



## WESTERN REGION

# Living with Wildland Fire in the 2020 Fire Year

Like recent years, the 2020 fire year is shaping up to present a number of challenges for stakeholders across the West. There is concern about everything from fire weather and response to impacts and recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic response and its effects are creating additional challenges for the wildland fire community this year. Impacts will vary across the West, with none felt more brutally than by communities that are already overburdened.

**The vision of the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#) is:**

**to safely and effectively extinguish fire, when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a Nation, live with wildland fire.**

Now more than ever, the Cohesive Strategy remains the strongest framework for managing complexity and providing strategic actions for working towards the goals of **Resilient Landscapes, Fire Adapted Communities and a Safe, Effective, Risk-Based Wildfire Response**. Each of these comes with different risk trade-offs that require understanding and acceptance.

So what does “living with wildland fire” look like in the 2020 fire year, given our current social, health, political, and economic challenges? Below, we highlight some of the “hard truths” and realities that may be encountered if one or more of the strategic actions is not available during the fire year. We do not address every issue that agencies, Tribes, organizations, and communities are facing, but focus on the critical few confronting stakeholders and partners as we approach the heat of the 2020 fire year.

Consider using this document to engage with your stakeholders - city and county governments, fire departments, fire education and prevention organizations, state and public land and fire managers, public health managers, law enforcement, and emergency management - about the likely, local realities for this 2020 fire year. Have conversations about what strategic actions can or must be taken to address these hard truths and how those decisions will impact your constituents and publics as we all prepare to “live with wildland fire” for the season now upon us.

Stay safe,

National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy  
Western Regional Strategy Committee

# Strategic Actions & Options Available

The Cohesive Strategy outlines the following actions and options available to you as you make progress towards the goals of Landscape Resiliency, Fire Adapted Communities and a Safe, Effective Wildfire Response. They are summarized here and indicate which type of stakeholder typically engages in these actions.

## Resilient Landscapes

Stakeholders that implement these actions include federal, state, Tribal, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations and private landowners engaged in land and fire management.

- **Use prescribed fire** - An effective, cost-efficient tool in areas with fire-adapted or fire-dependent vegetation to manage for hazardous fuels reduction, ecosystem restoration, maintenance, silviculture, rangeland preparation and post-harvest clean up.
- **Manage wildfires for resource objectives** - The use of unplanned ignitions to achieve resource management objectives such as ecosystem restoration or hazardous fuels reduction.
- **Implement fuels treatments using mechanical, biological, or other non-fire methods** - Mechanical thinning, herbicide use, mowing or grazing for ecosystem restoration and wildfire risk reduction.

## Fire Adapted Communities

In addition to those organizations noted above, stakeholders that implement and provide education about these actions include local fire prevention and education groups, fire departments, county and city governments, fire safe councils, fire adapted community organizations or similar groups.

- **Protect homes and increase actions by individuals** - The protection of homes during an incident and actions by the property owner to reduce ignition potential to homes.
- **Implement building codes and standards** - A focus on fire resistant building materials and construction standards to reduce potential loss.
- **Reduce accidental and intentional ignitions** - Implementation of locally tailored prevention efforts.

## Safe, Effective Wildfire Response

Stakeholders that engage in fire management and fire response typically engage these actions such as federal, state, Tribal and local fire agencies and departments.

- **Prepare for large, long-duration wildfires** - Enhance wildfire response preparedness in areas more likely to experience large, long-duration wildfires.
- **Protect structures and target landscape fuels** - Emphasize structure protection and conduct landscape resiliency operations (noted above) when conditions permit.
- **Protect structures and target ignition prevention** - At the local level, emphasize both structure protection and wildfire prevention to enhance the effectiveness of initial response.

# Realities of Living with Wildland Fire in 2020

What happens when one or more of the strategic options is not available during the fire year or for a particular event? Here are a few scenarios and the strategic options available for understanding and discussion with your stakeholders.

## **1 Firefighting resources will be impacted by state-to-state availability and the health of the workforce. There will likely be fewer resources to respond to communities, watersheds and other shared values.**

- Defensible space and home hardening activities will be the key to individual and community protection.
- Plan now for early evacuation and readiness, especially if health is an issue.
- Fire prevention messaging and activities are critical.

## **2 Smoke impacts from local and distant fires will likely increase health concerns.**

- Plan now for smoke-free areas in homes and buildings.
- Consider smoke impacts in evacuation planning.

## **3 There is a national, state and local focus on extinguishing fires as quickly as possible. There will likely be less opportunities for creating and maintaining landscape resiliency with prescribed fire and managed fire.**

- Prescribed fire and managed fire are still valuable tools in the fire and land management toolbox and will continue in specific places where conditions, staffing and risk allow for this effective practice to continue.
- There will be limited opportunities for creating and maintaining landscape resiliency using unplanned ignitions.

## **4 Large, long-duration fires will occur.**

- There will be constraints on local, state, Tribal and federal resources. Being prepared for all the impacts of this eventuality will be difficult, but necessary.

Cohesive Strategy's Western Region encourages you to have these "hard truth" conversations with your stakeholders, constituents and publics so everyone and every organization that can be impacted by wildland fire can understand the risks and trade-offs of the available strategic actions and be as prepared as possible for the 2020 fire year.