



## Synopsis of the Northeast Regional Action Plan

April 2013

### Introduction

This Northeast Regional Action Plan details the goals, desired outcomes, investment options, outcome measures, and priority implementation actions for the Northeast Cohesive Strategy Region.

- The Northeast can be described in risk management terms as having a large number of small, mostly human-caused, wildfires with a low occurrence of large wildfires, but most all these wildfires present a high risk to life and property when they do occur.
- 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.
- The Northeast Regional Risk Analysis completed in November 2012 identified a set of feasible investment options for addressing the Cohesive Strategy Goals in the Northeast U.S. For each of the investment options, the key risks, barriers, and opportunities were identified, and are addressed in this Regional Action.
- These options represent alternative strategies that wildland fire management organizations, federal, state, and local governments, non-governmental organizations and local communities can adopt in any number and combination to best meet their objectives and address the risks they may face from potential wildfire impacts. The options developed are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.
- ***There is no one set of preferred options to be applied across the Northeast Region.*** Instead the investment options should be balanced to achieve each of the national Cohesive Strategy goals and implement effective wildland fire management consistent with applicable land management objectives.
- The actual mix of investments is dependent on many factors such as, but not limited to: local, agency, and sub-regional land management objectives, specific community needs, agency mission, potential risks, existing barriers, available skills, qualified personnel, budgets, equipment, and other resources.
- 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.



## Overview of Regional Options and Implementation Actions

**Overarching Actions** – These are Regional actions, some with national implications, which apply to more than one of the Cohesive Strategy goals. Key among these actions are:

- a) Expand the Northeast RSC as a voluntary strategic leadership group to both guide the implementation of the Cohesive Strategy, and provide a coordinating entity with the WFLC and WFEC, and for all the other Northeast wildland fire coordinating organizations (such as EACG, Compacts, GACC).
- b) Form a NE work group to assist in the improvement of LANDFIRE data
- c) Insure that federal, tribal, and state land management and action plans incorporate applicable CS actions
- d) Expand the use of a full range of natural resource management tools to reduce hazardous fuels and encourage the sustainable use of biomass
- e) Improve collaboration and communication among CS partners and stakeholders in a variety of ways

### Goal 1 - Restore and Maintain Landscapes

The three options that were developed are:

- **Regional Option 1A** - *Expand the use of prescribed fire as an integral tool to meet management objectives in the Northeast.*
- **Regional Option 1B** – *Maintain and increase where possible, the extent of fire dependent ecosystems and expand the use of fire as a disturbance process.*
- **Regional Option 1C** - *Focus on mitigating “event” fuels to reduce potential fire hazard.*

Many landowners in the Northeast Region have similar interests and objectives for their land including wildlife habitat, recreation and tourism, tax interests, aesthetics, and ecosystem health and sustainability. Stakeholder input has indicated that prescribed burning is used to meet a wide range of objectives, and that under many scenarios burning actually accomplishes more than the primary objective such as fuels reduction.

Land uses, values, and fire suppression have changed the distribution, function, and sustainability of fire adapted systems. The NE action plan recognizes the value of restoring and maintaining the function of fire adapted communities within Historic Range of Variability (HRV) of structure and composition to the extent possible. Actions focus on improving efficiencies and effectiveness through collaboration and coordination in planning, implementation and monitoring.

Many of the fuel hazards in the Northeast are the result of natural events. Wind, heavy snow, ice, disease and insects can create large areas of very high fuel loading in forested areas. Removal of event fuels is more crucial when the proximity to homes and other infrastructure could lead to significant economic loss if a wildfire occurs. Event fuels may also represent an economic opportunity to supply forest product needs ranging from biomass to higher valued products.

### Goal 2 - Fire Adapted Communities

The three options that were developed are:



- **Regional Option 2A** - Focus on promoting and supporting local adaptation activities to be taken by communities.
- **Regional Option 2B** - Focus on directing hazardous fuel treatments to the wildland-urban interfaces.
- **Regional Option 2C** - Focus on promoting and supporting prevention programs and activities.

