

Southern
Interagency
Fire
Prevention
Strategy

June 1

2010

**A five to ten year wildfire prevention
strategy for the South.**

Interagency Fire Prevention Education Strategy Southern Area

June 1, 2010

Executive Summary

Wildland fire managers from the Southern Area, representing thirteen Southern states, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Southern Region of the USDA Forest Service, convened in Birmingham, Alabama in December 2009 to chart a new wildfire prevention strategy for the next 5 to 10 years. Population growth, increased urban-interface, continued high wildfire activity, recent and potential large wildfires and risks to communities are the impetus for this new strategy. This strategy follows on the successes guided by the 2000 Southern Wildfire Prevention Strategy that focused on debris burning and homeowner safety in the wildland urban interface.

The respective agencies, as a whole, are responsible for providing wildfire prevention and suppression on federal, state and private lands. Across the South wildfire prevention and suppression is conducted in partnership with communities and local, state and federal agencies. This document is an example of that partnership. The collaborative effort produced a stated goal and a strategy consisting of six objectives.

The goal of the strategy is to provide an action-oriented southern interagency framework to prevent human-caused wildfires.

Objectives:

1. Provide program leadership.
2. Enhance internal communications.
3. Aggressively use fire prevention education teams.
4. Develop prevention programs including messages, products, and campaigns that target fire causes.
5. Coordinate and conduct fire prevention training.
6. Monitor and evaluate program implementation to demonstrate the effectiveness of fire prevention and mitigation programs.

Priority Actions/Recommendations:

1. Evaluate and recommend the best method to provide leadership for the fire prevention program in the Southern Area. Identify leadership roles and responsibilities.
2. Establish forums and opportunities for wildfire prevention technology exchange. This may take the form of webinars, conference calls, exchanges and/or formal or informal meetings.
3. Visit and where appropriate address policy issues dealing with social media. Educate partners to become proficient in utilizing agency approved social media platforms such as the Lessons Learned Center to facilitate information exchange.
4. Provide national, regional, and state advocacy, program leadership, and technical support to fire prevention education teams.

5. Partner with InterfaceSouth to conduct a literature review and investigate opportunities to design and conduct research project(s) to better understand social dimensions and population demographics; and evaluate the effectiveness of current messages and campaigns.
6. Focus fire prevention planning by addressing fire causes and identifying stakeholders. Develop messages and products, establish delivery methods, including the use of social media, and monitor product success.
7. Develop an interagency taskforce to support prevention education training for agency personnel.
8. Develop an effective methodology to evaluate the success of fire prevention programs within the Southern Area.

Background

Over the last two decades, wildfires frequently threatened populated areas, sometimes requiring evacuations of residents. Major interstate highways were closed, thereby disrupting national commerce. National mobilization of firefighter and air resources were taxed.

At the same time, fire prevention education teams (FPETs) were being successfully used in the southwest. A FPET was dispatched to west Texas. Within one week, fire starts were reduced by 80%. This success became the catalyst for developing the new southern fire prevention education program.

Previous southern prevention programs focused on forest arson. The new prevention program focused on debris burning and homeowner safety in the wildland urban interface. The retooling centered on leadership at the state and regional levels, focusing on program implementation by partners such as volunteer fire departments, The Nature Conservancy, and state and federal agencies.

A workshop was convened in 2000 to develop a comprehensive five-year strategy for the Southern Area. The advent of the National Fire Plan provided the financial resources to implement the program. The southern program became a model program for the nation.

In 2008, following eight years of implementing the strategy, during which most of the recommendations were successfully achieved, the state foresters and USDA Forest Service agreed to review and update the strategy.

2009 Southern Area Strategy Workshop

A representative group of partners met in Birmingham on December 4 through December 6, 2009 to chart the strategy for the next 5 - 10 years. Attendees included: representatives of the thirteen southern states; the USDA Forest Service Southern Region and Southern Research Station; the USDI National Park Service Southeast Region, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Fish and Wildlife Service; and the Student Conservation Association. The Nature Conservancy and Tall Timbers Research Station were unable to attend, although both want to participate in the prevention effort. The collaborative effort produced a stated goal and a strategy consisting of six objectives.

Goal

To provide an action-oriented southern interagency framework to prevent human-caused wildfires.

