



## Global wildfire awareness

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## Global Wildfire Awareness



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*Amid the many talks at IAWF's Human Dimensions Conference this past March, one collaborative presentation examined the crucial role of collaboration amid countries with emerging fire regimes. The authors, led by Wildfire magazine Contributing Editor **Cathelijne Stoof** (The Netherlands and United States), **Lisa Langer** (New Zealand), **Julia McMorrow** (United Kingdom) and **Brian Oswald** (United States), observed that as changing fire regimes increase fire risk, there's an urgency to tackle this vulnerability via international collaboration and exchange. For more of what they've discovered, visit the full article (excerpted here) and conference video at [WildfireWorld.org](http://WildfireWorld.org).*

As climate change expands wildfire into new regions, what can the north learn from the south (and vice versa)?

**W**ildland fires generally are associated with countries such as the United States and Australia and the European Mediterranean, in the boreal North and in the savannas and tropics, all of which have track records of large-impact wildfires with severe social and environmental consequences. Wildland fire is not a natural hazard that is generally associated with countries in some temperate climates, such as the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, that are better known for their vulnerability to floods, snowstorms and earthquakes.

Yet, wildland fire risks are increasing significantly in these countries because of expansion of the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and a climate-change-related increase in the occurrence of extreme weather, such as heat waves and severe droughts. Moreover, lack of awareness and underestimation of wildfire risk has led to under-preparedness, vulnerable communities and stretched emergency services.

For instance, both the United Kingdom and the Netherlands share a position of limited policy, organization and knowledge of fire ecology, fire behavior, fire weather and the human dimensions of wildland fire. And although New Zealand is in many ways ahead of these countries because of its research, response structure, training and exchange, it is at risk of losing

firefighting expertise because of infrequent fire events — unless it continues to link to more fire-prone countries.

In all three countries, wildfire issues “compete” with better-known and more frequent natural hazards such as floods, earthquakes, etc. Communities are, therefore, less aware of wildfire risk, less prepared for fires and vulnerable.

As changing fire regimes increase fire risk and potentially also fire impact, there is an urgency to tackle this vulnerability before accidents happen. There is, however, a need for international collaboration and exchange, because of the limited expertise in the countries at risk.

The discussions at the 3rd Human Dimensions of Wildland Fire Conference (see video online) showed that there is an enthusiastic group of scientists and practitioners from various backgrounds interested in developing a collaborative and international response to these issues. Such a group of enthusiastic experts from around the world can build, teach and train multi-agency networks within and among the countries in need, and help build a regional scientific knowledge base. Such a collaborative effort can not only help increase awareness and implementation of best management practices in these countries but also provide opportunities for “cross-pollination” and worldwide innovation. **W**

### **ONLINE CONNECTION:**

To view this and other talks from IAWF's 3rd Human Dimensions of Wildland Fire Conference, visit [WildfireWorld.org](http://WildfireWorld.org).