

# Southern Fire Exchange

## *Operating Guidelines & Governance*

### **I. General Provisions**

In 2010 the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) provided funding to initiate the Southern Fire Exchange (SFE), a southeast regional consortium for fire science delivery across 11 states that contain southern pine ecosystems.

These Operating Guidelines enhance and expand the basic governance provisions contained in the proposal to JFSP from the University of Florida (UF), US Forest Service Southern Research Station (SRS), North Carolina State University (NCSU) and Tall Timbers Research Station (TTRS).

### ***Overall Purpose***

The Guidelines promote sound management practices in all SFE activities, ensure that all user groups are represented in Exchange governance, and coordinate overall SFE operations with national JFSP principles. The Guidelines cover operations of the Leadership Team, Advisory Board, SFE staff and partner interactions.

### ***Exchange Mission & Values***

The Southern Fire Exchange mission is to pave a two-way path by which the fire research community and fire use practitioners aid each other's efforts toward meeting management objectives and expanding relevant knowledge. We do so by coordinating, improving, and increasing access to existing fire science, while developing syntheses and enhancements to web-based platforms to fill gaps in available resources. SFE activities range from a web-based searchable resource platform to new research fact sheets to field days and other experiential learning opportunities. The ultimate objectives of these activities are to facilitate application of research on the ground and to incorporate science into management, while communicating needs for new research from managers to the research community.

Our success depends on how well we adhere to a set of core values and principles, to:

1. Be inclusive, making sure all relevant partners have the opportunity to be involved;
2. Serve as neutral science partners;
3. Be end-user driven, both in how we are structured and how we function;
4. Operate collaboratively;
5. Foster communication between managers and scientists;
6. Be innovative, pursuing new and creative ways to disseminate knowledge;
7. Facilitate the flow in fire science information, dialogue about new science findings, and needs of resource managers and policymakers;
8. Be accountable to all partners, end-users and JFSP rather than just individual institution interests;
9. Maintain focus on key JFSP objectives, through which our role is to:
  - a. Disseminate information and build relationships
  - b. List and describe relevant and applicable existing research and syntheses
  - c. Facilitate research demonstrations on the ground
  - d. Promote adaptive management using fire science findings
  - e. Illuminate new topics, synthesis or validation needs for the research community.

## ***Funding***

The primary Southern Fire Exchange funding is provided from the Joint Fire Science Program, through the US Forest Service Southern Research Station. The funds are allocated via Cooperative Agreements from the SRS to the other three lead organizations (UF, NCSU, TTRS).

## ***Guideline Revisions***

These Operating Guidelines are intended to be used as guides rather than firm policy statements. The Guidelines are dynamic and may be updated from time to time, and at a minimum of once every two years as necessary to improve the effectiveness and performance of the SFE. Changes and revisions are reached by consensus.

## ***Program Structure***

The SFE is managed collaboratively by the co-Principal Investigators at each of the four institutions along with the SFE staff. This SFE **Management Team** is responsible for conducting and completing all SFE deliverables. Overall strategic direction and guidance are provided by a **Leadership Team** (LT) and **Advisory Board** (AB) described in sections II and III. The LT and AB also review and provide feedback on the annual program evaluation. The Leadership Team and Advisory Board work closely with the Principal Investigators (Co-Directors) and staff at UF, NCSU, TTRS and SRS to help plan and implement SFE programs and to determine research needs and increase awareness of program accomplishments.

SFE operations are based at the four lead institutions, with professionals and supporting staff at each. The Exchange Administrative Director (PI) is co-located at TTRS and UF along with a part-time Communication and Evaluation Specialist. The SRS' Co-Director for SFE is located in Athens, GA and provides important funding and technology transfer assistance. The Co-Director at NCSU guides web-based activities, along with a part-time Information Technology Specialist. Another Co-Director, a database librarian, and the Program and Outreach Coordinator are located at TTRS in Tallahassee, FL. Collectively, these four institutions are directly responsible for implementing the science delivery program, dynamic website, and web-accessible database as key SFE program components.

## **II. Leadership Team**

### ***Team Composition***

The Leadership Team is composed of at least one representative from each lead institution, including the Director and Co-Directors. The other LT members are invited from key partner organizations (federal, state, private), to represent both research and end-user communities at key senior leadership levels. The lead institutions will be continuously represented on the LT, although the specific individuals serving as LT members may change if the Principal Investigators change as the SFE evolves. The partner organization representatives serve two-year terms, and may serve consecutive terms. When a partner organization member term ends, membership on the Team may be switched to another person within the same organization or a member of another partner organization may be invited to participate.

