



EMERGENCY PREVENTION,
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Title: Circumpolar Wildland Fire Cooperation (Circumpolar Fire)

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Submitted by: Gwich'in Council International

1. Rationale: Wildland Fires are increasing in frequency, intensity, duration and expanding into new areas. The 2016 Fort McMurray Fire in Canada left two dead, caused the evacuation of 88,000 people and incurred \$9.9 billion dollars Canadian in damages. Fires in California in 2018 killed 97 people and released 68 million tons of carbon dioxide, equivalent to all electrical production in the state of California for a year. Wildland Fire has become not only more destructive, but it has become a significant driver of carbon release and thus climate change in its own right. Wildland Fire can also release significant amounts of Black Carbon and have profound effects to air quality, which in turn has significant effects on public health.

Wildland Fire has had significant impacts on other northern States as well. The 2018 summer season saw unprecedented wildland fire activity in Sweden, which led to calls for aid from European partners. Additionally, there were fires in Greenland and Chukotka in both 2018 and 2019. Russia and the United States have seen increased fire activity in the north with significant taiga and tundra burns becoming increasingly more common over the last two decades. Little is known about the long-term impacts of Wildland Fire on northern ecologies, particularly its effect on climate change drivers such as carbon and methane release in the post-fire environment, and its impacts on permafrost and soil stabilization.

Wildland fire does not respect national boundaries, and often becomes 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.

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, would be eager to share expertise and practices of wildland firefighting in the Arctic context.

Work on wildfires is a new project area for EPPR but falls within the mandate of the WG. The issue was first discussed at EPPR II 2018, with additional discussions during 2019 EPPR meetings. In the SAO- and ministerial meetings in 2019 the idea of a project was presented within the EPPR workplan for 2019-2021. The proposal was positively received, and the topic



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was seen as important and timely. It is important to include the participation and insights from Arctic States, PPs and relevant WGs and the Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane (EGBCM).

It is important to understand the changing nature of wildland fire response across the circumpolar north, and to explore the possibility of a circumpolar agreement to expedite the contracting of wildland firefighting resources and personnel as fires grow in size and intensity, and are ignited in previously unburned terrains, as well as facilitate this cooperation with greater cross-national and interagency coordination.

2. Objective: This project aims to improve the coordinated response by Arctic States and Permanent Participants in response to catastrophic wildland fires in the Arctic region, and to promote the possibility of international cooperation and contracting of wildland fire resources across State boundaries, as well as coordinate trainings between relevant agencies so that emergency prevention, preparedness and response to wildland fire is effective and contemporary.

3. Study Area: Participating States, Permanent Participants, Observer countries as appropriate.

4. Project Design: As a *first phase* a task force or steering committee with relevant experts from Arctic Council States and Permanent Participants will be formed to map and evaluate current wildland fire interagency agreements between Arctic Council States, and evaluate other such instruments and agreements for best practices; and evaluate current and potential models for host nation support protocols. If the mapping and evaluation shows it feasible/ relevant a model agreement on the sharing-contracting of wildland fire response will be drafted for further consideration. A potential *second phase* of this project could catalogue and periodically update resources, and set parameters for training practices, promote international cooperation, share understanding of modern techniques in wildland fire management, and increased timeliness and effectiveness in responding to wildland fire. Hosting a biennial conference or workshop for Wildland Fire Managers and Ecologists, to better coordinate international response and science on wildland fire in the Arctic and in the context of hazardous materials. A possible *second phase* will be decided upon between EPPR Heads of Delegations.

5. Relevance to Indigenous Peoples: Better understanding by nation states of Indigenous practices related to fire ecology and management. Co-production of knowledge.

6. Traditional and Local Knowledge (TLK): Co-production of knowledge, documentation, better understanding of fire management practices of Indigenous peoples, particularly in Arctic contexts.

7. Other Related Projects: CAFF WG project (ARCTIC FIRE) on understanding wildland fire ecology in the Arctic context, mapping. EGBCM project (...). AMAP WG project (...).



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8. Schedule

- EPPR-I 2019 Meeting in Bodo, Norway – Release of the project proposal
- Intersessional - Receive feedback and refine proposal
- EPPR-II 2019 Meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland - Project proposal up for approval into 2019-2021 Workplan
- Intersessional - Establish a project Steering Committee or Task Force to evaluate inter-agency cooperative wildland fire agreements for best practices and modeling.

9. Anticipated Outputs: Phase one: Task force/Steering Committee mapping and evaluation on current wildland fire interagency agreements between Arctic States. Potential Phase two: For example, training conference or workshop on topical issues to be agreed later.

10. Application of Results: Looking into the possibility for greater cooperation and possible resource sharing on wildland fire mitigation efforts, potential conference or workshop to update wildland fire managers and fire ecologists.

12. Literature Cited: N/A

13. Personnel: The EPPR WG Steering Committee/Task Force would be ultimately responsible for coordinating this effort along with the EPPR WG Secretariat.