The new goal prepares the program to meet public needs in the coming decade. The recommended strategy for accomplishing the goal is supported by the following resources:

- Southern Group of State Foresters Strategic Plan
- The Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment
- Fire in the South 2
- Forest Resource Assessment and Action Plan for each state
- The “One Message Many Voices” prescribed fire campaign
- Current academic and fire management research Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)

- Southern Fire Exchange Consortium
- NWCG Communications, Education, and Prevention Committee (CEPC)
- Revision of NWCG courses P-101, Fire Prevention 1 and P-301, Fire Prevention 2 and new NWCG courses P-310, Fire Prevention Education Team Member and P-410, Fire Prevention Education Team Leader
- New law enforcement training courses for prevention personnel including FI-110, Wildland Fire Observation and Origin Scene Protection for First Responders and FI-210, Wildland Fire Origin and Cause Determination
- USDA Forest Service - Southern Region's Strategic Framework
- Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy

The new prevention education program addresses the traditional “3Es” of preventing human-caused wildfires using the tools of education, enforcement, engineering, and administration. The program emphasizes collaborating with local stakeholders to assess community needs and develop prevention programs to prevent human-caused wildfires.

Objectives

1. *Provide program leadership*

Proposed Action:

This is the highest priority objective and must be accomplished before implementing other objectives.

Provide program leadership to facilitate inclusion and cooperation among federal and state agencies and private sector organizations to plan, develop, and implement effective prevention programs that target human-caused wildfires in the Southern Area. Program leadership is critical to sustaining model prevention programs at the state, regional, and national levels.

Specific Actions:

Action 1: Establish a leadership structure.

- a. Program leadership is recommended through a southern wildfire prevention advisory group/steering committee that may be composed of state and Forest Service representatives and/or an interagency group similar to the Southern Wildland Urban Interface Council. The advisory group may be a council, a steering committee, a cooperative committee, an advisory committee, a prevention “MAC” group, or other entity.
- b. Participant membership may include organizations that collaborate with state and federal agencies including The Nature Conservancy, The Student Conservation Association, Tall Timbers Research Station, Southern Research Station InterfaceSouth, the Southern Wildland-Urban Interface Council, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and others identified by the stakeholders.

Priority Action for this Objective:

Determine the best method to provide leadership for the fire prevention program in the Southern Area. Identify leadership roles and responsibilities.

2. Enhance internal communications

Proposed Action:

Share and exchange successful fire prevention programs among agencies and partners within the Southern Area. Agency programs are strengthened by sharing and exchanging program successes with others.

Specific Actions:

Action 1: Increase efforts to exchange program success stories by webinars, social networking sites, conference calls and a biennial workshop.

- a. Fire prevention leadership should determine and recommend the specific need, discussion topics, and scale of any southern area-wide fire prevention meeting, conference, and exchange with their respective fire management leadership. Fire prevention leadership will plan and logistically coordinate these approved forums as an interagency effort.
- b. Continue using technologies to facilitate exchange and discussion - websites, webinars, and conference calls. Use online tools (social media) – for example Twitter, Facebook and others as approved for agency use - for daily exchange.
- c. Facilitate exchange opportunities including meetings, conference calls, and webinars with other functional areas such as research, fire management, law enforcement, public affairs, and information and education.

Action 2: Expand the Southern Area prevention education website www.southernwildfireprevention.sref.info to include success stories.

- a. Expand existing website development and usage.
- b. Create a discussion forum.
- c. Expand agency contact information.
- d. Maintain the present gate keeper system to ensure the site's currency and encourage submittals by field personnel.

Action 3: Increase internal communications of fire prevention education programs and activities.

- a. Exchange information between and within the agencies to increase program support.
- b. Develop venues to share information with management on current research.
- c. Encourage staff from outside of fire to participate in prevention activities.
- d. Submit programs for award recognition. Leadership should establish criteria to establish nominations.
- e. Emphasize life, safety, and property values.

Priority Actions for this Objective:

1. Fire prevention leadership should evaluate and recommend the specific need, discussion topics, and scale of any southern area-wide fire prevention meetings, conferences, and exchanges with their respective fire management leadership. Fire prevention leadership will plan and logistically coordinate these forums as an interagency effort .
2. Use technologies to facilitate exchange and discussion - websites, webinars, and conference calls. Use online tools (social media) – for example Twitter, Facebook and others as approved for agency use - for daily exchange.
3. Address policy issues and provide relevant training so partners can become proficient in utilizing agency approved social media platforms such as the Lessons Learned Center to facilitate information exchange.

