

What principles should be applied to the selection of management authority for wildfire?

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ABSTRACT – Disastrous wildfires, which result in massive damage to natural resources and loss of lives, homes and businesses, are to occur more frequently due to climate change and increased development in fire-prone areas. When Extreme Wildfire Events occur, there are acute debates on inefficient coordination, overlapping institutions involved, restructuring organizations and in some cases changes in roles and responsibilities are made.

One of the major questions is to restructure the whole of fire management or only the wildfire suppression sector to strengthen administrative efficiency and simplicity. Among involved actors, forest or land management agencies and the civil protection/emergency services that are responsible for the life and property protection are mainly mentioned.

Based on the characteristics of wildland fire management and experience over many years in the Korea Forest Service, five principles are presented that can be taken into consideration in reviewing government bodies engaged in wildland fire management and selecting a leading governing body in charge of fire management:

- Effectiveness: the adequate capacity to ensure that disaster-causing wildfires are reduced or are prevented.
- Efficiency: cost-efficiency with the minimal budget increase and availability of current resources
- Specialty: professional expertise and practical experience on wildfire management
- Sustainability: ability to manage the various functions of natural resources in a balanced and sustainable manner while promoting fire-resilience
- Community-involvement: the social, economic, cultural and environmental interaction of local people with natural resources and their voluntary participation in wildland fire management

This paper will use an example from direct experience in deciding the leading agency for forest fire management in the Republic of Korea, following a large forest fire.

As wildfires are inevitable and the financial burden is increasing, the government reshuffling issue will continue, in particular, in areas with forests surrounding urban areas. The selection of the competent government body and their range of wildland fire management will be determined in various forms according to conditions of each country such as fire weather, natural resource statutes, the capacity of involved authorities and public opinion. However, these five principles may assist in informing the discussion on fire management roles and responsibilities.

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