International Association of Wildland Fire

Climate Change Week at the United Nations
September 23 – 29, 2019

International Association of Wildland Fire Statement

Climate change has already had significant consequences in the global wildfire reality, affecting citizens as well as the global wildland fire community. Many key issues of importance to the IAWF – including firefighter and civilian safety, fire management expenses, changing weather patterns, natural role of fire, fire regimes and ecosystem succession, as well as the wildland urban interface-- all require recognition of the role of climate change.

Globally, we regularly see new reports about the "worst", "largest", "most expensive", and "deadliest" fires and fire seasons. In 2019 and 2018, striking headlines read "Arctic on Fire" (Sweden, Russia, Greenland, Canada and Alaska), and the most expensive and largest fire years were recorded in 2018 in California and British Columbia, respectively, breaking the previous records set in 2017. The Camp Fire (CA, 2018), Attica Greece (2018), Black Saturday Australia (2009), and Portugal (2017) fires were all ranked amongst the top 11 deadliest fires in the last 100 years.

Under current climate change scenarios, fire regimes will change in terms of increases in burned area, severity, fire season length, frequency, and ignitions from lightning. Many parts of the world have already experienced an increase in record breaking temperatures and recurring droughts that have led to shifts in wildland fire. There is already evidence of climate-driven fire regime change in the Northern Hemisphere upper latitudes with fire risk increasing in non-traditional fire-prone countries. The consequences of human actions are here today, not in some distant future, and these are alarming and, most important, escalating.

The IAWF encourages all countries to emphasize increased international fire training and to implement easier cross-border sharing of professional fire management resources for suppression and prescribed fire opportunities. These will lessen the irrationally heavy burden any single country will have to carry to manage extreme fire seasons. Homes and communities must be better planned and built, so they are

increasingly fire resistant and more adapted to natural disasters of all types. Health impacts of fires have long-term consequences, not only those that are immediate from the flames but also those from smoke and toxins, and these must be considered when planning and managing for future wildland fires. Wildfires and smoke do not recognize borders. As the global community tries to manage the new wildfire challenges, it is incumbent on everyone to prepare to support international neighbours in protecting lives and communities from fires and their impacts.

IAWF Vice-President Toddi Steelman recently said in *Wildfire* magazine (August 2019) that "Recent extreme weather events have catalysed public belief in, and concern about, climate change, and boosted public support for government actions to reduce its harmful impacts. This gives us a window of opportunity when conditions are right to make great strides on climate if we are strategic about it." This window of opportunity requires people having the knowledge and political will to act now. Our global scientific community needs to publicly share knowledge learned about patterns of extreme wildland fire and weather, as well as how climate change is associated with these patterns. Our global fire management community needs to leverage its credibility to share its experiences about how climate change and its role in extreme weather is playing out in their day to day work environments. Connecting extreme weather events to real on-the-ground consequences can help more people understand how climate impacts are affecting us all.

IAWF Webpage

Share Tweet Share