Communication on Integrated Wildfire Risk Management - introduction

23 April 2026 – 3 Billion Tree Workshop, Madrid

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What are the issues?

- 2025: **cumulative burnt area** in the EU was bigger than ever (1 million hectares).
- Recorded burned area in 4 of the last 5 years has been above average. Coincides with increased **global warming**: 3 past years were the warmest on record.
- **Size and intensity of wildfires are increasing**. Likelihood of extreme fires (‘megafires’ is increasing).
- **Wildfire season is getting longer**. Areas that have not been fire-prone in the past face increased fire risk.
- Wildfire cause **damage** to Europe’s society, economy, environment, climate, infrastructure and cultural heritage and estimated to be **around EUR 2.5 billion annually**.
- **Main 3 driving factors are climate change, changes in land management and human behaviour**:
  - Climate change increases likelihood of extreme weather conditions: heatwaves, long drought periods, increasing temperatures, dry soils.
  - Degradation of natural ecosystems, socio-economic shifts leading to rural depopulation and land abandonment.
  - Human activity plays a major role in wildfire ignitions and by far exceeds natural causes (96%).

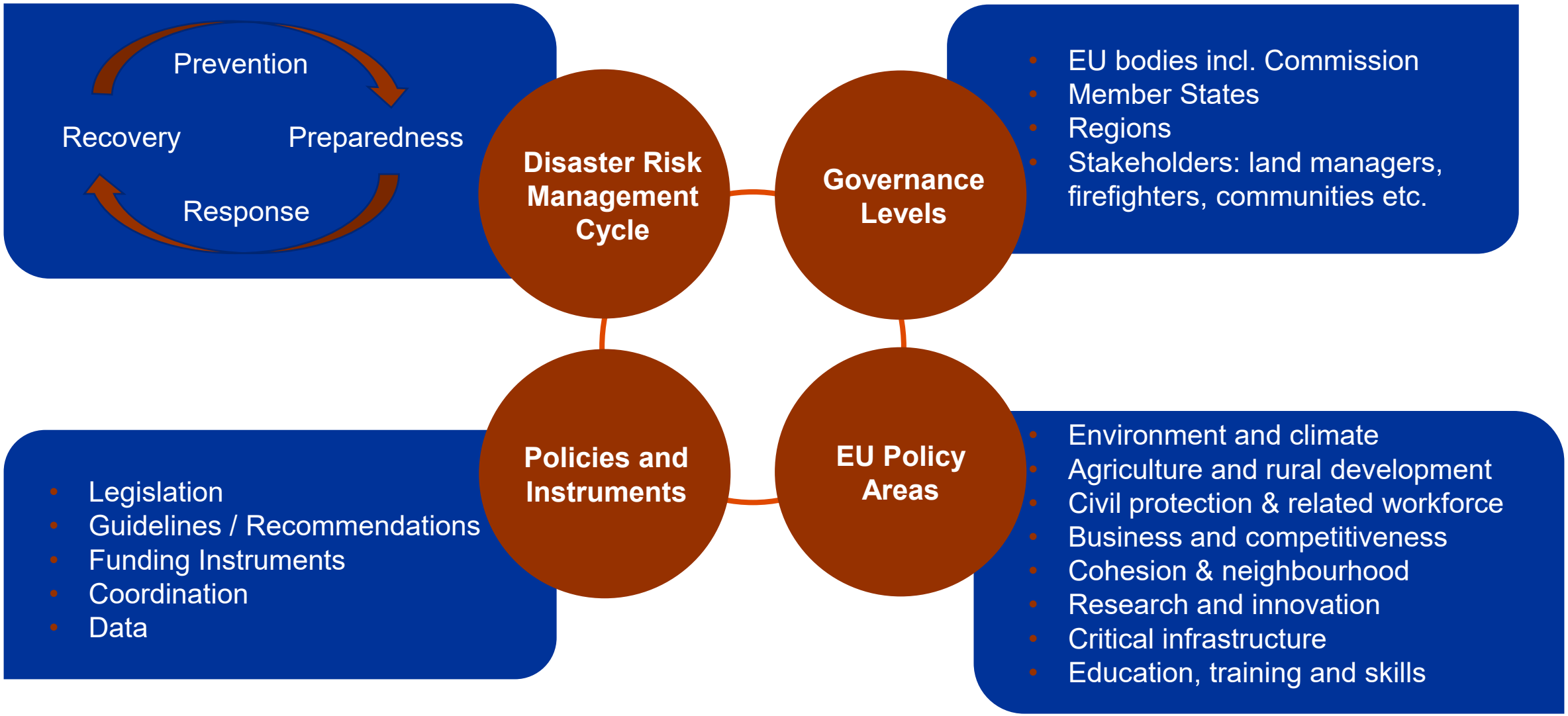
Communication on Integrated wildfire risk management

Commission published a Communication in March 2026 which outlines:

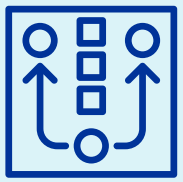
- Existing tools and actions that the EU provides; and
- Future actions the Commission will undertake to **strengthen the implementation of integrated wildfire risk management** in the EU

