



EMERGENCY PREVENTION,
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE



To: EPPR
From: Gwich'in Council International
Date: June 16, 2021
Purpose: For information – update on Circumpolar Wildland Fire Project

Background

Wildland fires are increasing in frequency, intensity, and duration, and expanding into new areas. Wildland fires have become not only more destructive, but also a significant driver of carbon release and climate change, impacting air quality, health, the pursuit of new and traditional activities, economies, and transportation networks.

Wildland fires do not respect national boundaries, and often become an issue of international importance in the Nordic countries and in North America, as fires cross territorial lines. States would be well served by greater cooperation in responding to wildland fires, and in coordinated training efforts to increase and facilitate partnership possibilities across the circumpolar north. Observer States and organizations also bring significant expertise in fire response, training, and data management, and are willing to share practices and lessons learned.

Additionally, Wildland Fire can have profound effects on indigenous communities, harvest of traditional foods, transportation, and sustainability. Gwich'in communities have been profoundly impacted by Wildland Fire, having more acreage burn in their traditional homelands than in any other region of North America in the last 20 years. Gwich'in are heavily involved in wildland firefighting and, possibly like other Permanent Participants, are eager to share expertise and practices of wildland firefighting in the Arctic context.

This project was approved by EPPR in January 2020, with the first gathering of the Steering Committee in June 2020. Over the past year, work has been focused on securing capacity, understanding state and organizational actors and roles, and sharing information about the project to generate interest and support. It is expected to be completed by 2023.

Ongoing and Planned Activities

Project activities:

- Compile and assess instruments that enable cross-border responses
- Interview users, designers, and policy makers for what elements worked, recommendations for change, and what was most useful
- Draft a template to include necessary elements for consideration when discussing cross-border fire response
- Host workshop in partnership with CAFF working group
- Scope Phase II of the project



EMERGENCY PREVENTION,
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE



Capacity and coordination

Gwich'in Council International (GCI) is the project lead, in collaboration with the Steering Committee (list attached). Both the GCI Head of Delegation to EPPR, Edward Alexander, and Executive Director Devlin Fernandes are involved in the project, organizing Steering Committee meetings, communicating about the project, and coordinating activities.

Arctic Council States, Permanent Participant organizations, and Observers have provided capacity to the project in terms of **Steering Committee** membership and expertise. A number of members have shared presentations and information related to their state's activities, or organization's capacity. We recognize that membership may change/grow over the course of the project as activities progress.

The United States has provided a **project coordinator, Michael Young**, who is supporting this project as well as a related wildland fire project in the CAFF working group. This is welcome capacity to advance project work and interests.

The **EPPR Secretariat** has played a coordination role with the Steering Committee and establishing a common workspace (Sharepoint) for project files. In addition, Nina ensures coordination with other Working Groups as necessary through open communications and discussions with Executive Secretaries and other project leads.

University of Alaska Fairbanks, specifically Troy Bouffard and researcher Edward Soto, are contributing to the project through a **Baseline Operational Survey of the Arctic States**, compiling roles and responsibilities, response systems, and governance components related to operational planning and conduct with regard to wildland fire response.

Additional capacity has been offered and discussions are ongoing.

Meetings, workshop participation, discussions

A number of activities have taken place including:

- Steering Committee meetings (June 2020, Feb 2021, April 2021, May 2021) with Spotlight presentations:
 - o **Finland**, Teemu Veneskari, Senior Specialist, Ministry of the Interior, Department for Rescue Services. Presentation on the bilateral and multilateral cooperation, agreements, and mechanisms that enable cross-border support, and discussion of governance and operational factors.
 - o **Global Wildfire Information System (GWIS)**, from Jesús San-Miguel-Ayán, European Commission – Joint Research Centre, Disaster Risk Management Unit. Presentation on the tool, data, frequency, and scope. <https://gwis.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>
 - o **Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection**, Heidi Vassbotn Løfqvist, presentation on response to fires in Norway, the different guidelines, and mechanisms used.
 - o Tiina Kurvits from **UNEP/Grid Arendal** shared an update on the forthcoming Global Wildfires Rapid Response Assessment (RRA), including relevance and connection to Arctic fires.
- Presentations and participation in meetings and workshops:



EMERGENCY PREVENTION,
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

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- Presentation of project to the Government of the Northwest Territories Environment and Natural Resource Fire Management Meeting
- Participation in the Yukon Flats NWR Fire Management Workshop
- Discussions with the Yukon First Nations Wildfire organization, learning about barriers to participation and training incorporating Indigenous knowledge and Elders.
- Project updates to the Canadian EPPR Readout (domestic audience)

Steering Committee meetings will resume after the summer, though work will continue through the summer.

Knowledge gathering

Work is underway to compile instruments (agreements, MOUs, policies, templates) that enable cross-border responses, which will then be analysed and shared back with Steering Committee. Thank you to all Steering Committee members who have shared work to date.