3. Aggressively use fire prevention education teams

Proposed Action:

Encourage establishing an interagency fire prevention education team (FPET) in each state. Perform a gap analysis to analyze availability, location, and utilization of current resources.

Specific Actions:

Action 1. Continue training Southern Area wildland fire prevention education team members and leaders.

- a. Provide team member and team leader training as needed.
- b. Develop a southern area cadre pool that can become the primary fire prevention training instructors.

Action 2: Structure Interagency Teams.

- a. Build on the success of southern fire prevention education teams.
- b. Communicate the cost effective use and success of teams to support team mobilizations.
- c. Incorporate other agencies and partner organizations as members of interagency teams.
- d. Explore ways to recruit team leaders.
- e. Develop fire danger standards to initiate team mobilization.
- f. Develop creative communication props such as posters to assist the Southern Area Coordination Center when ordering FPETs.
- g. Develop information on how one can participate on a team.
- h. Encourage the original organizational objective of ordering teams well before a wildfire incident. When appropriate, assist NIMOs and IMTs as needed when placing FPETs within their structure.
- i. Encourage the use of the compacts to request FPETs.

ction 3: Manage and maintain the currency of the existing FPET website.

- a. Manage the FPET website www.southernwildfireprevention.sref.info at the University of Georgia using the existing system of gate keepers.
- b. Update the website utilizing a program that automatically notifies users of an update.
- c. Feature team assignments on the website.
- d. Provide technical support on the website to agencies, team leaders, and team members by providing samples of Delegations of Authority, communication plans, products, and team dispatch rotations.

Action 4: Fund teams.

- a. Proactively investigate use of severity funds, where available, to dispatch FPETs prior to significant fire occurrence. Severity funds are available but scarce.
- b. Build compelling case studies and research as primary “selling points” demonstrating cost efficiency of prevention.

Priority Action for this Objective:

Provide national, regional, and state advocacy, program leadership, and technical support to fire prevention education teams.

4. Develop prevention programs including messages, products, and campaigns that target fire causes

Proposed Action:

Each of the thirteen southern state programs have unique qualities, but also have elements in common with each other. Develop plans to prevent human-caused wildfires in high occurrence areas for local, state, tribal, regional, and federal jurisdictions.

Specific Actions:

Action 1: *Be open to new perspectives to prevent human-caused wildfires by reaching beyond traditional practices. Utilize research to address successful opportunities to address education, enforcement, engineering, and administrative responses. For example, encourage attendance at a Changing Roles workshop and/or Emerging Issues Along Urban-Rural Interface conference.*

Action 2: *Use the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment to identify areas of high fire occurrence and identify areas of rapid growth to proactively address future prevention issues.*

Action 3: *Enlist the Southern Research Station InterfaceSouth to support a research study in a variety of southern geographic settings to better understand the changing dynamics of southern demographics to address changing perceptions, values, and attitudes related to fire causes and fire prevention strategies.*

It is essential to understand the social foundation of the community by assessing demographics and understanding basic human behavior. With this foundation, prevention programs are specifically designed for a community. Monitoring the success of the program affirms that the program meets the needs of the community and makes a long-term difference in the well-being of the community.

Action 4: Work with regional and state stakeholders utilizing the principles of collaboration taught in P-301, Fire Prevention Education 2 to develop Southern Area fire prevention programs that reduce human-caused wildfires.

- a. Develop effective fire prevention programs and common messages that address changing Southern Area demographics regarding specific human-caused wildfires such as mechanical failures, debris burning, woods arson, and campfires. Develop local messages that are implemented through the local fire prevention plan.
- b. Identify stakeholders, establish delivery methods, develop products, and monitor and evaluate the success of the products.
 - Understand demographic data for an area and target prevention activities accordingly
 - Develop products that are easily replicated by others
 - Utilize the fire prevention education team website www.southernwildfireprevention.sref.info to post products
 - Develop a distribution plan
 - Utilize traditional partners such as Rural Conservation and Development Districts, fire departments, homeowners associations, civic groups, and youth groups to deliver local programs

Action 5: Develop dual messages that incorporate prescribed fire information into fire prevention messaging and incorporate prevention information into prescribed fire messaging.

