Alaska Fire Science Consortium (AFSC)
FY 2013: Annual report to Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP)
October 1, 2012-September 30, 2013

Describe how things went during the year. Are you on track?

Overall, AFSC is on track, continuing its good progress from a strong foundation in Alaska’s interagency fire management community. Since AFSC’s inception in 2009, our series of webinars and workshops has become accepted, anticipated, and integrated into the management community's annual schedule of activities and trainings. In FY13, AFSC offered 5 webinars (total attendance 183) and 4 workshops (total attendance 123), all geared to management topics. Most grew out of needs identified by managers, who then asked AFSC to organize and implement. These include a field workshop on fuel moisture sampling and refresher webinars on using the Weather Information Management Systems and Wildland Fire Decision Support System.

This integration process culminated in August 2013, when the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group invited AFSC to help plan the October 2013 Interagency Fall Fire Review and organize a joint session with AFSC’s Fire Science Workshop. We view this as a significant vote of confidence, showing that AFSC is now a resource valued by Alaska’s management community, and our annual workshop an anticipated event in the eyes of the AWFCG.

With JFSP encouragement, we initiated briefings with senior agency personnel (Bud Cribley, BLM Alaska State Director, and Doug Alexander, USFWS Regional Fire Management Coordinator). These discussions identified new opportunities to broaden participation and include the general public at AFSC events. PI Sarah Trainor also met with Jolie Pollet, Renewable Resources Branch Chief with BLM Alaska Lands Division, to discuss how AFSC can better serve the management needs of BLM Alaska State Office. We look forward to implementing these ideas and meeting with more key agency leaders in the coming year.

A focal point for AFSC in FY13 was to increase our reach in the academic community and their participation in fire science activities in Alaska. Our efforts included greater participation by AFSC at scientific meetings, such as those held by the Bonanza Creek Long Term Ecological Research program and The Wildlife Society Alaska chapter, and
other academic events. We increased one-on-one networking to connect fire managers and scientists, working directly with PIs of current research projects in Alaska funded by NSF, DOD, and NASA to communicate and coordinate plans, results, and possible applications with managers in the region. We are also increasing outreach to UAF academic units in forestry and wildland fire science so that future managers are aware of AFSC’s products and resources. We were pleased to see an increase in our list-serv subscribers and participants from academic institutions in our workshops, webinars and other events. We expect to continue growing this audience in FY14.

As noted in the FY12 annual report, Alaska benefits from a relatively small, active, and collaborative group of researchers and agency personnel in wildland fire. This is an advantage for AFSC in building and maintaining relationships and partnerships. It also poses a challenge, however, as the same individuals must serve on multiple committees and face numerous demands on their limited time and organizational resources. AFSC tries to be mindful of this challenge and avoid overburdening the community we both depend on and serve.

On a related note, AFSC saw slowing growth in new subscribers from the fire management sector in FY13, suggesting that we may be approaching saturation of that audience in Alaska. We will work with our advisory board to evaluate this, entrain any “straggling” fire managers, and connect AFSC with relevant land and resource managers as well as academic participants.

Following a recommendation from board members, we held our first annual in-person Advisory Board meeting in February 2013. Board members were actively engaged and provided extremely useful input to guide our program direction and emphases. The full board held 2 additional teleconferences in FY13, and individual members are in touch with AFSC regularly.

*Issues or concerns which the program office should know about?*

AFSC experienced some changes in personnel and administration this year. These are not of concern but should be noted.

**Personnel changes:** Despite her outstanding performance as AFSC coordinator, Jen Northway’s appointment under an Intergovernmental Personnel Agreement with BLM could not be extended beyond December 2013, and Jen joined the National Park Service with a career seasonal appointment as an assistant wildland fire ecologist in January 2013. She remains involved with AFSC as a member of the Advisory Board and has been readily available to answer questions during the staff transition. We anticipate hiring Jen on a temporary, part-time basis during the winter of 2013-14 to continue building our products and agency outreach.
Alison York joined AFSC as its new coordinator in January 2013. Alison has extensive project management experience for a variety of science programs in Alaska, has strong existing relationships with scientists at UAF and has a broad range of experience and skills. Randi Jandt joined AFSC as a part-time fire ecologist in November 2012. Randi’s experience and existing relationships with both scientists and managers has been a strong asset and addition to our team. Randi retired from the BLM-Alaska Fire Service in 2010 after a career spanning 25 years in Alaska wildlife/fire management and fire ecology, during which she made significant contributions to the fire science literature in Alaska. Randi was in the AFSC office on a full-time basis from February through May 2013, and works part-time from her home in Oregon the remainder of the year. This schedule synchronizes well with the Alaska fire management community’s extremely seasonal calendar, and we anticipate continuing it in coming years.

The skills and experience of these two professionals proved to be highly complementary and effective in developing and implementing AFSC products and activities, with critical continuity provided by PI Sarah Trainor. This has enabled us to move forward without the need to replace the vacant science communication specialist position (discussed in FY 2011 and 2012 annual reports).

Our Advisory Board remains a strong, active and supportive group, providing key guidance and participation in AFSC projects. Some turnover has occurred in board membership, largely due to staffing changes in represented agencies.

