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NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION

TWENTIETH SESSION

SECOND NEAR EAST FORESTRY WEEK

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Good Governance of Forests and Rangelands : Pillar of Food Security

REGIONAL NETWORKS: BETWEEN NEEDS AND WILLS

Summary

The aim of this note is to facilitate discussion of policy issues and regional cooperation in the Near East region related to regional networks in support of sustainable development. The paper discusses the existing networks, constraints they face, and opportunities for improvement. A list of questions is provided to facilitate discussion.

INTRODUCTION

1. Three regional networks exist in the Near East Region: the Near East Network on Forest Health and Invasive Species (NENFHIS), the Near East Regional Network on Forest and Wildland Fires (NENFIRE) and the Near East Working Group on Wildlife and Protected Area Management (NEWPAM).
2. NENFHIS was created in 2007 and was endorsed by the Near East Forest and Range Commission (NEFRC) in 2008. NENFIRE and NEWPAM were both established in 2009 on request of the Commission and have not yet been endorsed by it.
3. The networks aim to:
 - enhance the exchange and dissemination of information related to forest health and invasive species, forest and wildfires, and wildlife and protected areas respectively;

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- promote networking and collaboration;
- facilitate the sharing of expertise within and beyond the region;
- foster active bilateral, sub-regional and regional cooperation on broad range of issues related to forests and wildlife.

4. Transboundary cooperation and collaboration on these issues is an important step in conserving biodiversity, protecting forest health, reducing the risk of forest degradation and increasing resilience to climate change thus enabling sustainable forest management.

ISSUES AND CONSTRAINTS

5. All three networks face similar problems related to lack of institutional framework, funds, commitment and involvement of member countries. As a result, the objectives for which the networks have been created have not yet been achieved.

IMPROVING EFFECTIVENESS AND COORDINATION OF THE NETWORKS

6. A regional workshop on networks in the Near East was held in Cairo, Egypt from 07 to 09 November 2010. All three regional networks and eleven countries from the region were represented (Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Sudan and Yemen). The meeting was organized in response to a recommendation made by the Commission to evaluate a regional coordination mechanism or “umbrella” group under which to manage the three existing regional networks.

7. Network members unanimously concluded that the three networks are important for forestry, range and wildlife sectors in the region and that there was a need to revitalize and strengthen the networks. They agreed on the importance of maintaining the three technical networks as independent entities with functioning secretariats and considered that an “umbrella” group was not the most effective coordination mechanism for their operations. It was proposed that NEFRC should be requested to fill the role as the coordinating mechanism to which the three networks can report and from which they can receive guidance.

8. Network coordinators and secretariat members declared they are fully committed to strengthen collaboration, to improve network performance and to attempt to raise funds from partners and donors. It was agreed that this collaboration could be facilitated through the Web sites, meetings and workshops, possibly at side events during COFO and NEFRC.

9. Recommendations were made to revitalize the modus operandi of the networks and between the networks.

10. All countries were requested to nominate national focal point for the networks they prefer. Two countries only responded positively.

11. Several members of NENFIRE participated in a workshop organized by JRC, GIZ and FAO in October 2011 in Rabat, Morocco which started the process of including them in the European Forest Fire Information system.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE COMMISSION

- a.** What actions would NEFRC members like FAO to take to support efforts (nationally, regionally or internationally) regarding the networks in the Near East?
- b.** What actions could NEFRC members take in their own countries to increase commitment for national action within the networks?
- c.** What role do members envisage for the NEFRC regarding support for the networks?