

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
ON ENHANCING CROSS-BORDER
CO-OPERATION TO FIGHT
WILDLAND FIRES

BETWEEN THE
WESTERN PREMIERS
AND THE
WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Jointly referred to as the Participants

September 14, 2003

WHEREAS drought and near-drought conditions in the Western United States and Western Canada over the past few years, along with a build up of combustible wildland fuels in certain areas, have resulted in severe fires involving significant risks and losses to citizens, communities, and the environment on both sides of the border, and have placed significant social and economic strains on individual state and provincial/territorial resources;

WHEREAS Western Governors and Western Premiers, at the August 2001 Western Governors' Association meeting in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, recognized the critical need to address this issue by maximizing the existing local, regional, national, and international fire fighting arrangements to enhance further co-operation and co-ordination efforts across the Canada-United States border;

WHEREAS Western Governors and Western Premiers reconfirmed the need for enhanced co-operation on wildfire management and forest health matters at the 2002 Western Governors' Association meeting in Phoenix, Arizona;

WHEREAS a study of co-operation in forest fire fighting was undertaken on behalf of the Western Premiers and the Western Governors' Association, resulting in a January 2003 Report "*Enhancing Cross-Border Co-operation to Fight Forest Fires*";

WHEREAS the Report recognized that significant progress has already been made to improve co-ordination efforts in wildfire management, including:

- The Western Governors' Association, the United States Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior, and many other partners that have developed and begun implementation of a ten-year collaborative strategy and the National Fire Plan, which called for significant improvements in co-ordination and co-operation in forest fire fighting among local, state, tribal, and federal agencies throughout the West;
- The Governments of Canada and the United States that are implementing the *Smart Border Accord*, which provides both an opportunity for jurisdictions to revisit provisions for mutual support and collaboration and a platform for governments to discuss the timely movement of fire fighting personnel and equipment;
- The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) in Winnipeg, Manitoba and the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho, which co-operate and share fire-fighting equipment, personnel, technology and research, and development through the Canada/United States Reciprocal Forest Fire Fighting Arrangement of January 15, 2003;
- The Northwest Wildland Fire Protection Agreement that promotes effective prevention and control of forest fires in the Northwest wildland region of the United States and the adjacent areas in Canada by establishing procedures in operating plans that facilitate providing mutual aid; and
- The Interior West Fire Council that advises and recommends needed research on matters of fire science and equipment development, as well as facilities management, prevention and control, and that supports the use and distribution of new technologies;

WHEREAS Western Governors and Western Premiers support the objectives and recommendations presented in the 2003 Report to continue to improve cross-border co-ordination of wildland fire management activities that would lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency;

THEREFORE, in the spirit of promoting further cross-border co-ordination of fire management activities in order to ensure timely responses to fire suppression needs and to maximize the use of available fire-fighting resources wherever they are most needed, Western Governors and Western Premiers agree to work co-operatively to the fullest possible extent consistent with fire-fighter safety, the law, and existing treaties between their respective nations as follows:

1.0 SCOPE OF CO-OPERATION

1.1 Improve Standardization and Harmonization

Western Governors and Western Premiers agree to establish a co-operative process and mandate by 2005 to pursue the objectives of standardizing best practices and harmonizing agreements for joint training, personnel, equipment, aviation, fire suppressants and retardants, organizational structure, and technology exchange.

1.2 Ensure Speedy and Safe Cross Border Clearance of Crews and Equipment

Western Governors and Western Premiers strongly encourage appropriate Canadian and United States federal departments, including the Department of Homeland Security, to improve rapid standardized pre-clearance protocols for fire fighting aircraft, personnel, and equipment.

1.3 Support Continued Co-ordination between the Northwest Wildland Fire Protection Agreement (Northwest Compact), the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC), and the United States National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC)

Through the implementation of this Memorandum of Understanding, Western Governors and Western Premiers agree that participating jurisdictions must work closely with the membership of the Northwest Compact, NIFC, and CIFFC to ensure ongoing optimal inter-agency co-operation.

1.4 Implement “Closest Resource Protocols” on Initial Attack

Western Governors and Western Premiers direct their fire management departments to review existing protocols on in-country and out-country fire response, evaluate the 2003 fire season co-operation, explore additional opportunities, and collaboratively strengthen the agreements to ensure a “Closest Resource Protocol” on initial attack.

1.5 Utilize Joint Training, Safety and Education Programs

Western Governors and Western Premiers encourage the development of opportunities for a joint Incident Command System (ICS), fire prevention, suppression, and rehabilitation training at times and locations that correspond with existing training efforts.

1.6 Ongoing Monitoring of Progress on Work Plan Implementation

Progress made in implementing this Memorandum of Understanding will be reported to the annual meeting of Western Premiers and Western Governors.

2.0 IMPLEMENTATION

To support implementation of this Memorandum of Understanding, a Steering Committee will be formed immediately, comprised of one representative from each of the participating jurisdictions. The Committee, initially co-chaired by Manitoba and Idaho, will work on the following tasks:

- 2.1 Examine existing mutual support/compact agreements and identify needed modifications;
- 2.2 Develop a Cross-Border Work Plan to implement the objectives and time-lines of the Memorandum of Understanding;
- 2.3 Consult and include all participating provincial/territorial, state, regional, and national agencies to ensure they are involved in the Work Plan development in an appropriate way;
- 2.4 Ensure accountability for progress toward outcomes through reports to the Western Governors and Western Premiers, until such time as the six key objectives have been realized.

Dated this 14th day of September 2003, in Big Sky, Montana.

Original Signed By

The Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier of British Columbia
Chair of the Western Premiers' Conference

Original Signed By

The Honorable Judy Martz
Governor of Montana
Chair of the Western Governors' Association

Original Signed By

The Honourable Gary Doer
Premier of Manitoba
Lead Premier

Original Signed By

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Governor of Idaho
WGA Co-Lead Governor

Original Signed By

The Honorable Bill Richardson
Governor of New Mexico
Vice Chair of the Western Governors' Association