

CONFERENCE NEWS

Fire Ecology Across Boundaries: Connecting Science and Management

Shared by Pau Costa Foundation
and Association for Fire Ecology

The Situation: Global challenges call for local yet interconnected solutions

Science suggests that climate change is far from reaching a stable situation. We are already experiencing its effects through unprecedented wildfire conditions around the world. The fire paradox is manifesting itself in many regions. Where there is an absence of small-medium fires or fire management in general, the few wildfires that escape from control become larger and more severe causing catastrophic impacts on nature and society. It is becoming increasingly evident that fire suppression is no longer a viable approach to the current predicament.

Fire-prone countries are experiencing some of the most extreme wildfires ever observed, with the capacity to erase entire ecosystems from the face of the Earth. These extreme fires are uncontrollable even for the most advanced fire agencies, causing important environmental and socio-economic losses. Many less fire-prone countries had never considered wildfires as a real threat, but as fire regimes shift due to climate change, the exposure and vulnerability of ecosystems in those areas is changing as well. This global increase in wildfire frequency, intensity, and severity may lead as well to the release of large amounts of carbon, further exacerbating climate change.

Europe is experiencing both scenarios. For instance, in 2017, for the first time in recent European history, extreme “megafire” events took place in Portugal, twice in one year. Then, in 2018, throughout the continent, unprecedented wildfires burnt simultaneously from the Mediterranean (e.g., Greece, Portugal) to Scandinavia (e.g., Denmark, Sweden).

European forests, grasslands and shrublands are adapted to climate conditions that are rapidly changing and may not be ready for the new emergent climate. Thus, two management strategies open up which need to be debated. One option is to let nature adapt with no (or little) intervention, even if this means coping with



“Walking together.” Art: Josep Serra Tarragon.

the impacts of unprecedented disturbances such as extreme wildfires. Alternatively, through interventions and management strategies, we can facilitate a more sustainable evolution of these ecosystems that can contribute to more successful climate adaptation and increase their resilience.

Those options raise many uncertainties. Which option better guarantees the maintenance of essential ecosystem services in the long term? How can we make society understand the complex tradeoffs these options imply and how can it participate in the work necessary to implement these solutions? Where should research and innovation investments be focused? The current situation evidences the need for a global debate on identifying effective local solutions.



The Response: A conference focused on connecting

The conference Fire Ecology Across Boundaries: Connecting Science and Management aims to bring together the global wildfire community to more effectively exchange knowledge and understanding about the possible contributions of fire ecology to fire management. Such coordination is needed to help provide solutions that balance overall ecological conservation goals and wildfire risk reduction.

The present challenges demonstrate the need to enhance the debate on potential solutions: cost-efficient alternatives to the wildfire suppression approach, learning from traditional landscape management and local communities about alternative adaptation strategies to a changing climate, the benefits of prescribing fire to maintain long-term ecosystem services and finally the need to establish a wildfire risk culture through transdisciplinary science that can at the same time enhance effective societal engagement in the management of the problem. Decision makers and society need tools and

leadership to understand and prepare for future extreme fire events and build adaptive resilience.

Experts from Europe and around the world are invited to gather in Florence to share new and innovative fire ecology findings and expertise, and to engage in a forum for discussing potential solutions to these emerging issues. “Fire Across Boundaries” will be a meeting point for international wildfire and landscape managers, scientists, policy makers, communicators and other representatives from national, regional and local organizations. The conference will be a space to understand and discuss the global wildfire situation and regional challenges, the uncertainties that need to be addressed, and potential solutions on wildfire mitigation.

The four days of workshops, concurrent sessions, networking activities, and fieldtrips will provide ample opportunities for learning, interacting, and networking with peers from other regions.



CONFERENCE DETAILS

The Association for Fire Ecology (AFE) and Pau Costa Foundation (PCF) are partnering with Regione Toscana and University of Florence to host the Conference.

Dates:

20-23 October 2020

Location:

Auditorium di Santa Apollonia,

Via S. Gallo, 25, 50129

Firenze FI, Italy.

Hashtag:

#FireFlorence2020

The call for submissions is open for abstracts and workshop proposals is open until April and May, respectively.

For more information on the topics accepted and the submission processes: <http://fireacrossboundaries.org/>



COVID-19 UPDATE FROM CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS (AS OF MARCH 24, 2020):

Our thoughts are with those worldwide who are being impacted by the coronavirus. At this time, we are proceeding with plans for the Fire Across Boundaries conference this fall and developing contingency plans as we continue to monitor the situation. We have extended the dates for accepting abstracts for the Call for Proposals and for opening registration. We are also working on options to participate in the conference virtually should that be needed. We will be following the advice of pertinent health officials and organizations with a focus on the well-being of our attendees, presenters, and the Florence community. The website will be updated with changes or contingency plans as soon as possible, and you are welcome to email us at office@fireecology.net with any questions or concerns.