Workshop planning

A component of this project is a joint activity with the CAFF working group to host a workshop bringing together fire ecologists, knowledge holders, and operational staff to share and discuss project work and deliverables across and within working groups. We will be taking into considerations COVID-19 restrictions and the fire season when planning the workshop, and will be establishing an advisory group to guide the planning.

Connections with other Working Groups

CAFF: A related project has been approved at CAFF, ArcticFIRE. See attached project summary document for project activities and deliverables. A proposal has been submitted to the Project Support Instrument to advance ArcticFIRE and we await their decision.

AMAP is working on assessment products and fire mapping and analysis related to smoke and emissions associated with wildfires, assessing climate change impacts on wildfires and associated climate feedbacks, and risk assessment.

We will maintain communication across working groups to ensure sharing of information and practices, avoid duplication of work, and explore synergies between the work. Most recently, EPPR Secretariat (Nina), GCI (Devlin), CAFF Secretariat (Tom Barry), and Coordinator Mike Young discussed project workplans and ongoing collaboration June 1, 2021. We are working on an **updated project summary document** which will be circulated when complete.

Work in the news

- **2021 Reykjavik Declaration** recognizes the importance of this issue: <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/2600>, “recognize the increasing threat of wildland fires in the Arctic region, note with satisfaction the ongoing work to strengthen circumpolar cooperation on this serious



challenge, and encourage efforts to keep pace with the evolving impacts of climate change, human induced and natural disasters, and growth of sustainable development activities”

- Project featured in the Arctic Council **media briefing** May 17, 2021 <https://vimeo.com/552366874>
- Project featured in the Arctic Council **Pathways Magazine** <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/2597>
- Ed Alexander interviewed related to this project, **Arctic Today**: <https://www.arctictoday.com/icelands-first-danger-alert-for-a-wildfire-could-be-a-sign-of-things-to-come/>
- Edward Alexander interviewed about Indigenous Fire Management and Arctic Council work on fires by **German broadcaster DW**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hqEHuYJ1Xc>
- Project featured in **Cabin Radio** article: <https://cabinradio.ca/45222/news/environment/wildfires/gwichin-working-to-change-how-wildfires-are-fought/>
- Project featured in **Eye on the Arctic** article: <https://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic/2020/10/06/indigenous-wildfire-knowledge-to-be-key-part-of-new-arctic-council-project/>

Next Steps

- Document collection, summaries and analysis
- Steering Committee Meetings & guidance, including additional Spotlight Presentations
- Drafting and reviewing materials
- Joint workshop

Steering Committee Members

Note that this list includes all Steering Committee members who have participated since project inception. The most current list is on the Project Sharepoint site.

Name	Delegation	Role/Affiliation
Andrey Petrov	IASSA	IASSA President
Ángela Iglesias Rodrigo	Spain	Desk Officer, Fire Service Department (Forestry Policy and Fight against Desertification Department) of the Ministry for the Ecological Transition of Spain
Åsa Larsson-Blind	Saami Council	Chair, Swedish Sami Association
Bożena Kruk	Poland	Fire Brigade HQ
Brian Wiens	Canada	
Devlin Fernandes	GCI	ED, GCI
Edward Alexander	GCI	HoD



EMERGENCY PREVENTION,
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE



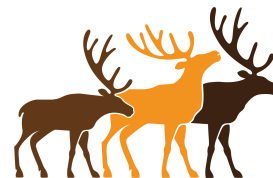
Edward Soto	GCI	University of Alaska Fairbanks
Elena Hernández Paredes	Spain	Desk Officer, Fire Service Department, Forestry Policy and Fight against Desertification Department of the Ministry for the Ecological Transition of Spain
Gerlis Fugmann	IASC	IASC Executive Secretary
Gordy Sachs	USA	Chief of the All Hazard and International Fire Support Branch in USFS Fire and Aviation Management
Hans Kristian Madsen	Norway	Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection
Heidi Löfqvist	Norway	Senior Engineer, Fire and Rescue, The Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection (DSB)
Jesús San-Miguel-Ayanz	EU	European Commission Joint Research Centre, Directorate E, Space, Security and Migration, Disaster Risk Management Unit
Julian Reyes	EGBCM	EGBCM Wildfire Priority Area Lead
Julienne Morissette	Canada	Director of Wildland Fire Research at Northern Forestry Centre
Karen Pletnikoff	AIA	Head of Delegation to EPPR
Maribeth Murray	AINA	AINA Executive Director
Mike Young	USA	USA staffed Project Coordinator
Nina Agren	EPPR	EPPR Secretariat
Peskov Roman Igorevich	Russian Federation	Head of the Office of the Operational Use of Digital Technology of the Main Department of "The National Crisis Management Center" of the EMERCOM of Russia
Pete Lahm	USA	Air Resource Specialist with USFS Fire and Aviation Management and an expert on black carbon
Rickard Hansen	Sweden	Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)
Scott Dehnisch	USA	USAID/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance/Wildfire Coordinator
Stefania Amici	Italy	National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology
Stephen Arnold	IASC	Chair of our IASC Atmosphere Working Group
Teemu Veneskari	Finland	Senior Specialist, Ministry of the Interior
Tiina Kurvits	UNEP/GridA	
Tina Schoolmeester	UNEP/GridA	
Troy Bouffard	GCI	University of Alaska Fairbanks
Ulrike Herzsuh	IASC	Vice-Chair of our IASC Terrestrial Working Group
Vito Vitale	Italy	National Research Council - Institute of Polar Sciences (ISP)
Wes James	USA	HoD
Wivi-Ann Wagello-Sjölund	Finland	HoD

