

**National Association of Forest Service  
Retirees**

PO Box 793  
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**Scott River Watershed Coalition of Fire  
Safe Councils**

PO Box 342  
Fort Jones, CA 96032

December 2, 2010

Darrel Kenops, Executive Director  
National Association of Forest Service Retirees  
PO Box 793  
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Dear Mr. Kenops,

On November 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> I attended the first meeting of the National Wildland and Urban Interface Council (NWUIC), a coalition formed to combat wildfire and treat where U.S. urban neighborhoods meet wildland areas. The meeting was in Washington, D.C.

The NWUIC was developed by the International Code Council (ICC) and the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils.

I attended representing the Scott River Watershed Coalition of Fire Safe Councils and the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR).

The first day was spent hearing what the very diverse group of attendees were doing and could offer to treat wildfire threats. The make-up of the NWUIC is government fire agencies, makers of fire resistant products, states, local government and fire prevention groups such as our Fire Safe Council.

On day 1 of the conference the following issues and opportunities were noted. They are as follows:

1. Some of the attendees have extensive nationwide membership covering up to 85% of U.S. counties.
2. Most local members of the various groups are volunteer.
3. Local units are highly dependent on some form of grant funds to accomplish on the ground projects.
4. Local groups have little control over state and federal fire policies and joint protection suffers.
5. Relationships between local governments and state and federal agencies can be strong or weak depending on the local leaders.
6. The economic viability of the timber industry is a big issue in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas as timber sales are a large source of funding for WUI coalitions.
7. Some rural counties are starting to take proactive steps to reduce wildfire threats but are in the minority.
8. The new cohesive strategy (to Congress on December 1<sup>st</sup>) seeks to offer long range guidance but is little known or understood.

9. There is a need to bring in the market place and promote enterprise into the fire protection efforts not just government.
10. We need to think more about fire and land use, building standards and codes.
11. We need to tap into new technology such as geospatial services, data sharing structure, visualization and connectivity.
12. Turf wars between government agencies make fire prevention coordination difficult.
13. Some feel a divide between foresters and fire fighters around how to address wildfires.
14. Concern over the obscurity of the WUI issue and the shift in power to GOP and desire to reduce government spending and its effect on possible cuts in fire preparedness and fire fighting programs.
15. See that regardless of shift in political power we need to have a unified stake-holder presence to advocate for the policies we want to see.
16. Feel that this coalition needs to develop an intense coordination to work at national and local level and with elected officials at all levels.
17. Fire risk needs to be incorporated into all aspects of land planning, land management, and building fire resistant homes. (Fire adapted communities).
18. Seeing a move by seniors to move into WUI to build retirement homes, seniors are not usually able to evacuate themselves in fire emergencies. The highest influx will be in West and Southwest.
19. Concern over aging population of volunteer fire fighters and the lack of funding for training and basic services.
20. See a need for better communication between State Foresters and State Fire Marshals.
21. See a cost of \$3 Billion per year to protect homes in the WUI and see a huge increase in WUI communities needing assistance.
22. High concern over the need to retrofit older homes in the WUI to be more fire resistant and the lack of interest nationwide.
23. See little agreement on who ultimately is responsible for WUI firefighting costs and who should pay.
24. Many new products are available to retrofit old homes to be more fire safe but this is not widely known or understood.
25. Fire Safe Councils and similar groups have done great work on making local areas more fire safe but real worries about funds drying up.
26. Feel that fire science is the easy part, but social science is most difficult. How do we change landowners and code officials behavior, to be more ready to adopt better home codes and install new innovations?

The second day was spent in small groups to try to find solutions to the problems identified. The following are some key suggestions for improvement:

1. In Education group, identify audiences and offer a uniform awareness message tailored to local needs and stress concepts of defensible space and building codes to make homes more fire resistant.
2. In regards to mitigation, identify where money for fire hazard reduction exists, and create a system to measure project success that can be shown to project funders such as:
  - a. Amount of hazard fuels removed.
  - b. Reduction in losses (the amount of money).

- c. Decreased insurance claims.
- d. Decreased health expenditures.
- 3. In regards to incentives do the following:
  - a. Continue research into what hazard reduction actions really produce results.
  - b. Be sure new construction follows a national code.
  - c. Continue education as being done by Fire Safe Councils and similar organizations.
- 4. In regards to regulations consider the following:
  - a. Market codes as best practices.
  - b. Look at current codes and regulations, and see if we need to do better job of implementation.
  - c. Develop more flexible codes based on local needs.
  - d. Use new GIS techniques in construction planning.
- 5. In regards to fire suppression consider the following:
  - a. Support cross training and flexible delivery methods of training to structural and wildland fire fighters.
  - b. Support local, state, tribal and federal cooperation in pre-planning and response.
  - c. Support maximizing the effectiveness of local responders to the initial attack to improve cost efficiency.
  - d. Fund proven fire department assistance programs.
  - e. Link Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) with fire suppression pre-plans.

After my analysis of the session outcomes there are a few challenges that I see facing the Forest Service. They are:

- 1. The NWUIC and the new cohesive fire plan speak to the need for the local and federal agencies to work closely with local government agencies to provide better support each other's fire prevention and suppression efforts. The issue identified is that in many locations good cooperative relations do not exist.
- 2. The NWUIC identified the need for government agencies to involve the local Fire Safe Councils or equivalent to insure that Forest Service fire plans follow the local CWPP. Currently in most locations this is not the practice.
- 3. The NWUIC discussed concerns that current fire policy of using wildfires to accomplish resource objectives is resulting in downstream damage to local landowners in the form of escaped wildfires, stream degradation and health issues from smoke.
- 4. It was identified that State Foresters are not closely cooperating with State Fire Marshals, it seems that the Forest Service, State and Private Forestry has a role to play here in facilitating a stronger relationship.
- 5. A major issue facing the Forest Service is how to continue supporting local rural communities in reduction of fire hazards in a time of fiscal cutback. It has been proven that money spent on fire prevention is a wise investment. The Forest Service needs to push hard to continue and increase financial support for worthy projects.

In conclusion the NWUIC effort is a good one that NAFSR needs to support with continued attendance at future meetings and dissemination of recommendations.

Sincerely,  
Bruce Courtright

Bruce Courtright, Representative  
NAFSR and the SRW Coalition of FSC

Cc: Jim Golden  
John Marker