### ***Member Responsibilities***

The Leadership Team is responsible for setting SFE direction and priorities by providing feedback on the annual SFE Plan of Work (POW) and SFE Annual Report. It provides general oversight of SFE operations. Additionally, LT members are asked to represent SFE in a wide variety of contexts by serving as “ambassadors” for SFE and soliciting feedback and ideas from interactions with the natural resource management and research communities. Team members are encouraged to support SFE through

promoting external partnerships. Team members also represent their home agency and, at times, should present the needs and views of their agency. Members are expected to clearly disclose when they are representing a single-agency viewpoint.

### ***Leadership Team Meetings***

The Leadership Team meets quarterly, through conference calls or web meetings. E-mail communications are used more frequently for progress updates and decisions on project deliverables. When members cannot participate in scheduled meetings or conference calls they should indicate their positions on key agenda issues to the Chair or Co-Chair, who can convey that position to the participants at the meeting.

### ***Chair & Co-Chair***

The Team is co-chaired by the Director (PI) and one elected member from the partner organizations. The elected co-chair is nominated for a two-year term and elected by simple majority at the next meeting following a vacancy. Nominations may be made and seconded by any Team member. The Co-Chair assists the Chair in developing agendas for each meeting, and summarizing meeting activities in minutes to be reviewed and approved by the Leadership Team. The Co-Chair also assists in developing the annual list of research priorities to be forwarded to the JFSP Board when requested by JFSP.

### ***Ad hoc Committees***

The LT may establish ad hoc committees to conduct studies or other activities in support of SFE planning and operations. A charter for each committee will include the purpose, duration and composition of the committee and other appropriate information. All such committees include at least one LT member.

### ***Leadership Team Decision Process***

The Leadership Team operates by consensus (all members agree with or can support the decision). However, it is inevitable that members will miss meetings. In the event that decisions must be addressed without full membership, reasonable effort will be made to determine the member's views/position before or after the meeting before decisions are finalized.

In the event that consensus cannot be obtained on any issue, the Team may defer the issue for further discussion and negotiation. If the issue cannot be deferred, the Team may elect to use a 70% majority on major issues and a simple (60%) majority on minor issues. If a decision is not made by consensus, the process used and minority opinion will be documented in the meeting minutes.

## **III. Advisory Board**

### ***Board Composition***

The AB is comprised of on-the-ground fire managers and practitioners who represent federal, state, private and non-profit organizations. Potential members are identified by organizational leaders (e.g., state fire chiefs) and then invited by the Leadership Team so that the AB is composed of one person from each state plus several at-large representatives, collectively representing the full range of end users, from federal wildland fire managers to private consultants and landowner organizations. Each Leadership Team member from UF, NCSU and TTRS will be responsible for maintaining regular contact and communication with three or four AB members to promote active participation and assistance from those particular members.

Advisory Board members will serve three-year terms and may serve a second three-year term. When a member's term ends, their membership on the AB may be switched to another person within the same organization or someone may be recruited from a different organization, with a focus on maintaining diversity among states, organizations, and agencies across the region.

### ***Member Responsibilities***

Advisory Board responsibilities include: identifying a broad range of opportunities for science delivery and application, recommending specific fire science information and technical assistance needs, summarizing high priority opportunities for new research, and regular evaluation of SFE progress and success. Board members represent the program both formally and informally in a wide variety of contexts, and serve as "ambassadors" for the Exchange—sharing information about the program and soliciting feedback and ideas from ongoing interactions with their organizations and others in the fire management community in their states. Board members will review annual Plans of Work with the Leadership Team and periodic refunding proposals. They will help identify opportunities for science delivery activities in their states, key contacts to help with those activities, and will help get SFE on agendas of PFC and other fire science related meetings in their states. Travel costs for AB and LT members are generally borne by the members' organizations.

### ***Board Meetings***

The Advisory Board will meet biannually; in late summer or early fall each year to help prepare for SFE reporting and planning deadlines, and in the spring to evaluate progress (including a review of annual progress report) and suggest new opportunities for SFE activities for the upcoming year. AB meetings are generally teleconferences although opportunities will be investigated for meetings in person when opportunities (such as conferences) are available. The SFE Co-Directors and staff participate in the Board meetings to listen and respond to suggestions and requests.

### ***Chair***

The AB is led by a Chair elected from the members. They serve a three-year term and are elected by simple majority at the first AB meeting of the year. The SFE Administrative Director serves as secretary to the AB and Co-Chair if necessary, and helps organize, document and advise the AB but is not a voting member except in the event of a tie vote.

### ***Ad hoc Committees***

The AB may establish ad hoc committees to conduct studies or other activities in support of SFE planning and operations. A charter for each committee will include the purpose, duration and composition of the committee and other appropriate information. All such committees include at least one AB member.

### ***Board Decision Process***

The AB operates by consensus (all members agree with or can support the decision). However, it is inevitable that members will miss meetings. In the event that decisions must be addressed without full membership, reasonable effort will be made to determine the member's views/position before or after the meeting before decisions are finalized.

