



## Western Forestry Leadership Coalition Issue Brief: Cohesive Strategy to Address Wildland Fire Threats May 25, 2006

### **Background**

For several years, reviews of the wildland fire management program at the federal level have resulted in at least one consistent recommendation: the Departments of Interior and Agriculture should develop a cohesive strategy that knits together the resources available to both the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service. The recent House Interior appropriations bill reiterated the need, directing the Departments to address original National Fire Plan goals and integrate more recent developments including Fire Program Analysis and LANDFIRE. In February, 2006, the Departments released a report entitled *Protecting People and Natural Resources: A Cohesive Fuels Treatment Strategy*. Despite this important step, the Government Accountability Office reports that the Strategy does not meet expectations since long-term funding expectations were not addressed. According to GAO's recent report (see below for link), the effort must be considered incomplete.

### **Highlights of the Strategy**

The Cohesive Strategy is organized around four principles: (1) prioritization; (2) coordination; (3) collaboration; and (4) accountability. Explicit in the document, these principles align well with the goals outlined in the 10-Year comprehensive Strategy. It outlines a coordinated approach to fuels treatment adopted by the five major federal land management agencies: the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, and the Forest Service. The report notes that at current funding levels, we can expect over 4 million acres of hazardous fuels to be treated, including 1.5 million acres in the Wildland-Urban Interface. While the report focuses overwhelmingly on federal lands, Section III includes a detailed discussion of the role of Community Wildfire Protection Plans in prioritization for federal agencies. States are depicted as having an important role in the collaborative process.

As observed by the GAO, the Strategy fails to outline a long-term fire program that includes funding estimates. Agencies, the Office of Management and Budget, and the GAO agree that such funding estimates are impossible to develop until LANDFIRE and FPA are sufficiently operational so as to provide the necessary data.

### **Next Steps**

Given the expected time-frame for LANDFIRE and FPA to be released, it seems unlikely that a final Cohesive Strategy will be available before 2009. Until then, officials will rely on wildfire management direction to be found in the forthcoming review of the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan and the monitoring framework outlined there. Performance measures recommended in the updated Plan may be adopted.

### **For More Information**

The Cohesive Strategy is available at [www.fireplan.gov](http://www.fireplan.gov)  
To view the GAO report about the Strategy, see <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06671r.pdf>

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