnable acres are coordinated and the community fire-protection plans are then linked to associated fire prevention programs. The overall goal is to have all treated acres result from collaborative processes that involve local communities. Next steps are to charge the National Wildfire Leadership Committee (representing all federal agencies) with moving forward to put in place the Implementation Plan – development of more detailed work plans, strategic plans, performance and budget procedures. A goal is to have the policy and budget underpinnings for integrated implementation of the Implementation Plan in 2004.

The Office of Management and Budget and Council on Environmental Quality are on board with the planning goals and are helping to develop ways the plan can be implemented in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and within budgetary expectations. Mr. Tenny stressed that the CFA can work together to help implement the NFP by providing leadership, help focus program direction, being accountable for performance, monitoring accomplishments, and “spreading the word”. He closed by thanking the California Fire Alliance for its leadership and good work to advance the National Fire Plan.

Louis Blumberg

Mr. Blumberg described the bipartisan work by the Western Governor's Association to convene states across the West to begin discussing fire issues. This work ultimately led, in part, to the development of the NFP. A key to the success of these discussions was the agreement up front to avoid other controversial issues like old-growth forests and wilderness. Louis underscored the work of California and the Western Governors to help

develop the NFP and the Implementation Plan their continuing support for both documents. He complimented Mr. Tenny on the consistent theme of collaboration with states in his presentation. He then identified eight expectations for the Western Governors:

- 1) continuing accomplishments and accountability
- 2) enhanced collaboration
- 3) acceptance of “local” differences
- 4) continuing work towards common ground
- 5) increased protection for the Wildland Urban Interface as well as wildland areas
- 6) acknowledge limitations from using performance measures
- 7) continuing political support for full funding of the NFP
- 8) resolution of the 2002 funding shortfall issues and its effects on grant allocation to communities

Mr. Blumberg closed by stressing the need to provide supplemental funds for fire suppression needs this year without borrowing from future programs.

Director Tuttle asked the audience to briefly remember the fire-fighters who were killed or injured in accidents this year and group shared a moment of silence on their behalf.

Institutional Arrangements that Help Promote Implementation of the National Fire Plan in California

Pat Kidder

Mr. Kidder described the California Fire Alliance and the history behind its development. The CFA was started by former CDF Director Richard Wilson who convened agency leaders at two conferences in southern California. The group began to build the relationships in fire agency leaders so that they were already working together when the NFP was developed. The CFA did not result in great accomplishments until the resources of the NFP were provided. Key additions were new funds for fire suppression, fuels management and community assistance, and capacity building. The availability of these resources has resulted in a very active Fire Alliance that is now working closely to provide coordinated programs for accomplishing the NFP across jurisdictions. In the first year, the Alliance began developing processes for coordinating grant funding and tracking accomplishments, crafted a communication plan, and adopted the fire-safe council structure from the California Fire Plan as the model for community planning in the state.

Rich Schell

Rich described the key components of the California Fire Plan:

1. Discrete fire-protection responsibilities among state, federal, and locals (1/3 each)
2. Community-based fire-protection planning processes based on protecting locally identified assets at risk

3. State and local fire-safe councils
4. Direct linkage between community fire-protection plans (assets at risk) and economical/efficient agency projects and programs
5. Annual updates and reviews with affected communities

Bruce Turbeville

Bruce described the structure and function of the California Fire Safe Council. Led by CDF in the early 1990s, the “Fire Safe Advisory Council” began meeting to develop recommendations for reducing the incidents and effects of wildfires in California. The real estate and insurance industries were key participants in the Council. The early work of the Council resulted in funding for development of the California Fire Plan. At the same time, the statewide Council developed “community action kits” for forming local fire-safe councils. As the California Fire Plan was developed, the statewide and local fire-safe councils became formally linked. The California Fire Safe Council was one of the founding members of the California Fire Alliance. There are now 90-100 local fire-safe councils.

