



WESTAR Prescribed Fire and Smoke Management Dialogue: Recommendations for the WESTAR Council

Below are recommendations for the WESTAR Council to consider based on the recent January 23-24 and February 28, 2019 *Prescribed Fire and Smoke Management* dialogues between state air quality and federal, state, and private land management agency staff. The purpose of the dialogues was to identify actions that can be taken to enhance state-land manager collaboration and coordination and improve program outcomes related to prescribed fire, smoke management, and air quality objectives.

The recommendations below are organized around the major themes identified in the February 28 meeting summary. WESTAR staff recognizes that the degree to which state air quality and federal land management agencies will be interested and/or willing to take action on these recommendations will vary depending on the capacity of the agencies and their judgement as to the necessity of the actions.

Theme 1: WESTAR Air Directors could support development of a ‘key map’ overlay for interested states, to ensure states and land managers are in agreement regarding the geographic areas of greatest concern for possible smoke exposure being targeted for fuel load management and to help bring focus on possible alternatives to burning and other ways to improve coordination. In addition, WESTAR, in collaboration with federal land management agencies, could offer NEPA and prescribed fire and smoke management planning processes training for interested state air quality agency staff.

Themes 2 and 4: WESTAR Air Directors could contact their respective Governor’s offices and federal land management agency leadership to schedule joint discussions regarding prescribed burn and smoke management within agreements the Governor is developing with federal land management agencies. This will ensure that as relationships and agreements are solidified at the Governor-FLM level, the role of state air quality agencies in smoke management is clearly identified. WESTAR states could share the results of their respective Governor-FLM agreements with each other to understand new developments across the region.

In addition, WESTAR Air Directors could reach out as appropriate to state, regional, and land-unit level leadership at the federal land management agencies to proactively ensure positive working relationships exist to address issues that will arise over the course of the prescribed burn season and beyond. Conversely, state, regional, and land-unit level leadership at the federal land management agencies could reach out to and engage State Air Quality Directors as they implement their long-term planning processes.

Theme 3 and 7: In light of the anticipated increase in regular communication and coordination between states and land managers when planning for and conducting prescribed burn and smoke management activities, WESTAR could convene a regional group of state air quality and land management agency staff on an annual or bi-annual basis to reflect on the experiences of the past year and upcoming burn season. In addition to state air quality and land management agencies, participants could include tribes,

and other key parties with significant interests in conducting prescribed burning. Meetings could be held via conference call or webinar, or if deemed necessary, in-person. Potential dialogue topics could include pre- and post-burn season planning; developing common messaging around prescribed fire; public communications and outreach generally; advances in best smoke management practices; forecasting and modeling; and, how Exceptional Events policy is being implemented by states.

Theme 5: WESTAR could convene periodic prescribed fire and smoke management technical webinars to enable states and federal land managers to discuss, share and learn about new developments in modeling, monitoring, and other tools for effective fuel load and smoke management.

Theme 6: WESTAR states could monitor the resource capacity of their state air quality agencies in light of the likely increase in the pace and scale of prescribed burns across the western landscape, to assess if state air quality agencies are able to perform their responsibilities adequately. WESTAR states could keep each other informed through regular status engagement with each other on their resource situation, including highlighting challenges that deal with resource constraints and priorities.