

NORWEGIAN CHAIRSHIP WILDLAND FIRES INITIATIVE

NORWEGIAN CHAIRSHIP OF THE
ARCTIC COUNCIL 2023-2025

The Norwegian Chairship of the Arctic Council (2023-2025) is launching a **Wildland Fires Initiative**, which seeks to elevate this urgent climate change issue on the Arctic Council's agenda, and beyond, to increase circumpolar collaboration, knowledge sharing, and partnership. The initiative will include public panels and outreach campaigns that will span across the Norwegian Chairship term.

BACKGROUND

Wildland fires have arisen as a critical environmental concern with far-reaching ecological, social, economic, and cultural implications, serving as a stark reminder on the urgency of addressing climate change and its immediate and long-term impacts in the Arctic and globally. Climate change causes and accelerates Arctic wildland fires in several ways as air temperatures rise, the number of lightning strikes increase, the snow cover is reduced and land surfaces become drier (AMAP, 2021a).

- More and larger fires that are more intense and stretch over a prolonged fire season that starts earlier and ends later. Research suggests that the combined impact of human activity and natural forcing on the climate have made **extreme fire risks up to 6 x more likely** in some areas (AMAP, 2021a).
- **Accelerated warming as black carbon and other emissions are released into the atmosphere.** Current estimates indicate that for example 12-15% of total deposition of black carbon in the Arctic originate from boreal forest fires in Siberia, Canada, and Alaska (AMAP, 2021b).
- Threats to life and property, altered available local food sources and degraded air quality for people living in the Arctic, resulting in **significant economic loss** from property damage as well as **physical and mental health impacts** (AMAP, 2021a).

"Wildland fire has gone from being an effect of global climate change to a driver of it. It intersects with human, environmental, and animal health."

Edward Alexander
Co-Chair Gwich'in Council International,
Co-Lead Chairship Wildland Fires Initiative



AMAP, 2021a. Arctic Climate Change Update 2021: Key Trends and Impacts. Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, Tromsø, Norway.

AMAP, 2021b. Impacts of Short-lived Climate Forcers on Arctic Climate, Air Quality and Human Health. Summary for Policy Makers. Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, Tromsø, Norway.

NEW INITIATIVE ON WILDLAND FIRES

As a growing concern for the Arctic States and Permanent Participants, Norway is elevating wildland fires on the Council's agenda – both as a challenge and opportunity requiring greater circumpolar collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

“Under Norway’s leadership, we want to ensure that our attention is turned towards better understanding the causes and impacts of wildland fires on Arctic ecosystems and communities. It is important to the Arctic States – and the rest of the world – to find solutions. We regard this as an important offering for our climate’s future,” says Morten Høglund, Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials of the Arctic Council and Co-Lead of the Wildland Fires Initiative.

Aligned with the Arctic Council’s Strategic Plan and Norway’s priorities on climate and environment and people in the North, the Chairship is launching a **Wildland Fires Initiative** to make information and knowledge on Arctic wildland fires more accessible.

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL’S WILDLAND FIRE ACTIVITIES

The Arctic Council has been working extensively on wildland fires over the past years, monitoring and addressing wildland fires on multiple levels, including fire types; prevention and response strategies; safety measures and cross-border cooperation; climate and health impacts; and the utilization of Indigenous Knowledge and Local Knowledge.

Many communities across the Arctic are directly affected by the increase of wildland fires. One of the Council’s Permanent Participants, the Gwich’in Council International (GCI), raised the issue high on the Arctic Council agenda during the Finnish Chairmanship (2017-2019). GCI’s efforts resulted in the launch of dedicated wildland fire projects addressing fire ecology mapping and monitoring, and circumpolar emergency management in collaboration with the Arctic Council’s Conservation of Flora & Fauna (CAFF) and Emergency Prevention, Preparedness, and Response (EPPR) Working Groups and other Permanent Participants.

The new Chairship initiative builds on these efforts, amplifying the findings from past activities and projects, and promoting new cross-cutting efforts within the Arctic Council and beyond. “As we are facing an accelerating emergency, we need a comprehensive overview of the best available knowledge that is both accessible and actionable,” states Morten Høglund.

INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Norway’s initiative will provide an information sharing platform to pool together and communicate the collective expertise, experiences, and resources on wildland fires from the Arctic Council Working Groups, Permanent Participants, ad Arctic States, as well as Observer states and international organizations and other relevant external actors.

Throughout its Arctic Council Chairship, Norway will host thematic wildland fire panel discussions at conferences and in the virtual realm, as well as support an outreach campaign during the wildland fire season 2024. Deliverables of the initiative aim to include a publication on the state of Arctic wildland fires, a set of recommendations to Arctic States and a comprehensive compendium on wildland fires.

OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES

- Identify knowledge gaps and best practices
- Enhance knowledge generation and sharing
- Improve the understanding of wildland fires from an Arctic and climate change perspective

▼ NORWAY’S CHAIRSHIP ARCTIC COUNCIL 2023-2025

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact the Arctic Council Secretariat acs@arctic-council.org and find an overview of the Council’s wildland fire work here: <https://arctic-council.org/explore/topics/climate/wildland-fire/>