Forest Fire and the FLEG Process in the Russian Federation

REPORT

Summary

The Report was prepared as part of the ENPI FLEG Program by a team of Consultants to the World Bank, consisting of: E.P. Kuzmichev (Team Leader), D.F. Efremov, A.S. Zakharenkov, M.A. Kopeikin, M.I. Smetanina, and V.V. Soldatov.

Key goals of the FLEG process are associated with illegal logging and illegal timber trade, but there are also related issues which affect other aspects of forest governance. Forest fire poses a major threat to Russian forests. A chief cause of the catastrophic fires of the year 2010 was unforeseeable consequences of forest governance reform after the adoption of the new Forest Code (since January 1, 2007) when many Russian regions had been unprepared to undertake forest fire management functions.

The first meeting of the ENPI FLEG National Program Advisory Committee (September 15, 2010) adopted the following decision: “In view of the disastrous forest fires in summer 2010, it is necessary to enhance the assistance to improve forest governance (as provided for in the existing Country Workplan) to meet the needs of forest fire prevention and related emergency response”. To implement this decision, an additional component (Forest fire and illegal forest use in Russia) was designed and incorporated in the Program.

The forest fire component is called to:

Identify causes of forest fires and describe forest fire trends in the Russian Federation and in a pilot region (pilot regions)

Output: Data on forest fires in 2-3 regions and in Russia as a whole aggregated. Fire behaviour described. Causes of fire identified and the share of anthropogenic fires established. Data analysed.

Review the regulatory and legal framework for forest fire outreach and public awareness activities

Output: A list of federal and regional (for 2-3 regions) laws and regulations and their articles governing outreach and public awareness activities of authorities to prevent forest fires prepared. Adequacy of this regulatory and legal framework assessed; proposals to develop missing elements of the framework prepared.

Develop guidelines on surveying social groups and their attitudes to forest fire

Output: Guidelines developed to identify representative homogeneous groups, find out how they tend to behave in forests; and to assess the needs for and ways of the development of measures to change their behaviours in forests.

The work done was based on data analyses in three typical forest-rich Russian regions: in the Far East Federal Okrug, Arkhangelsk Oblast and Krasnoyarsk Kray, using publicly accessible data on forest fires in Russia as a whole.
This work resulted into an illustrated evaluation report on 49 pages, consisting of an introduction, 4 chapters and conclusions.

In 2010, there were 33,500 forest fires in Russia; they burnt 2.1 million ha of forest areas. Compared with the year 2009, the number of forest fires increased 1.5 times. In 2010, fires killed 193,200 ha of forests, i.e. much more than annually on the average over many years. It should be noted that the annual numbers and areas of forest fires have been steadily and significantly growing since 2007 (when the new Forest Code became effective). The average area per fire increased 4-5 times. The share of anthropogenic forest fires is as great as 93%.

Deliberately or accidentally, man is the main source and the most prevalent cause of forest fires. However, high rates of forest fire occurrence and spread are preconditioned with a broad range of managerial, technological, institutional, economic, social and climatic factors as well as with national forest management and tenure systems.

The reports reviews these factors which include: imperfection of the forest legislation, non-existence of laws to cause forest fires to be prevented, poor law enforcement; destruction of the earlier established regulatory frameworks and ruined technical and human resource capacity to ensure fire safety in forests; lack of a national system to protect forests against fire and ensure centralised forest fire management; poor interagency cooperation/coordination; insufficient funding and other inputs to control forest fires; and inconsistent procedures for channelling funds to those who implement forest fire management activities, etc.

The Report depicts a detailed and logical “tree of forest fire causes”.

It contains and reviews a list of sector-wide measures taken by the Government of the Russian Federation after the catastrophic fires in European Russia in 2010. No doubt, those measures have affected the current situation. But, it is concluded that the listed measures cannot make a substantial contribution into improvement of an evolving forest fires situation. Therefore, during the period since the beginning of the current forest fire season till April 20, 2011, the burnt area was 140 times vaster than during the same period in 2010, and the number of fires is 11.3 times greater.

The Report identifies gaps in the forest legislation on protection of forests against fire, including the regulatory and legal framework for public involvement in forest fire prevention and fighting. It is noted that outreach efforts and public involvement in forest management, monitoring of forest use and forest protection from fire are clearly inadequate. In the context of forest management reform, new legislation, roles and responsibilities for forest fire control, it is necessary to enhance the role of civil society in forest fire prevention. To this end, there is a need to develop not only a regulatory and legal framework, but also guidelines on public involvement in forest fire prevention.

The work done enabled to produce methods to identify social groups and assess their attitudes to forest fire. It is found out that the failure to make forest fire spending really effective is accounted for, among other things, with the fact that public awareness and outreach efforts do not target specific categories of people who are to blame for the bulk of fires in specific areas of the forest estate. The population consists of various groups based on a common feature, a joint occupation or similarity of conditions or circumstances in their life and activities. To a certain degree, people consciously admit that they belong to this or that group and adopt, to a certain extent, a common stereotype of behaviours (group codes of conduct), including fire-related behaviours. The Report defines criteria for classifying people into social groups for forest fire control purposes. These are: occupation; place of residence and its remoteness from the regional (rayon) centre; social status; income levels, gender and age. The description of such social
groups shows specifics of their behaviours in forests and their general attitude to forest fires. The authors developed methodological approaches to assess and arrange targeted public awareness and outreach activities for the social groups. Efforts to reach local communities to prevent forest fire are a key tool for forest fire prevention. To reduce forest fire incidence, it is necessary to develop a legal and regulatory framework for public involvement and respective guidelines and procedures. For these purposes, an in-depth social survey is needed to understand this problem, develop standards of human behaviour in forests, a code of forest user conduct, set norms and limits for mass-scale harvesting of forest resources, elaborate arrangements for public awareness and education to prevent forest fires, employ various tools to attract volunteers, create an information environment in mass media, Internet, establish a methodological framework for environmental education, etc. The Report also describes possible preventive activities.