

Abstract

Fire as a global conservation issue: Regional collaboration toward collective action

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In March 2004, a group of fire experts and policy-makers from around the world met in Switzerland to discuss the state of fire regime conditions and biodiversity conservation. The results of this workshop (the work of a *Global Fire Partnership* between The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)) represented the first coarse-scale assessment of the extent to which fire is beneficial or harmful to biodiversity. It identified common sources of threats to natural fire regime dynamics (TNC 2004). It is no surprise that conserving fire regimes is a global conservation issue. The results of this preliminary assessment also showed that a number of ubiquitous threats to conservation are effectively posing barriers to maintaining the role of fire in ecosystems in a socially acceptable manner. Topping the list of key threats: national and multinational policies, rural development, climate change, and inadequate fire management capacity.

In this paper we describe implementation of a next step toward prioritizing and abating threats to maintaining the role of fire in ecosystems and to human health and livelihoods at global and regional levels. Between January and April 2006, the Global Fire Partnership (now including the University of California, Berkeley Center for Fire Research and Outreach)

implemented 2 multi-lateral workshops of over 40 scientists, managers and policy-makers from North, America, South Asia, and Australia designed to: (1) refine the science of assessing global fire regime conditions, (2) collaborate on goals for maintaining or restoring ecologically sustainable fire regime conditions at national, regional and global levels, (3) identify high-level strategies to achieve mutual goals, and (4) strengthen collaboration and partnerships between experts, managers and policy-makers with common interests. A third workshop of over 20 scientists, land managers and policy-makers will be implemented in July 2006 for Central and South America, but will occur too late to include those results here.

Using a common global framework for understanding the science, ecology and degree of alteration of fire regime dynamics, regional experts were facilitated through a structured review of preliminary global assessment results, and asked to provide feedback on priority strategies necessary to abate fire-related threats to biodiversity conservation within regional social contexts. The management of fire regimes consistent with ecosystem health and biological diversity will require continued partnerships and commitments between scientists, land managers and policy-makers to make tangible progress at global, national and landscape levels.

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