National Seasonal Assessment Workshop

Mesa, Arizona
February 25–28, 2003

For more information, contact:

Thomas Wordell
National Interagency Coordination Center
(208) 387-5093
twordell@fs.fed.us

Tim Brown
Program for Climate, Ecosystem, and Fire Applications
(775) 674-7090
tbrown@dri.edu

Gregg Garfin
Climate Assessment for the Southwest
(520) 622-9016
gmgarfin@email.arizona.edu

Wildland Fire Assessment Problem

Wildland fires burn millions of acres each year, in spite of much effort going into fuel treatments, prevention, and fire suppression. Given current fuel loadings, limited resources, and increasing costs in suppressing wildland fires, effective decision-support products and tools must be available to improve resource allocation decisions and maintain a high standard of safety for firefighters and the public.

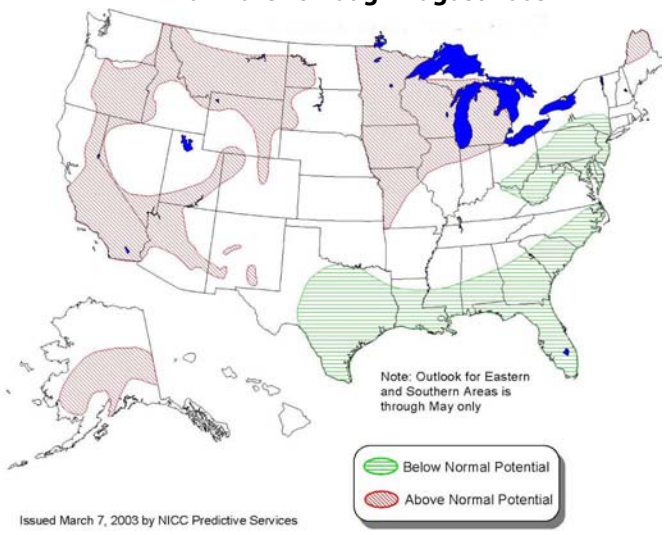
The Solution

A new Predictive Services program has been launched to anticipate where fires are most likely to occur in order to allocate the appropriate firefighting resources to these areas. Geographic area predictive services units, established by the 2000 National Fire Plan, are tasked with integrating information about climate, weather, fire danger, and firefighting resources to provide decision support to fire managers on the location, timing, and severity of fire potential. These predictive services units identify fire threat areas on a daily/weekly/monthly/seasonal basis and, in turn, provide:

- Proactive fire management
- Information that can save lives and property
- Increased public awareness
- Reduced suppression costs

During the week of February 25-28, 2003, the first annual National Seasonal Assessment Workshop brought together climatologists, predictive service units, and fire managers from across the country to produce seasonal fire outlook reports. The National Wildland Fire Outlook (see figure) is the compilation of the 11 geographic area outlooks generated at the meeting.

National Wildland Fire Outlook for March through August 2003



Results and Outcomes

- Geographic area wildland fire outlook reports
- NICC preseason national wildland fire outlook
- 2003 consensus climate forecast
- Standardized protocols for producing long-range fire danger outlooks
- Feedback to improve U.S. climate forecasts
- Improved cooperation between forecasters and fire managers
- Frameworks for future multiagency cooperation

Consensus Climate Forecast

Under the guidance of CEFA, climate experts from five agencies merged climate predictions into a consensus forecast for the 2003 fire season. This new climate decision-support tool, along with regional fire and fuels assessments prepared in advance of the workshop, provided the foundation for the seasonal fire danger outlooks.

Interactions between fire specialists and climate forecasters set the stage for a period of concentrated effort during breakout sessions to produce the outlooks. The workshop offered a unique opportunity for cooperation among the geographic areas and climate forecasters to share fire danger and climate forecast perspectives, fuels and weather data, and other information.

Partnerships and Cooperation

Several agencies cooperated to facilitate the workshop, including the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC; representing agencies of the Department of Interior and the USDA-Forest Service), the University of Arizona Climate Assessment for the Southwest (CLIMAS; a NOAA-funded Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments project), and the program for Climate, Ecosystem and Fire Applications (CEFA) of the Desert Research Institute. The USDA-Forest Service, the NOAA Office of Global Programs, and the University of Arizona Institute for the Study of Planet Earth provided funding for the workshop.

Participants included wildland fire analysts, fuel specialists, fire meteorologists, and other predictive service specialists from Department of Interior agencies, the USDA-Forest Service, and state fire management agencies. The NOAA Climate Prediction Center, the NOAA Climate Diagnostics Center, the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, the International Research Institute for Climate Prediction, the Desert Research Institute, the University of Arizona, and the University of Utah provided climate expertise to the workshop.

Where to find the outlooks, updates, and more information:

Geographic Fire Season Outlooks
http://www.nifc.gov/news/nicc.html (scroll down and click on a geographic area on the map)

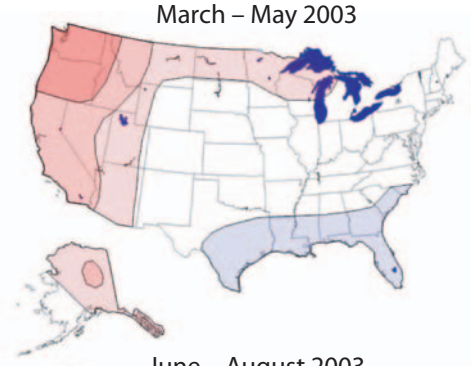
National Wildland Fire Outlook for March-August 2003
http://www.nifc.gov/news/intell_predserv_forms/season_outlook.html

Program for Climate, Ecosystem, and Fire Applications
http://cefa.dri.edu/

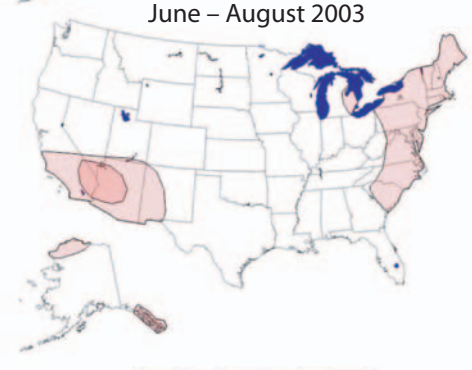
Wildfire Alternatives (WALTER)
http://walter.arizona.edu

Temperature

March – May 2003



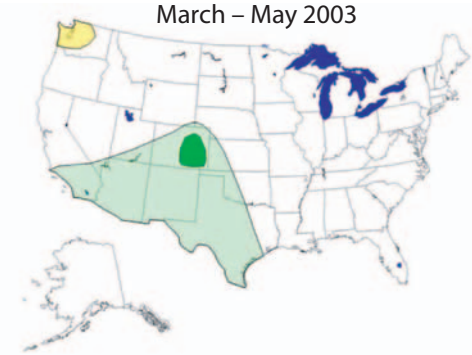
June – August 2003



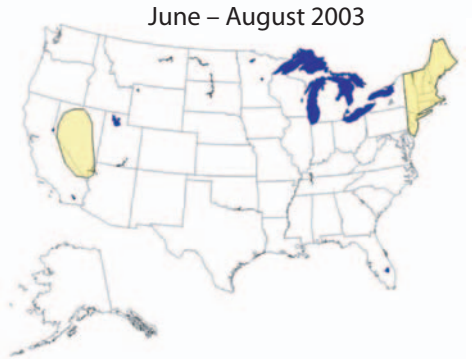
Warm Cool
Brighter color = increased probability

Precipitation

March – May 2003



June – August 2003



Wet Dry
Brighter color = increased probability