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Climate change impacts on forest fires: the stakeholders' perspective

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In this work, we present a synthesis of the presentations and discussions which arose during a workshop on 'Impacts of climate change on forest fires' held in September 2011 at the National Observatory of Athens, Greece in the framework of EU project CLIMRUN.

At first, a general presentation about climate change and extremes in the Greek territory provided the necessary background to the audience and highlighted the need for data and information exchange between scientists and stakeholders through climate services within CLIMRUN. Discussions and presentations that followed linked climate with forest science through the use of a meteorological index for fire risk and future projections of fire danger using regional climate models. The current situation on Greek forests was also presented, as well as future steps that should be taken to ameliorate the situation under a climate change world. A time series analysis of changes in forest fires using available historical data on forest ecosystems in Greece was given in this session. This led to the topic of forest fire risk assessment and fire prevention, stating all actions towards sustainable management of forests and effective mechanisms to control fires under climate change. Options for a smooth adaptation of forests to climate change were discussed together with the lessons learned on practical level on prevention, repression and rehabilitation of forest fires. In between there were useful interventions on sustainable hunting and biodiversity protection and on climate change impacts on forest ecosystems dynamics. The importance of developing an educational program for primary/secondary school students on forest fire management was also highlighted.

The perspective of forest stakeholders on climate change and how this change can affect their current or future activities was addressed through a questionnaire they were asked to complete. Results showed that the majority of the participants consider climate variability to be important or very important and to influence their activities. Extreme climate events, desertification and drought were regarded as the most important environmental problems along with loss of biodiversity. Most of the participants answered that they use historical data for research, and would welcome climate data and services targeted to their sector if offered.

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