Michelle Phillips

Michelle described the structure and function of the Nevada County Fire Safe Council. The 15-member council is a mix of homeowners and fire-protection agencies who advise fire agencies on fire protection matters. They also develop/implement local fire protection projects and programs. She described some of the representative programs that are under way by the NCFSC.

Director Tuttle then asked the Alliance members to identify issues that should be discussed in the open session later in the day.

1. Jack Blackwell identified the management of smoke and air quality. He also wants to discuss the way that agencies allocate grant funds for fire protection. Utilization of biomass and other forest products for fuels reduction and fire protection were also mentioned.
2. John Reynolds agreed that smoke management should be discussed. Finding efficient ways of complying with NEPA/CEQA is also important.
3. Mike Wilkenson suggested that better communication between grant applicants and funding agencies is needed. He also agreed that a listing of federal requirements for NEPA and ESA compliance is needed. The increased value of lands in areas like SoCal is also important.
4. Ken McDermond offered that more discussion is needed about efficient ways for addressing ESA consultation.
5. Ron Recker argued for greater training across agencies for the technical needs of fire suppression and fuels management.
6. Karen Barnette stated that the Alliance and other should discuss supplemental performance measures for the NFP beyond the traditional “acres treated”.
7. Dallas Jones suggested that there may be more efficient ways to handle FEMA grants.

There was a short discussion about the difficulties of a federal agency granting money for work on private lands. Jack Blackwell suggested that the Alliance take on this issue by providing federal block grants to states. Louis Blumberg offered that BLM is doing that now and has an independent committee that chooses the projects. However, the need to address ESA and cultural resource protection measures remains a challenge for all federal agencies. Jim Francis stated that there is a need for a standard set of criteria for choosing acceptable projects for federal funding under the NFP.

Coordination Efforts by Agencies and NFP Accomplishments in California (Moderator: Wayne Mitchell)

Fire Suppression – Pat Kidder

NFP will bring 100% MEL (most efficient level) funding to the federal agencies and we have already reached the 95% level. Since the federal agencies are approaching MEL, their responsibility for providing 1/3 of California's fire protection has been greatly enhanced. For example, no military personnel have been used for suppression to date this year in California. NPS has used the funds for doubling its staff. The FS has greatly increased its staff and equipment. BLM was already well staffed, but has now increased to full MEL operational capability. The FS in California employs roughly 20% of the federal fire suppression staff. The FS has been a leader in the development of contract helicopters as an important component of the suppression operation.

Emergency Restoration and Rehabilitation – Richard Hadley, FWS

Richard discussed the National Interagency Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Team and the process they use during wildfire restoration and rehabilitation work. The first objective is to protect human life and resources. Protecting and restoring natural resources comes next. Both short and long-term R&R needs are considered. The process involves evaluating the desired post-fire condition, identification of resources at risk, and planning appropriate restoration needs. Many regional and local BAER Teams are operational and are increasingly becoming interagency in composition. In California, 53 fires have been evaluated and roughly 85,000 acres have been restored at a cost of about \$10 million. Richard noted that restoring public lands can begin quickly, but work on private lands is much slower and must be coordinated with NRCS. At least 2-3 weeks are needed to coordinate with NRCS and damage from flooding and other factors can result.

Hazardous Fuels Reduction

Sue Husari

Sue noted that hazardous fuels reduction is needed for fire protection but it is also important for reducing firefighter incidents similar to that which killed three people on the Klamath NF on Sunday. The federal agencies differ in how they plan and complete

fuels reduction programs. All are now focusing on the wildland urban interface and most believe that both mechanical and prescribed fire programs are needed to treat the land. Sue suggested that the NFP system for classifying fuels conditions don't work as well as the CDF system for California because the biggest community fire protection problems occur in chaparral habitats. She also noted that the treatment types should strongly consider what is know about the long-term effects on biodiversity and the environment. In California, planning costs for surveys, community involvement, and other activities is very high. Summary statistics for agency accomplishments are provided in the binder that was given to all participants.

