



## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Cohesive Strategy and the Northeast Regional Action Plan**

### **What is the Cohesive Strategy?**

The *National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy* (Cohesive Strategy) is being developed in response to requirements of the Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement (FLAME) Act of 2009, and its development is being directed by the Wildland Fire Executive Council (WFEC) and overseen by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC).

The Cohesive Strategy is a collaborative process with active involvement of all levels of government and non-governmental organizations, as well as the public. The goal is to find national, all-lands solutions to wildland fire management issues. You have had one or more employees serving as members of either the Regional Strategy Committee or one of our Working Groups (see enclosure) over the last 3 years developing the reports for the Northeast.

The Cohesive Strategy is being implemented in three phases, allowing stakeholders to systematically develop a dynamic approach to planning for, responding to, and recovering from wildland fire incidents. This phased approach was designed to promote dialogue between national, regional and local leadership.

Phase I involved the development of two documents: *A National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy* and the *Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act Of 2009 - Report to Congress*. These documents provide the foundation of the Cohesive Strategy.

In Phase II, regional assessments were completed to address the national goals and the needs and challenges found at regional and local levels. Regional Strategy Committees representing three regions of the country—the Northeast, Southeast, and West—examined the processes by which wildland fire, or the absence thereof, threatens areas, and issues that Americans value, including wildlife habitats, watershed quality, and local economies, among others.

Phase III has involved taking the qualitative information gathered in Phase II and translating it into regional risk analysis reports that in turn has helped inform the development of management actions that are designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of wildland fire management programs and activities on the ground. Each of the three geographic regions of the country, (Northeast, West, and Southeast) is producing a *Regional Action Plan* which along with a national trade-off analysis, will be folded into a National Action Plan due in the Fall of 2013.



Once the strategy is finalized, it will be implemented across the country and overseen by the national Wildland Fire Executive Council (WFEC), which will establish a five-year review cycle to provide updates to Congress. Additional background on the Cohesive Strategy can be found at: <http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov>

The Cohesive Strategy is not guidance and it is not policy, at least not yet, but it is more than a set of ideas. It is a description of the shared understandings about what we as a nation and region want with respect to wildland fire.

### **Why do we need the Cohesive Strategy?**

Wildfires burn across landscapes without regard for political jurisdictions, property lines, or land management units. The effects of fire on wildlife, water, air quality, recreation, and communities extend far beyond the burn boundaries. Rural and urban economies depend on services generated by wildland ecosystems; most of those ecosystems depend on fire of appropriate timing and intensity but can be damaged by wildfires that burn outside the range to which they are adapted. Seldom can one landowner or manager alone adequately influence fire across the relevant landscape. That requires collaboration among many stakeholders with different authorities and resources whether it is implementation of a community wildfire protection plan or restoration of fire resilience to a watershed thousands of acres in size.

### **Is the Cohesive Strategy a Policy? A set of ideas? Guidance?**

The Cohesive Strategy is not guidance and it is not policy, at least not yet. It is more than a set of ideas. It is a description of the shared understandings about what we as a nation want with respect to wildland fire.

- We want communities that are adapted to fire so that fire losses of life are as small as possible and people suffer few injuries or illnesses from being exposed to wildfire in or near their communities or while fighting fire. We want property and other community values-at-risk to be protected from wildfire. We also want to protect those wildland values important to communities that depend on fire.
- We want landscapes that are resilient and sustainable in terms of flows of services from fire dependent ecosystems.
- We want effective and efficient preparations for and response to fire that succeeds in preventing unwanted fires and quickly and safely extinguishing those that do start.

The Cohesive Strategy also describes why we want those things and suggests in broad terms how we will proceed to accomplish them. In short, it is a strategy.



### **What is the Northeast Regional Action Plan?**

The Northeast Regional Action Plan details the goals, desired outcomes, investment options, outcome measures, and priority implementation actions for the Northeast Cohesive Strategy Region. These actions, as identified by the Northeast Regional Strategy Committee (RSC), will help guide all the partners in wildland fire management in the Northeast Region to make progress in achieving the overarching national goals: Restore and Maintain Landscapes, Fire Adapted Communities, and Wildfire Response.