Creating Fire Adapted communities is an investment of relatively few dollars that can be effective in preventing large losses due to structure fires, increase public awareness of wildfires, reduce fire ignitions, make wildfires easier to extinguish, and reduce resource losses.

Actions under this goal focus on a proactive, collaborative approach to identifying risks in the WUI combined with developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans, reducing hazardous fuels, treating event fuels and educating the public in the context of managing fuels across a multi-jurisdictional, fragmented landscape.

Homes and infrastructure are involved in a high percentage of wildfires in the Region. Due to the heavy population and large proportion of landscape in the WUI/intermix even the small wildfires threaten at least one and usually many structures which increases risk and complexity for firefighters. Actions have been developed in this plan focused on preventing unwanted fires and increasing homeowner shared responsibility will reduce firefighter risk and decrease need for firefighting responses.

### **Goal 3 - Response to Wildfire**

The three options that were developed are:

- **Regional Option 3A** - Improve the organizational efficiency and effectiveness of the wildland fire community.
- **Regional Option 3B** - Increase the local response capacity for initial attack of wildfires.
- **Regional Option 3C** - Further develop shared response capacity for extended attack and managing wildfire incidents with long duration fire potential.

Many and various scales of wildland fire management occur within and across the States, all with a dependence on local fire departments and other local resources. The majority of land is protected by local fire departments, not large land management agencies. More than 13,500 local fire departments provide wildland fire protection support on public and private lands in the region. Local fire departments, both professional and volunteer, are key partners and are often the first and sole responders on wildland fires in the Northeast.

Impacts from a lack of adequate investment affect all agencies and organizations with wildland fire responsibilities – local, state and federal. Actions under this goal are directed toward improving a wildland fire management program that focuses efforts on maintaining and developing field level leaders and a properly prepared workforce for maximum firefighter safety and effectiveness.

Maintaining or increasing the capacity of local fire departments to respond to wildfires is vital to augment state, federal, and Tribal response needs. Most of the fire community is also vital to all hazard response in the Northeast. More effective integration of wildfire response training into the all hazard response trainings is key to maintaining local response capability in the Northeast.



Improved interagency coordination, more effective sharing of limited resources, a streamlined qualifications process and system, and more integrated wildfire reporting system are also critical to the success of Goal 3 in the Northeast Region.

### **Monitoring and Accountability**

- Monitoring of progress and accountability for accomplishment of the actions in this plan by Cohesive Strategy leaders and managers is critical to the success of the Northeast Cohesive Strategy Action Plan.
- Monitoring also includes the opportunity to identify and incorporate new accomplishment data and scientific information as it becomes available.
- A regular process of reporting performance measure and activity accomplishments will maintain a regular focus on the three Cohesive Strategy goals, communicate progress nationally, with the other Cohesive Strategy Regions, and among the Northeast Cohesive Strategy partners and stakeholders, and provide an opportunity to make course adjustments as work progresses.

### **Communications**

A Regional Communication Strategy will be developed in more detail following the completion and release of this Regional Action Plan. This communication strategy will be designed to:

- Identify and share of Lessons Learned, and examples of Success Stories related to the implementation of the Cohesive Strategy's three goals in the Northeast.
- Expand and maintain stakeholder outreach to engage partners, stakeholders, and local communities in the development dialogue and collaborative solutions for making progress on the three goals.
- Improve the understanding and maintain the engagement within those organizations and agencies represented on the Northeast Regional Strategy Committee.
- Provide all partners and stakeholders with timely accurate information on Cohesive Strategy progress in the Northeast.

### **Conclusions**

- 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.
- 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 with available funding. Collaboration is especially important during times of economic stress.
- The strength and success of this Northeast Regional Action Plan will lie in its ability to motivate collaborative actions to reduce wildland fire risk by the diverse agencies, organizations, and partners involved in the wildland fire issue. Regular communications among Cohesive Strategy partners will be essential for success.