

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

RESOLUTION 1

Safeguarding Western Fish and Wildlife from Future Wildfires



WHEREAS, The lands and waters of western North America provide habitat for the west's native fish and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, States have primary management authority over fish and wildlife and the state fish and wildlife agencies actively manage fish, wildlife, and their habitats; and

WHEREAS, For thousands of years, natural and cultural fire has been one of the most important forces shaping western landscapes. Many western ecosystems have evolved with fire as a frequent disturbance, while other systems evolved with lower fire frequencies; and

WHEREAS, More than a century of fire suppression, drought, invasive species, and other climatic factors have created a high risk for uncharacteristically severe fires across the west; and

WHEREAS, Climate change scenarios for the west forecast a disruption of historical disturbance regimes and climatic conditions conducive to higher fire risk in the future; and

WHEREAS, Approximately forty million acres in the west, across all ecosystem types, have burned in the last five years; and

WHEREAS, Wildfire can improve or diminish the quality and quantity of terrestrial and aquatic habitat and affects individual wildlife; and

WHEREAS, Wildfire response and post-fire recovery efforts can improve or diminish the quality and quantity of terrestrial and aquatic habitat for a variety of native western fish and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, Wildfires of all sizes are multi-sector issues that affect human health and safety, the economy, and other social systems in addition to fish, wildlife, and natural resources; and

WHEREAS, Fish and wildlife populations and their habitat span a patchwork of land management types, complicating state efforts to manage and conserve species under their management jurisdiction, especially when there is a patchwork response to wildfires; and

WHEREAS, Private landowners play an invaluable role in conserving wildlife habitat and responding to wildfires across the western landscape; and

WHEREAS, Many state fish and wildlife agencies engage in the multi-agency responses to fires only after ignition, seeking to minimize negative outcomes and maximize positive outcomes for fish and wildlife populations; and

WHEREAS, Efforts are underway across all jurisdictions to prevent and prepare for future wildfires and restoring natural and cultural fire regimes is an important tactic in this management; and

WHEREAS, WAFWA members are actively engaged in shaping future landscape and fire management; and

WHEREAS, A sustained, proactive approach to adaptive management of forest, range, and other ecosystems types to restore natural fire regimes and to prevent and respond to future wildfires requires strong relationships between management jurisdictions; and

WHEREAS, WAFWA's Climate Adaptation, Human Dimensions, and Habitat Committees jointly hosted a Symposium at the January 2021 meeting entitled, "Western Fire: Blur the Boundaries – Advancing Collaborative Science, Management, and Policy";

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies supports an adaptive approach to land management across the west that strategically restores fire to the landscape, applies proactive interventions to reduce the incidence of uncharacteristically severe wildfires, and minimizes the opportunity for wildfires that are catastrophic to human health, fish and wildlife species of concern, and other human values on the landscape;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies recognizes the essential role of partnerships with federal, state, local, tribal, and private land managers in response to natural wildfire and planning of prescribed and cultural burns and urges stronger cooperation and broader coordination across the west on an integrated, modernized approach to managing lands and fires among all partners, including identifying and highlighting successfully managed, climate-adapted landscapes as examples;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies will engage in initiatives to improve science, policy, management, planning, and funding related to western land and wildfire management and engage in a sustained discussion on a proactive, adaptive response to the wildfires of the future with other multi-state organizations such as the National Association of State Foresters, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

Adopted in Convention (virtual)
July 20, 2021