



## IAFC Wildland Fire Policy Committee Vision Statement

### **The Problem:**

Fire is a natural process and a mechanism for biological renewal across forest and rangeland ecosystems. During the 20th century, federal, state, and local firefighters were successful at suppressing wildland fires in the early stages creating a fire exclusion scenario that is not sustainable. An unintended consequence was the overstocking of forests with trees and ladder fuels. These overstocked conditions combine with other stressors such as drought, insects and disease, invasive species, and longer, hotter summers to create uncharacteristically large wildfires that threaten homes, communities, and cultural and resource values, and can cause widespread property damage.

If the last century was about understanding and controlling wildland fire, the next century must be about reconciling our aims, with respect to the dynamics that define these fire disturbance regimes. It must be about managing our expectations *for the land* in ways that are consistent with the dynamics *of the land*. If the last century was about strengthening the tactical dimensions of fire control, the next century must be about restoring fire-dependent lands and, strategically, better aligning our perceptions, our laws, our policies, our plans, and our practices the “new realities” of a changed environment.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) supports the vision statement from the United States National Wildland Fire Cohesive Strategy and adopted a vision for this century that serves the international community:

**“To safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as an international community, to live with wildland fire.”**

The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (Cohesive Strategy), as called for in the U.S. Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act of 2009, addresses the impacts of wildland fire across the landscape and on communities, counties, states, tribes, and federal agencies, and what can be done to reduce the

negative impacts of fire on people, property and natural resources. The IAFC strongly endorses this direction and strategy for the international community.

In this regard, the three goals of the IAFC are:

(1) **Restore and Maintain Landscapes:** Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to fire related disturbances in accordance with management objectives.

(2) **Fire-adapted Communities:** Human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property.

(3) **Wildfire Response:** All jurisdictions participate in reaching and implementing safe, effective, efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions.

The IAFC embraces the following guiding principles that are consistent with the vision statement and goals:

- Reducing risk to firefighters and the public is the first priority in every fire management activity.
- Sound risk management is the foundation for all management activities.
- Actively manage the land to make it more resilient to disturbance, in accordance with management objectives.
- Improve and sustain both community and individual responsibilities to prepare for, respond to and recover from wildfire through capacity-building activities.
- Rigorous wildfire prevention programs are supported across all jurisdictions.
- Wildland fire, as an essential ecological process and natural change agent, may be incorporated into the planning process and wildfire response.
- Fire management decisions are based on the best available science, knowledge, experience and risk assessment tools and processes, used to evaluate risk versus gain
- Local, state, tribal and federal agencies support one another with wildfire response, including engagement in collaborative planning and the decision-making processes that take into account all lands and recognize the interdependence and statutory responsibilities among jurisdictions.
- Where land and resource management objectives differ, prudent and safe actions must be taken through collaborative fire planning and suppression response to keep unwanted wildfires from spreading to adjacent jurisdictions.

- Safe aggressive initial attack is often the best suppression strategy to keep unwanted wildfires small and costs down.
- Fire management programs and activities are economically viable and commensurate with values to be protected, land and resource management objectives, and social and environmental quality considerations.

The escalating cost of fire suppression expenses for battling wildland fires continues to be a significant international challenge as have the post suppression damages to natural resources and community infrastructures. These fiscal issues continue to be contentious given current fiscal constraint by all levels of government and growing WUI development. With the expectations of the publics based on previous wildland suppression successes, these issues will continue to challenge wildland leaders.

### **The IAFC Challenge:**

The IAFC is committed to promoting international efforts to reduce wildfire threats through aggressive prevention, public information and education, mitigation, preparedness and integrated wildland fire response efforts. Specifically, the IAFC will promote programs that improve firefighter and public safety, reduce community life-hazards and protect highly valued community assets. As the vast majority of IAFC members are representatives of local government, the IAFC is well positioned to address the local government perspective on these issues when dealing with officials at all levels of government.

The following are the priority concerns to be addressed by the IAFC:

- Coordinated efforts between local, state and federal agencies that stress collaborative efforts to address local wildland fire threats, with priority on life safety and aggressive fire suppression protection of community infrastructure, private property and identified community assets at risk.
- Firefighter and public safety are priority concerns when managing wildland fire problems. These concerns must be managed by creating fire adapted and resilient landscapes, promoting safety on the fire ground, providing adequate personal protective equipment and radio communications, and establishing effective lines of command authority and coordination of fire forces to recognize extreme fire behavior and communicate changing fire conditions and weather changes to avoid suppression tragedies.
- Creating fire adapted communities by utilizing programs such as Ready, Set, Go!, FireWise Communities, Living With Fire, Fire Safe Councils and Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Key elements will focus on preparedness, defensible space, community education and appropriate development/construction and zoning.
- Aggressive local, State and Federal action to recognize and create fire management plans for all wildland-urban interface threat areas that include a

documented coordination agreement among fire agencies and inclusion of local general land use plans into the fire management policies.

- The fire management plans must include clear lines of authority, prioritized focus on high fire threat areas, based on local, state and national policy and methods for incorporating local mutual aid agreements that are well understood and supported by local fire service leadership.
- We support unified command that is well understood and coordinated before the incident. Response standards, protection priorities and cost-sharing policies must be clearly understood and supported by local fire service leaders before a wildland fire event.
- The IAFC will identify and attempt to eliminate gaps in fire readiness, with specific focus on efforts to support standardized levels of training, safety awareness, physical fitness, cost reimbursement and firefighter pay policy.
- Furthermore the IAFC will promote methods that help local fire service plan and train together with their state and federal fire service partners on an on going basis, crossing jurisdictional boundaries to accomplish higher levels of local expertise, readiness efficiency and effectiveness.

The IAFC will be a lead collaborator and play an aggressive role in representing local fire services when addressing wildland fire planning and policy issues. The IAFC will seek to use a task force approach, utilizing motivated and informed fire service leaders who are appropriately experienced to work out the challenges and problems that exist for member agencies.

The IAFC will support legislation that improves firefighter safety and effectiveness of fire operations, reduces risk to local private property and high valued community assets, and promotes seamless and well-coordinated response of local, state and federal fire forces to wildfires.

The IAFC will be an active voice in Washington, DC representing the Fire Service for our continued wildland fire threat, fuels reduction challenges and our need to work together with all local, State and Federal agency's .

The IAFC will develop clear lines of communication and an easily understood matrix of responsibility for local fire agencies to use when solving problems and seeking resources to achieve improved readiness and response times. The IAFC understands and appreciates cross-jurisdictional areas of responsibility and roles of the players.