Wayne Mitchell

Wayne described CDF's vegetation management program which has a target to treat 85,000 acres per year. The program focuses heavily on prescribed fire. Targets are never met because of all the logistical challenges associated with prescribed fire. More emphasis is now being given to the more expensive mechanical treatments in strategically important areas like fuelbreaks and residential areas.

Michelle Phillips

Michelle discussed the goals and programs for fuels reduction in Nevada County. The Nevada County FSC has developed a GIS database to help develop strategically placed projects. Chipping projects are being funded with NFP funds in areas that have been identified as high priority for treatment. Special attention is given to low-income seniors with heavy fuels accumulations in strategically important areas. Local businesses, charitable organizations, and other interests are now contributing funds for some projects.

Community Assistance

Erica Bisch

Erica discussed the role for the CFSC in the Community Assistance Grants Program. Funds are provided for education, fuels reduction, and capacity building. A major role for the statewide council is to help local fire-safe councils with grant applications and trouble shooting for projects and agency processes. Another role is to be an information clearinghouse and an advocate for public awareness.

Betty Riley

Betty discussed the work of a local economic development district and RC&D. Much of the work at this level is presently focused on feasibility studies for various utilization methods for forest fuels or "wood waste". Betty's office currently has eight community assistance grants from the Forest Service. The focus of their work is determined by local communities who identify program and information needs. Some projects focus on technology development, others on new information, and still others on building community capacity and local fire-protection plans. Communities are now coming together around these funds to consider options for addressing current issues like fuels management and fire protection. And the private sector is beginning to reconsider investing in industries that can help with the fire protection and fuels reduction work.

Leigh Beck

The Forest Service provides funds through the State and Private Forestry Program that help with the implementation of the NFP. They are designed to increase the interest and capacity of communities in fire-protection issues. Related programs are:

1. State Fire Assistance – funding provided through CDF for financial and technical assistance for local fire protection providers. Funding was \$1.6 million in 2000 and 3.6 million in 2001 and 2002.
2. Volunteer Fire Assistance – administered by CDF for increasing capacity of volunteer fire organizations at the local level. In 2000 funding was \$173,000 which was raised to \$1.6 million by the NFP.
3. Economic Action Program. Funding for developmental and planning projects is provided through the FS and California Resources Agency. In 2001, NFP provided \$2.8 million for the program. About \$1.4 was provided in 2002. Fire safe plans for 138 communities have been funded through this program.
4. Community Protection Program – provides funds for fuels reduction on private land. In 2002, \$1.7 million has been provided for this program.

Research – Enoch Bell

Enoch summarized current fire-related research that is underway by the Forest Service in California. The PSW staff is conducting 14 projects at a total cost of roughly \$6.2 million. Projects range from fire-related modeling to fire effects assessments and management options.

Accountability

Erica Bisch

For grant recipients and communities, accountability means following through on promises. That should be done by tracking results in a formal accounting structure (e.g. acres treated) as well as sensing communities and agencies for overall impressions about results.

Rich Schell

The best test for accountability is to determine what happens when fires occur. Priorities and practices should change if fire protection is not improved and communities are increasingly satisfied. This will be determined by on-the-ground audits by CDF for projects and programs that are funded by the NFP.

Pat Kidder

Pat stressed that current programs are increasing capacity for communities to do work. The agencies are now asking for communities to be accountable for results. But soon the communities will begin to ask the managers of the NFP to be accountable for continuing

to fund the work that has been started. Funding requests will soon begin to increase perhaps by 10-fold and community efforts will begin to dissipate unless the funding stream approach demands.