In the event that consensus cannot be obtained on an issue, the AB may defer the issue for further discussion and negotiation. If the issue cannot be deferred, the AB may elect to use a 70% majority on

major issues and a simple (60%) majority on minor issues. If a decision is not made by consensus, the process used and minority opinion will be documented in the meeting minutes.

#### **IV. Exchange Staff**

SFE funded positions are described below.

The **Administrative Director** is responsible for: overall coordination of SFE efforts to meet JFSP, SRS and institution planning and reporting requirements; development and promotion of experiential learning opportunities; preparation of research summaries, PowerPoint presentations, fact sheets and newsletter articles that can be used in a variety of science delivery mechanisms; preparation and distribution of public education factsheets; and maintaining regular interaction with public agencies such as the Southern Group of State Foresters. The AD serves as a liaison between the end users and partners, participates in Leadership Team and AB meetings, and coordinates monthly conference calls involving SFE staff and the management team.

The **Program and Outreach Coordinator** plays a lead role in developing and implementing SFE programs and activities. This position works closely with the Administrative Director, Co-Directors and Communication and Evaluation Specialist to plan and execute field learning events, presentations, workshops, and all other SFE science transfer activities. This position may conduct extensive travel across the region to represent, promote and conduct SFE science transfer programs. The Program and Outreach Coordinator also leads the SFE social media programs.

The **Communication and Evaluation Specialist** works closely with the Directors, AD, Outreach Coordinator and IT Specialist to help plan and carry out all SFE science transfer activities and plays a lead role in planning, compiling, analyzing, and reporting on evaluation activities.

The **Information Technology Specialist** is responsible for website development, implementation, evaluation, and security. They interact with the Leadership Team to enhance and coordinate website function, monitor the forums, and maintain website security. The IT specialist also assists in the development of on-line material (i.e. courses) for education purposes.

The **TTRS Librarian** maintains and updates the Fire Ecology Database that is a pivotal resource for SFE programming, and interacts with FRAMES to ensure compatibility and connectivity of the two databases.

#### **V. Exchange Partners**

**Land management agencies (USFS, USFWS, USNPS, state forestry, wildlife and park agencies)** set much of the agenda for the SFE. They are engaged with SFE staff in on-going definition of their technical assistance needs and priorities. They will contribute to developing syntheses of scientific and agency information, developing and maintaining a network of internal and external experts, and co-hosting field workshops and other science delivery activities.

**Research agencies (SRS, TTRS, Jones Center, and others) and universities** in the South have numerous experts in fire science and related fields. We will draw from this pool to synthesize existing information around priority issues, promote interaction among managers and scientists, develop field workshops, and participate in other science delivery activities. NCSU, UF and other appropriate organizations will work together to develop web-based educational and training programs on key fire science issues.

**Land-grant universities and the Southern Regional Extension Forester** have Cooperative Extension programs with community-based educators who produce and disseminate fire science information. Because they collaborate with research scientists, end users of research products and the public, extension educators provide a bridge between researchers and science users. SFE will coordinate with these extension programs to ensure that science delivery activities and products are made available to private consultants, landowners and the general public.

**Regional Research and Management Projects (e.g., SERPPAS, Southeast Regional Climate HUB, Regional Integrated Sciences & Assessments (CLIMAS, SECC, CISA), Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (4 in SE), Fire Learning Network)** develop information and provide syntheses, research applications and outreach activities closely related to fire management interests and issues. We will collaborate with each of these projects when appropriate to leverage opportunities for science delivery and to enhance management applications for a variety of co-relevant topics. We will also work with the Southeast Regional Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy team to assist with their action items related to science delivery.

## **VI. End-user Communities**

The primary target audiences for SFE are field-level technical specialists in public agencies and private land management who design and implement fire management activities, for both wildfire and prescribed burning. We use diverse science delivery mechanisms to reach them, including Prescribed Fire Council meetings, an interactive website, research summaries, newsletters, field tours and demonstrations, Extension workshops, focused working groups, and landowner association meetings.

## **VII. Reporting & Documentation**

Several types of SFE reports are prepared to meet JFSP requirements, for stakeholders and for Regional briefings.

- 1) Annual Progress Reports. The SFE submits an annual report to JFSP in early November that summarizes progress, planned activities, issues/concerns, opportunities for new research or science delivery applications, and adjustments in the next annual Plan of Work. The report will also be posted on the SFE website. Annual institutional reports are submitted to the USFS Southern Research Station as a deliverable for the cooperative funding agreements with UF, NCSU and TTRS.
- 2) Regional Briefings. An abbreviated summary of the Annual Report to JFSP is used for publicizing SFE programs with groups such as the Southern Group of State Foresters, USFS Region 8 administrators and Southern Research Station, Prescribed Fire Councils and landowner organizations.
- 3) Quarterly Reports of activities and plan adjustments are prepared by UF, NCSU and TTRS for the Southern Research Station grants office on an as-needed basis.