



EMERGENCY PREVENTION,  
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE



To: EPPR  
From: Gwich'in Council International  
Date: November 23, 2021  
Purpose: For information – update on Circumpolar Wildland Fire Project

This briefing supplements the verbal update provided to the EPPR Plenary Meeting November 23, 2021.

## Project Update

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Since the [last update](#) provided to the EPPR in June 2021:

- The Project Steering Committee met in September 2021 and received updates and a presentation from EMERCOM Russia, highlighting satellite technology in the identification and assessment of fire locations and risks.
- Work is ongoing by the University of Alaska Fairbanks (Ed Soto and Troy Bouffard), who are leading a review of agreements to identify and assess common operational elements. They are also working on baseline summaries for all Arctic States, and have completed three to date (United States, Russia, and Canada). They will continue to report out to the Steering Committee.
- The United States has joined the project as a co-lead, and Michael Young (U.S. State Department) continues to play an integral role as Project Coordinator.
- The next Steering Committee meeting will be in January 2022.

## Funding Update

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- The United States has provided funding to the CAFF Working Group and the Indigenous Peoples Secretariat (IPS) which will benefit this project:
  - o Funding to CAFF contributed to the successful delivery of the Arctic Council Wildland Fire Sharing Circle, which highlighted EPPR work.
  - o Funding to IPS will go towards capacity for all Permanent Participants, and help cover travel for participation in the joint EPPR-CAFF workshop planned for late 2022.
- States and Permanent Participants are currently providing in-kind contributions to the project, but additional resources may be needed to complete project deliverables.



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## Arctic Council Wildland Fire Sharing Circle

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- EPPR, CAFF, and GCI co-hosted the Arctic Council Wildland Fire Sharing Circle November 17-18, 2021. The virtual event was intended to:
  - o Enable projects and organizations to share, through presentations and written materials, highlights of their work, driving questions, and opportunities for involvement.
  - o Enable people to learn about the different projects to assess their interest and capacity to participate, identify synergies and potential alignment of priorities and/or activities, and avoid duplication of work.
- We are grateful to Nina Ågren (EPPR) and Mike Young (US) for their leadership in co-organizing and supporting the event, and to EPPR Chair Kathy Nghiem for providing closing comments on Day 1. We were honoured to have SAO Chair Nikolay Korchunov open the event and highlight the importance of the issue and need for cooperation and collaboration.
- There were over 70 participants each day, including a number of people involved in emergency management from different States and organizations.
- There were 18 presentations, and recordings will be made available in English and Russian. The presentations which closely aligned with the EPPR mandate, and/or elevated EPPR work, were:
  - o Edward Alexander & Ed Soto: Circumpolar Wildland Fire (EPPR)
  - o Joel Kauppinen, ArcResc: Rescue Service in the Arctic
  - o Akram Gadaborshev & Irakly Arabidze: EMERCOM of Russia
  - o Amy Cardinal Christianson: Indigenous Fire Management
- A Summary Report from the event will be shared, and we will review the event as a model for future activities.
- A full list of Acknowledgements is attached.

## Background

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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



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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.

Project activities, as defined in the Project Proposal, are to:

- 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

## Further Information

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EPPR: <https://eppr.org/projects/circumpolar-wildland-fire-project/>

Gwich'in Council International: <https://gwichincouncil.com/wildland-fire>

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