- a. Incorporate prescribed fire benefits as a fire prevention tool.

Action 6: Utilize effective communication technologies (including social networking) to deliver fire prevention messages to targeted stakeholders.

- a. Link /access social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others - as allowed by agency policy - that directs viewers to agency websites.

Action 7: Recognize that fire investigations and enforcement of burning laws are important fire prevention tools.

- a. Stress the element of public safety when making public contacts.
- b. Provide educational materials to law enforcement officers for distribution during public contacts such as safe burning information, fire laws, etc.
- c. Provide law enforcement officers with prevention messages.
- d. Proactively investigate all human-caused wildfires to determine the most effective prevention and/or law enforcement response.
- e. Utilize law enforcement to target areas of high arson occurrence .

Priority Actions for this Objective:

1. Partner with InterfaceSouth to (1) conduct a literature review, (2) design and implement a research instrument to better understand social dimensions and population demographics, and (3) evaluate the effectiveness of current messages and campaigns.
2. Develop a southern area prevention plan by addressing fire causes and identifying stakeholders. Develop messages and products, establish delivery methods, including the use of social media, and monitor product success.

5. Coordinate and conduct fire prevention training

Proposed Action:

Coordinate and conduct wildfire prevention training for agency personnel who participate in fire prevention activities. Develop the skills of agency prevention personnel and partners to work collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders to plan, implement, and evaluate effective fire prevention programs.

Specific Actions:

Action 1: Establish a training taskforce.

- a. Complete a regional needs assessment to determine what fire prevention training is needed.
- b. Coordinate fire prevention training needs based on the results of the needs assessment.
- c. Support state training academies with NWCG qualified instructors.
- d. Train internal personnel as well as external partners balancing needs with opportunities.
- e. Allocate funding to cover the cost of training logistics and travel cost of participants.

Action 2: Encourage states to include NWCG fire prevention education courses in their wildfire training academies.

- a. Teach NWCG courses: P-101, Fire Prevention Education 1; P-301, Fire Prevention Education 2; P-310, Fire Prevention Education Team Member; and P-410, Fire Prevention Education Team Leader.
- b. Cross train agency personnel. Law enforcement personnel attend P-101, Fire Prevention Education 1 and agency fire prevention personnel attend FI-110, Wildland Fire Observation and Origin Scene Protection for First Responders and FI-210, Wildland Fire Origin and Cause Determination.
- c. Teach basic NWCG wildfire training for all prevention education personnel.
- d. Coordinate course offerings throughout the Southern Area.
- e. Coordinate with the national training schedule.
- f. Provide “train the trainer” opportunities to develop local capacity to provide needed training.
- g. Facilitate networking for instructors.
- h. Instruct prevention education courses with interagency cadre.
- i. Improve communications about training availability.

Action 3: Encourage prevention education program managers to attend training and conferences beyond traditional NWCG courses such as the Southern Research Station Emerging Issues and Changing Roles workshops and attend conferences on human dimensions of fire management.

Priority Action for this Objective:

Establish an interagency taskforce to support prevention education training for agency personnel..

6. Monitor and evaluate program implementation to demonstrate the effectiveness of fire prevention and mitigation programs

Proposed Action:

Monitor and evaluate program implementation to demonstrate the effectiveness of fire prevention and mitigation programs. Program managers know how a program works, but not necessarily if it is really working. “Widgets” are counted such as public contacts but not whether those public contacts make a long-term difference to community well-being.

Specific Actions:

Action 1: Develop a methodology for measuring program effectiveness and develop baseline data consistent across the Southern Area using information from the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment and economic analysis using the resources of the Southern Research Station.

- a. Develop consensus concerning replicable and reliable metrics.
- b. Measure effectiveness based on current human-caused fire starts compared to historical fire starts.
- c. Develop a common template that states can use to consistently measure the effectiveness of prevention programs.

Action 2: Using the methodology, annually evaluate and report the progress of implementing programs across the south. Post the report and program successes on the fire prevention website www.southernwildfireprevention.sref.info. Provide recommendations to make programs more successful.

Action 3: Monitor the implementation of the 2010 Fire Prevention Education Strategy; make strategic adjustments as needed.

Priority Action for this Objective:

Develop an effective methodology to evaluate the success of fire prevention programs within the Southern Area.