



What can wildfire management learn from Dutch water management?

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CONTEXT

Water management in the Netherlands is a story of success because it has allowed society to live with water thanks to a shift from fighting against it to reducing flood risk. Wildfire management is still heavily based on suppression, which contributes to increasing the risk of large wildfires due to fuel accumulation. As there is an increase in extreme wildfire events and fire regimes are changing, it is necessary to adopt a similar approach: living with fire.

Hugo Lambrechts looked at the Dutch history of integrated and adaptive water management to extrapolate recommendations for wildfire management that would allow shifting from wildfire suppression to adaptation, reducing the risk of disaster and enabling society to live with fire.

OUTCOMES

Living with fire can be achieved through:

- A **holistic and integrated approach** where different levels of governance and sectors collaborate through, for example, fire boards; landscape management objectives overlap; safety and risk reduction are a priority; and decision-making takes place long ahead of disaster events, with transparency, and flexibility.
- **Adaptive management** that accepts the inherent uncertainty of current and future wildfires; combines soft (awareness-raising, education, and evacuation plans) and hard (physical) measures; accounts for future (extreme) events; and allows experimentation.
- **Resilient landscapes with stakeholder participation** where information circulates openly and freely, and all parts are contributing to the solutions of the processes taking place.



The three key lessons that integrated fire management can learn from Dutch water management.

IMPACT ON WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT

- Promote soft measures, e.g. awareness-raising days, school projects and round-table meetings with communities.
- Prioritise landscape management through, e.g., prescribed burns, grazing and sustainable forest management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For policymakers

- Prioritise sustainable forest management, a forest-based bioeconomy that benefits communities beyond wildfire risk reduction, and stakeholder engagement.
- Adopt a win-win, flexible and long-term approach where strategies are developed considering benefiting all parts, undergoing regular assessments, and obtaining results in the long run.
- Promote awareness-raising actions on the positive impacts of fire.
- Accept the uncertainty of wildfires around changing fire regimes and behaviour.
- Integrate wildfire risk reduction into building fire-resilient properties, urban and land use planning, and spatial design, especially in high-risk areas, and prioritise future developments in low-risk areas.
- Recognise that disaster events offer a window of opportunity to improve policies, which can be done effectively only if beforehand research has been done and plans have been developed.

For emergency responders

- Share easy-to-understand evacuation and emergency response plans with citizens.

FULL ARTICLE: Lambrechts, H., Paparrizos, S., Brongersma, R., Kroeze, C., Ludwig, F., Stoof, C. R. (2023). Governing wildfire in a global change context: lessons from water management in the Netherlands. *Fire Ecology*. 19 (6). Freely available at <https://bit.ly/3jngX3x>