Administrative changes: AFSC’s federal fiscal representative at BLM-Alaska Fire Service, Mary Lynch, retired in December 2012; Mary remains on our Advisory Board as an at-large member. BLM-Alaska Fire Service Fire Management Officer Tom St. Clair took over AFSC’s fiscal representation on Mary’s retirement; Tom is also an active member of the Advisory Board.

AFSC is co-located physically and administratively with three other programs at the University of Alaska Fairbanks: the Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Policy (ACCAP, funded by NOAA), the Scenarios Network for Alaska and Arctic Planning (SNAP), and the Alaska Climate Science Center (CSC, funded by DOI). Although they are funded by different sources, all four of these programs share a synergistic emphasis on making the best available science relevant to stakeholders and decision-makers. We benefit administratively through sharing common office space, supplies, and services and leveraging outreach expertise. AFSC also benefits in this collaboration by having direct access to up-to-date climate science, including current wildland fire research and new products relevant to the fire community in Alaska.

In July 2012, these four programs were transferred administratively from the School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences to the International Arctic Research Center (IARC). In early summer 2014, all four programs will be physically moving from our current location just off the main UAF campus to the IARC building in the heart of the
research area of campus. We view both of these changes as positive, in that AFSC will be directly in touch with the leading administrative, academic, and scientific resources of the university. This aligns well with our current efforts to improve our reach in these audiences.

**Briefly describe efforts of collaboration and coordination with other partnerships.**

**ONGOING**

**Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group**
AWFCG leads planning for interagency wildland fire management statewide. AFSC Advisory Board membership reflects AWFCG’s agency composition. AFSC coordinates activities with AWFCG when possible and works directly with several AWFCG committees.

**Fire Science Workshop**
Annually since 2009, AFSC’s FSW follows immediately on AWFCG’s Interagency Fall Fire Review, which most Alaska fire managers attend. This maximizes efficiency for busy managers. 68 individuals from 11 agencies attended the October 2012 FSW. AWFCG asked AFSC to help plan 2013’s FFR and a joint FFR/FSW science session.

**AWFCG Fire Research & Development Applications Committee**
AFSC works with FRDAC to update and communicate Alaska fire research needs. We maintain a FRDAC webpage to share its research needs list and encourage interactive manager-scientist research project development.

AFSC also works with FRDAC on fuel moisture sampling, including maintaining sampling guides and offering field workshops.

**AWFCG Fire Modeling and Analysis Committee**
AFSC worked closely with FMAC on 2 refresher webinars:
- WIMS winter maintenance;
- Alaska WFFDSS modeling.
AFSC is helping FMAC develop collaborations with:
- Alaska DOF and SNAP staff, to improve how CFFDRS FWI represents fire potential in Alaska situations;
- AICC Predictive Services staff and Geographic Information Network of Alaska, on management use of GINA products.

**Bonanza Creek Long Term Ecological Research Program**
AFSC collaborates with BNZ in both science and humanities on long-term consequences of changing climate and disturbance regimes in boreal forest. AFSC presented on its activities at BNZ annual meeting.
Art of Fire
BNZ is a major partner in this FY12 project, which continued in FY13 with:
- Presentations by AFSC and BNZ PIs at Words on Fire: Toward a New Language of Wildland Fire and the International Fire Ecology & Management Congress;
- Exhibits at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage and National Science Foundation in Virginia; and
- Discussions with LTER leaders on humanities programs.

Fire Research & Management Exchange System
FRAMES provides AFSC website hosting, support, and events posting, and is a key collaborator in projects like the Alaska Reference Database and Boreal Fire History.

Society of American Foresters
SAF offered CE credits for AFSC IFTDSS training and evaluation. AFSC staff and advisory board members presented information on AFSC activities and the Cohesive Strategy process to SAF Yukon River Chapter.

New

Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (White House Office of Science & Technology Policy)
Randi Jandt serves by invitation on a new federal fire science implementation committee, formed after the FY13-17 Arctic Research Plan identified arctic wildland fire as a priority area.

Wildland Fire Management Research Development & Application
AFSC worked with RD&A to recruit Alaska participants for and present IFTDSS training and evaluation; we met with RD&A staff to discuss respective roles and activities and avenues for future cooperation.

National Fire Training
AFSC staff recorded and posted sessions from RX 410 (Smoke Management Techniques) when it was taught in Alaska. The RX 410 cadre visits at approximately 10-year intervals, so Alaska managers value such a resource.

Science project partnerships
Identifying Indicators of State Change & Future Vulnerability in Alaskan Boreal Ecosystems (DoD)
AFSC organized and hosted a scientist-manager tech transfer workshop to discuss mutual interests and possible products and wrote a research brief on project findings.

Arctic Boreal Vulnerability Experiment (NASA)
AFSC participated in an invited planning workshop.
BLM Central Yukon field office
AFSC provided subject matter expertise for field surveys of fire effects in tundra on legacy plots in western Alaska.

BLM Arctic Field office
AFSC provided subject matter expertise on a field study of arctic vegetation and climate change/fire on Alaska’s North Slope (leveraged funds from BLM).