Definition: Integrated wildfire risk management addresses wildfire risk **holistically** as a **long-term problem** across its ecological, social, cultural, and economic dimensions, **covering the whole risk management cycle** of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

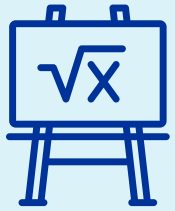
Integrated Wildfire Risk Management



Thematic blocks of the Communication



1. PREVENTION THROUGH LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT & RESTORATION



2. PREPAREDNESS WITH BETTER DATA AND RESEARCH

3. POPULATION AWARENESS AND PREPAREDNESS

4. SUPPORT FOR COORDINATED RESPONSE

5. POST-FIRE RECOVERY

6. STRENGHTENING MANAGEMENT OF WILDFIRE RISK

7. INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Link to tree planting & reforestation

Goal: Promote integration of wildfire risk into nature restoration and nature conservation policies

Proposed actions:

- Provide technical support to Member States to integrate wildfire risk considerations into their national restoration plans throughout 2026 and 2027.
- Encourage the uptake of existing guidelines on closer-to-nature forest management and biodiversity-friendly afforestation and reforestation, with an emphasis on the Mediterranean region.
- Support exchange of best practices on post-fire recovery methods throughout 2027.

Next steps

- Prepare together with Member States' experts and other stakeholders **guidelines for the implementation of integrated wildfire risk management**.
- Develop a **portal that provides information on EU funding opportunities for integrated wildfire risk management**.
- Carry out the proposed actions and report on progress.

EU Commission Guidance on
Natura 2000 and Climate Change

April 2026

Gonzalo González Jurado, European Commission, DG ENV.D3, Nature Conservation

Natura 2000 and Climate Change

Guidance document on Natura 2000 and climate change (Commission notice, 24 March 2026)

With implications for:

- FIRE MANAGEMENT

- TREE SPECIES SELECTION

Natura 2000 and Climate Change

How Natura 2000 can help reduce and mitigate the impacts of extreme events – wildfires

Fire as an ecological process, but threats to biodiversity from large-scale fires

Synergies conservation measures-WRM:

- OGF
- Habitat mosaics
- Species diversity
- Native tree species
- Large deadwood (context-dependent)

Natura 2000 and Climate Change

Managing climate change related extreme events - Fire management

Traditional protection infrastructures complemented by landscape and ecosystem-based prevention

Natura 2000 and Climate Change

- Managing climate change related extreme events - Fire management
- Landscape and ecosystem-based prevention
  - Landscape planning
    - maintains or restore multifunctional resilient mosaic landscapes
  - Ecosystem-based fuel management techniques
    - Thinning
    - Prescribed burning
    - Grazing

Natura 2000 and Climate Change

Clarity in management-related legal questions:

- Wildfire protection infrastructures subject to an appropriate assessment under Article 6 HD

- Emergency operations in Natura 2000 sites

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Climate Change Impacts on Forest Habitats

Key Challenges:

- Warming temperatures, altered precipitation regimes, and increased disturbances (droughts, storms, pests) reduce forest resilience.
- Shifts in tree species distributions

Consequences:

- Changes in canopy density, microclimate, hydrology, and soil conditions

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Principles for Management

- Natural transitions (e.g., spruce → beech → oak) should be accepted if climate-induced, not human-caused.

- Avoid resisting change where habitats are no longer climatically viable—this risks:
  - Ecosystem degradation (e.g., pest outbreaks, fire risk).
  - Loss of biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

  Support resilience through:
  - Sustainable forest management (SFM).
  - Assisted migration (if natural adaptation is too slow).

  Key Message: **"Manage for resilience, not stasis."**

Natura 2000 and Climate Change

Tree Selection Criteria for Climate Adaptation

- Prioritise Species That: ✅ Match future climate projections (use diverse models, not single trajectories). ✅ Enhance diversity

- Mixed stands = higher resilience/productivity under variable climates.
- Native species preferred (avoid non-natives unless justified).
- Water infiltration, moisture retention, evapotranspiration regulation. ✅ Include pioneer species (e.g., birch, rowan, aspen) for:
  - Microclimatic buffering.
  - Soil protection during transitions.

- Avoid: ❌ Over-reliance on single "miracle" species. ❌ Non-native species unless exceptional cases (e.g., no native alternatives)

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Adaptive Management and Monitoring in Natura 2000

Steps for Climate-Smart Forestry in Natura 2000:

- Align with conservation objectives (update periodically for climate realities).
- Document transitions: Prove changes are climate-driven, not anthropogenic.
- Monitor systematically: Tree mortality, pest outbreaks, fire impacts, soil health.
- Adjust strategies based on new data (e.g., shift species mixes).
- Train managers in climate-adapted practices.

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Legal and Policy Considerations: Natura 2000 Compliance

- Non-deterioration principle:
  - Member States must prevent avoidable harm (e.g., poor management).
  - Climate-driven changes ≠ deterioration if documented.

- Precautionary principle: Maintain genetic diversity to safeguard future options.

- Justify exceptions (e.g., non-native species) with evidence.

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Thank you!