Arctic Council Wildfire Projects

Wildfires are increasing in frequency, severity, and area across the Arctic, bringing challenges as well as opportunities and requiring greater collaboration, knowledge sharing, and partnership. GCI is leading two projects to advance work on wildfires at the Arctic Council, in the CAFF and EPPR Working Groups.

Each project has unique objectives and intended uses, summarized below, as well as its own Steering Committee of State and Permanent Participant representatives. The projects are connected through their overarching goal of addressing wildfires in the Arctic and circumpolar focus. Knowledge sharing is a key component of both projects, and a workshop is planned to bring people working in ecology, management, and response together and review draft project deliverables.

	CAFF	EPPR
Sphere of impact	Management & mitigation of impacts Sharing knowledge systems	Operational readiness and response Economic development
Objective(s)	Understand extent and impacts of wildfires Understand good practices for wildfire management (to achieve social, ecological, cultural goals) from Western science and IK perspectives Share practices and ongoing work and learnings	Document and understand good practices for international cooperation agreements targeting operational activities Improve coordinated response by Arctic States and Permanent Participants, and promote international cooperation Create template for discussion of MOU for Arctic fire collaboration (response, training)
Activities	Map the extent and distribution of fires across the Arctic (look at data across jurisdictions and map key elements), currently and in the past Review practices from states/different jurisdictions to compile how they manage fires Invite PPs to document use of fire for management and impacts Assess who is doing what work/projects around fire in the Arctic Joint with EPPR Workshop to bring together fire ecologists, knowledge holders, and operational staff to share and discuss project work and deliverables across and within working groups	Compile and assess instruments (agreements, MOUs, policies) that enable cross-border responses Interview users, designers, and policy makers for what elements worked, recommendations for change, and what was most useful Draft a template to include necessary elements for consideration when discussing cross-border fire response Scope Phase II of the project Joint with CAFF Workshop to bring together fire ecologists, knowledge holders, and operational staff to share and discuss project work and deliverables across and within working groups
Deliverables	Map(s) of the extent and distribution of fires across the Arctic	Compendium and assessment of instruments and best practices



	<p>Compilation of guidelines and best practices for Arctic fire ecology and forest management</p> <p>Compilation, to be updated annually, of work on Arctic fire ecology and fire-related Indigenous knowledge products</p>	<p>Template with clauses relevant for wildfire response (including but not limited to operational and training response)</p> <p>Summary of how each Arctic state manages operational response and what, if any, interagency/state agreements are in place</p> <p>Summary of standard practices/training by state</p>
How work is intended to be used	<p>Reduce threats of catastrophic wildfires</p> <p>Increased options for mitigating and managing fires depending on desired outcomes</p> <p>Support cross-border conversations about management</p> <p>Advance Arctic conversation because extent of impact in Arctic is known</p>	<p>Enable cross border responses to fire, bringing more resources to bear and creating economic opportunities for crews that understand and are trained in Arctic fire response</p> <p>Create the framework for joint responses when fires cross borders</p> <p>Proactively have mechanism for sharing resources</p> <p>Enable international cooperation, training, and contracting of wildland fire resources across state boundaries</p>
Priorities	<p>Data compilation and standardization</p> <p>Ecological, management, social, cultural impacts and knowledge transmission</p>	<p>Understanding context for international cooperation on fire response, and drafting template to advance discussion</p>
Audience	<p>Public – understand how fires impact the Arctic</p> <p>Ecologists – better understanding of management practices and options, including from Indigenous perspectives</p> <p>Policy makers – understand scope of issue and levers of impact</p> <p>Academics – understand current work and gaps</p> <p>PPs – enable knowledge transmission</p>	<p>Policy makers</p> <p>Operational fire managers</p> <p>Government resource managers and planners</p> <p>Local fire crews and communities</p> <p>PPs – enable co-production of knowledge</p>
Partners	<p>CAFF Secretariat</p> <p>Natural resource agencies & departments of Interior, Resource Management, Forestry</p> <p>Knowledge holders</p> <p>Academics</p> <p>GIS specialists</p>	<p>EPPR Secretariat</p> <p>Wildland fire experts and managers (operations division)</p> <p>Law & policy specialists</p> <p>Training branches</p>
Timing	<p>Project approved September 2019</p> <p>Steering Committee established Nov 2019</p> <p>PSI Funding application Feb 2020</p>	<p>Project approved January 2020</p> <p>Steering Committee to begin early summer 2020</p>