Overview - Communities at Risk List (Wayne Mitchell)

Wayne described how a CDF database was used to respond to the National Fire Plan need for a list of communities at risk. When the National Fire Plan was developed and forwarded to federal agencies in California, CDF was already constructing GIS data layers to help them identify high-risk communities as part of the California Fire Plan. CDF then used these data to help the Federal agencies submit their lists of communities at risk for the NFP. The first list was a poor representation of actual community locations, so several revisions have been done and another is ongoing.

Roundtable Discussion of the National Fire Plan

This was an open discussion where each of the Alliance members was asked to briefly describe their views about accomplishments of the NFP. The Alliance members commented as follows:

Dallas Jones

Mr. Jones offered that “all disasters are local” because local citizens always suffer the consequences. He suggested that the local mitigation plans needed for FEMA disaster relief could be combined with the state-level plan to provide a comprehensive framework for fire planning and recovery work. He offered that the OES staff will work with the CFA to start on this.

Bruce Turbeville

Bruce suggested that the insurance industry is reducing coverage for fire protection in the state and the CFA should be aware of that.

Ken McDermond

Ken offered FWS staff to work on identifying the most efficient ways for handling species issues so that projects can go on in the local communities.

Jack Blackwell

Smoke management is a big issue and the federal agencies are already beginning to discuss how that can be addressed. Block grants should be considered for federal money that is passed through the state as the BLM is already doing. He asked Pat Kidder to pursue how this might be done in the FS and elsewhere. Jack is also concerned that tracking acres alone is not the best system for following accomplishments. He will discuss this with Chief Boswell and ask for a broader look at ways to best manage accomplishments. He asked Pat Kidder to lead a staff discussion on this issue as well.

John Reynolds

John encouraged the CFA to begin considering processes for multi-jurisdictional fire protection planning across large landscapes. John asked for a thorough review of the draft fire management plan for Yosemite. He also suggested that, for most westerners, fire protection is felt to be a bigger threat than terrorists and attacks on their communities. Therefore, most western communities would like to see more federal resources allocated to the National Fire Plan.

Mike Wilkinson

Noted that the cooperative tone that CFA and NFP has brought to community fire protection is spilling over into fire suppression work at the local level.

Karen Barnette

Karen is pleased that the kinds of coordination that has existed in suppression work in California is now moving into fuels reduction and community fire protection planning.

Andrea Tuttle

Andrea noted that a dependable source of funding for continuing fire protection work will be a key to long-term success. She stressed that the integrated interagency infrastructure that exists in California at multiple levels is functional and is becoming increasingly efficient. But the staffs are “maxed out” on the level of community involvement that can be accomplished. More resources will be needed to increase service across the state.

Ron Rector

Ron stressed that public education will also be a key for long-term success.

Closing Remarks from Dave Tenny

The foundation for the NFP Implementation Plan is collaboration and protecting values is the key principle. The reason that acres continue to be used as the primary metric is because NFP leaders want to track the percent of acres identified by a collaborative process with the public that are being treated under the NFP. California is tracking very consistently with the NFP by adopting the bottom up approach from the California Fire Plan as the basic model for fire protection planning.

Staff in DC will continue to rely on the good work in California as some of the most informative thinking regarding the NFP. The DC staffs recognize that governance is a process of setting priorities and managing expectations. Fire is high on the list of the current federal administration and budgets should stay constant or slightly increase as a result. This condition could limit what many would like to accomplish with the NFP as large funding increases are unlikely. Therefore, the Administration is looking at ways to make existing budgets go as far as possible. For example, there will soon be a proposal to address small vegetation management projects with categorical exclusions rather than EAs or EISs. Long-term stewardship contracts are also being evaluated and OMB has recognized, for the first time, that these contracts are a necessary component of efficient fire protection work.

Mr. Tenny thanked the California Fire Alliance for an informative program that provided much information that he will carry back the Washington.

Director Tuttle and Jack Blackwell also thanked the presenters, Alliance members, and audience for their contributions to a good discuss. The meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM.

Notes by Mike Chapel
July August 1, 2002