### **How was the Northeast Regional Action Plan developed?**

As a starting point, the Northeast Region developed key actions under each option based upon feedback received from stakeholders during Phases I, II, and III of the planning process. The actions listed are key actions that are intended to be implemented during the next five years, and that will provide the most benefit to the region over that time period. The Action Plan describes the scope of the actions, the tasks associated with the actions, the lead and coordinating groups that will be implementing the actions, and the timeframe in which it is expected that the actions will take place.

### **Who developed the Northeast Regional Action Plan?**

The Action Plan was developed, with input from the public and stakeholders in the wildland fire management community, by the Northeast Regional Strategy Committee, which is comprised of representatives from the following agencies and organizations:

- Department of the Interior
  - US Fish and Wildlife Service
  - US Geological Service
  - National Park Service
  - Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Department of Agriculture
  - US Forest Service
- Fond du Lac Indian Reservation
- Intertribal Timber Council
- Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters (20 Northeast and Midwest States, and District of Columbia)
- International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC)
- National Association of Counties (NACO) (Lake Co., MN)



**Will the Cohesive Strategy and Northeast Regional Action Plan affect how funds are allocated and spent?**

Not at this time. While more funding is not anticipated in the near term, the Cohesive Strategy is focused on making current investments more effective and working within current programs to get better results. Emphasis is on collaboration is especially essential during times of economic stress.

**How will the Northeast Regional Action Plan affect my organization or agency's workload?**

Addressing wildland fire is not simply a land management, fire operations or wildland-urban interface concern – it is much larger and more complex. Each agency and organization represented by the Northeast RSC has the authority, responsibility, and autonomy to develop and implement their own policies. But long-term success can only be achieved through a unified, collaborative and focused effort of all.

The implementation actions expressed in this plan, while *voluntary in nature*, represent the collective work of the Northeast RSC and stakeholders to identify the most important actions needed to make progress toward achieving a more efficient, effective, and collaborative wildland fire management strategy for the Northeast.

In addition, leads and collaborators have been identified for each of the actions and task under each goal and option. *It is important to note that not every agency and organization in the Cohesive Strategy partnership will have to work on every action and task.* With each partner doing their share we can make significant progress in advancing wildland fire management in the Northeast as outlined in the regional action plan.

**How can we tell if the Cohesive Strategy as represented by the Northeast Regional Action Plan makes a difference?**

Sound scientific methods and performance measures will be used to monitor and evaluate actions that implement the strategy. Evaluation results will be used to guide action needed to make adjustments in policy or programming and to learn what works and develop best practices. Promising success stories from projects across the country showing evidence of significant impacts on landscapes, communities and fire response will be available to others to help them design and manage their own efforts to collaborate with others implementing the Strategy.

**How will the CS partners in the Northeast coordinate actions, set priorities, and monitor progress?**

One of the key actions identified in the Northeast Regional Action Plan is the need to establish and expand the membership of the current Northeast Regional Strategy Committee (RSC) as a more permanent coordinating entity. It is the belief of the Northeast RSC, that this action alone will greatly increase the efficiency and effectiveness in addressing many of the wildland fire management



challenges identified in the Northeast Regional Action Plan. Currently in the Northeast Cohesive Strategy Region, there is no single entity in place that has the responsibility for governing and coordinating all the wildland fire management organizations, policy direction, and operational activities envisioned under the Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. This action involves the formation of a *wildland fire regional strategy committee* through an agreement to oversee, coordinate, and monitor the implementation of the Cohesive Strategy across the 20 states of the Northeast and Mid-west U.S.

**How will this new NE Regional Strategy Committee relate to the other existing wildland fire coordinating groups such as Compacts, EACG, the State Forest Fire Supervisors Committee, etc.?**

In addition to the current member agencies and organizations represented on the NE RSC, these and other interested groups would be participating members of the NE RSC with the purpose of coordinating policies and procedures to improve resource sharing efficiencies. Their current charters and wildland fire management responsibilities would not change. The purpose of this coordinating committee is to provide strategic oversight and participating agency coordination to ensure policy coordination, accountability, facilitate sharing of resources, and effective implementation of the Cohesive Strategy and related long-term strategies to address wildfire preparedness and suppression, hazardous fuels reduction, landscape restoration and rehabilitation of wildlands, and assistance to communities.

More information is always available on [www.forestsandrangelands.gov](http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov).