South East of England Regional Wildfire Group

and

Home Counties Wildfire Operations Group

Project Plan 2013 - 2015

South East of England Wildfire Regional Group

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Project Plan

2013 - 2015

Prepared by

South East England Regional Wildfire Group and

Home Counties Wildfire Operations Group Partnerships

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Executive Summary

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1 Introduction

This document sets out the third phase of the project plan for the South East of England Regional Wildfire Group (SEEWG) and the Home Counties Wildfire Operations Group (HCWG), seeking to build on the success and partnership working initiated by the first two plans

It builds on these plans, which were originally prepared by Rural Development Initiatives Ltd. in association with, and on behalf of, the South East of England Regional Wildfire Group and the Home Counties Wildfire Operations Group partnerships.

The South East England Regional Wildfire Group (SEEWG) is seeking to operate in two distinct areas:

1. To be a key deliverer, alongside land managers / owners and the Fire and Rescue Services, of Wildfire Impact Reduction.

2. To influence where appropriate local, regional and national policy with regards to wildfire reduction through highlighting both areas of best practice and those that require attention

It will do this by creating a forum between all the interested parties and providing strategic guidance where required.

2 Aims and Objectives

2.1 Aim

As specified in the Terms of Reference, the aim of the SEEWG is to create a forum between fire services (FRS), land management organisations, CFOA and government that will provide strategic guidance for land managers to enable them to reduce risk on their properties and hence reduce the increasing impact on FRS resource. This Forum will also be able to interpret national guidance for land managers / owners that impacts on FRS and feed this into the relevant national and regional bodies.

2.2 Objectives

1. Reduce the number, area burnt and impact of wildfires (as defined by CFOA. FRS nationally) on:
    a. **Environment –** heritage, natural and built.
    b. **Infrastructure –** property, way leaves and transport infrastructure.
    c. **Climate change –** reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and CO_2.
    d. **Social –** recreation, cultural, aesthetics, life, health and well being and community.
    e. **Economic –** food, fibre, fuel, sporting and tourism.

And to have accessible or in place the reporting / monitoring systems to facilitate this.

2. Provide a framework for partnership working and ensure that all partners are able to contribute to an integrated approach including; management, education, training, strategic planning, incident recording, regional policy, tactics and doctrine.
3. Reduce the amount of resources required and risk to safety that exists for major wildfire incidents by; sharing resources, tools, vehicles, equipment, knowledge and experience through the use of training and the creation of a regional / national asset register.
4. To provide input where required into the creation of a framework for a regional response to wildfires – eg trained wildfire officers
5. Working with land managers to link open space management to wildfire prevention / intervention

6. To advise CFOA, through the regional lead / CFOA representative of key issues that affect the South East England region.

7. Provide a forum for discussion between member organisations that will assist in the production of effective wildfire reduction strategies.

2.3 Definitions

Wildfire: Unplanned fire in the natural environment, in this instance, with a particular emphasis on heathland and forest fires.

Prescribed burning: Planned use of fire within a defined area for a particular management purpose. Wildfire can quickly develop from prescribed burning if adequate precautions are not taken.

Deliberate fires: A fire resulting from a person placing burning material to cause ignition. The intent of the person may have been to cause harm or destruction to life or property (arson-criminal offence) or to modify fuels and/or vegetation for land management purposes (summary offence).

Deliberate – own property	Where a fire is started deliberately. Own property refers to the normal occupiers – including a child in their own house.
Deliberate – others property	Where a fire is started deliberately by somebody who is not an occupier of the property. This includes fires in non-residential buildings where the owner is not involved e.g. fires in office buildings, fires in barns, cars.
Deliberate – unknown owner	Where a fire is started deliberately but it cannot be determined whether it was own or others property.

Source: Incident Reporting System Help and Guidance. Version 1.5 Communities and Local Government. Sept 2008.

SEEWG: South East of England Regional Wildfire Group. Works on strategic activities needed to deliver the aims and objectives.

HCWG: Home Counties Wildfire Operations Group. Works on operational activities needed to deliver the aims and objectives within the Home Counties

Home Counties: A landscape scale area across three countries; Hampshire, Berkshire and Surrey. Typified by Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, Wealden Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) and surrounding areas. Please see map in Appendix 1.

South East of England: The region as defined by Government Office of the South East of England.

3 Impacts of Wildfire

Wildfires can have significant short and long term effects on the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the landscapes and communities affected.

3.1 Wildfires - the problem

Wildfires are identified as hazards by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

There is a long tradition of using controlled fire to manage some habitats, but out of control wildfires are entirely different and threaten the biodiversity, society and the economy. As shown in the table below, a considerable number of wildfire incidents occur in the United Kingdom. Due to only partial recording the number of primary fires in England between 1995 and 2004 is accepted as an under estimate by wildfire practitioners.

Table 1: Comparison of Number of 'Wildfires' by type and location between 1995 and 2004

	Primary Fires[1]	**Secondary Fires[2]**
United Kingdom	26,935	833,328
England	17,487	496,625
Average total per year in England	1,943	51,181
SE England	**2,750**	**70,480**

3.2 Environment – heritage, natural and built

The South East has exceptional environmental assets, in terms of both landscape and biodiversity. The Region has many internationally, nationally and locally important habitats which are highly susceptible to wildfire damage, including:

- 40 % of the UK's lowland heathland;
- Numerous designated sites, including SPAs and SSSIs.

[1] Known as Primary Grassland and Heathland Fires (FDR1). Those involve more than four fire appliances to the incident. Includes metropolitan Fire and Rescue Services. Data from Department of Communities and Local Government.

[2] Known as Grassland Fires (FDR3). Those involving less than four fire appliances to the incident. Excludes metropolitan Fire and Rescue Services. Data from Department of Communities and Local Government.

Within the South East over 1,500 hectares of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) were burnt by wildfires between 1999 and 2006, many as a result of deliberate or accidental fires. For example wildfires have had a significant impact on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA and New Forest National Park as well as other statutory designated sites in the South East.

Case study A: Pirbright Ranges Fire 2003

Over 870 hectares of lowland heath designated as Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) was burnt over a four day period from the 17th to the 20th April 2003. This area, in conjunction with Bagshot Heath, forms one of the most extensive tracts of heathland in south east England. The area also forms part of the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham candidate SAC which is considered to be one of the best examples of extensive wet and dry heathland and depression on peat substrates in the UK.

The extent of damage to the vegetation varied depending on the intensity of the fire. In the small valleys the burn appears to have been particularly intense and all herbaceous material to ground level was removed and seeds and shallow roots in the surface layer also being killed off. In this situation it is likely that heather will take longer to regenerate and the increased bare ground will enable annuals and grasses such as *Molina* to colonise and bracken to re-establish unchecked.

The effect of the fire on the sensitive wetland, bog areas and valley mires may well result in a significantly altered species composition. *Sphagnum* mosses are very vulnerable to fire damage and where nutrient levels are increased by layers of ash on the surface, bryophytes such as *polytrichum spp* and *Camplopus introflexus* will tend to replace the bog mosses. The incidence of fire in itself may result in significant drying out of this habitat.

The fire was highly damaging to invertebrate and reptiles, such as Sand Lizard, Smooth snake and specialist invertebrates. It is also inevitable that any ground nesting birds such as Skylark will have lost their first clutch. It may take upwards of 10 years for the area to return to a suitable state for many heathland fauna.

From 'Pirbright Fire 17 - 20 April 2009' MOD

3.3 Property and Infrastructure (Wayleaves and Transport)

The South East region faces a particular threat from wildfire due to the proximity of forestry and heathland to property, wayleaves and major transport routes. Large areas at risk from wildfire are

directly adjacent to developed areas. A major wildfire has the potential to damage buildings and property.

Much critical infrastructure in the South East is located on or adjacent to agricultural, forestry, defence training and other rural land uses - all of which are susceptible to wildfire. This infrastructure is vital to the region's economy and societal needs, and plays a critical role in response to emergency incidents. Temporary closure or damage to infrastructure has occurred several times in recent years, as illustrated in the case study below. A wildfire could result in serious disruption to the South East's infrastructure and result in significant economic consequences.

Given the density of major highways in the South East Region the risk and impact of wildfires is particularly acute. The Highways Agency has undertaken a number of modelling scenarios to estimate the cost of closure of a variety of road types which indicate that costs of up to £1m per hour for rural routes in proximity to wildfire at risk sites:

Scenario 1: Rural Motorway closure - diversion via rural 'A' roads

- A rural motorway has an AADT (Annual Average Daily Traffic) flow of 80000 vehicles.
- The motorway is closed in both directions for 24 hrs to deal with a fire.
- Traffic is diverted to a high standard rural 'A' roads and allowed to rejoin the motorway at the next junction. They experience an average delay over the 24 hr period (increase in journey time) of 15 minutes.
- The 'A' road also experiences congestion; AADT 32000, average 5 minutes delay over 24 hr period.

Cost of delay: £315,067

Scenario 2: Rural Motorway closure - diversion via inter urban routes

- A rural motorway 100000 AADT is closed and the traffic diverts via an inter urban route.
- An average delay of 45 minutes is experienced by the M/way traffic. Other impacts 200000 vehicles delayed by an average of 15 minutes.
- If the inter-urban route is primarily non-trunk then the cost to HA traffic is approx: £1,042,500

Cost of delay: £1,737,500

Scenario 3: Motorway Closure – diversion via other motorways and trunk roads

- M25 J13 (dual 4 lane at 1800 vehicles per lane) closed for 1 hour during a peak period.
- M25 - 14400 vehicles experience a 1.5 hour delay diverting via alternative routes.
- Other Impacts A3, A320, M3, A30, A3113, M4, & M40 affected, allow for 36 lanes flowing at 1800 veh/hr. Assume a delay of 45 minutes to 64800 vehicles on their journey on or across the M25.

Cost of delay: £975,780

Case study B: Disruption to Infrastructure

Ash Ranges (1999)

The Ash Ranges Fire was deliberately started and the wildfire caused the temporary closure of the Waterloo to Alton Train Line, as well as local A-roads during the four-day incident.

Pirbright Ranges (2003)

The Pirbright Ranges Fire again closed local A roads but also lead to the evacuation of military homes and concerns about Farnborough Airport flight path. The impact of both these wildfires had regional implications on major infrastructure and reduced Fire and Rescue resources to respond to other emergencies.

Sandhurst & Swinley Forest (2004) and Thursley Common (2006)

Reports have been produced for incidents in 2004[3] at Sandhurst Training Area and Swinley Forest and in 2006[4] at Thursley Common both of which caused significant disruption including damage to power lines and closure of A roads, Thursley in particular seeing the closure of the A3 into London.

Tarmac Hill and Lightwater Country Park (2011)

The effect of these fires, both running concurrently and either side of the M3 motorway into London was a number of lane closures over a prolonged period and a complete closure over a lesser period that caused considerable disruption / delays.

[3] Report of fire at Sandhurst Training Area and Swinley Forest, April 2004. High voltage power lines effects fire suppression strategy and tactics (Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire)

[4] Report of fire at Thursley Common, July 2006. Evacuation of homes at Thursley and 'A – Road' closures

3.4 Climate change – impacts of changes in climate and reducing the loss of greenhouse gases and CO_2

It is predicted that the South East of England will be considerably affected by the impacts of climate change. The region is predicted to see lower levels of rainfall, an increase in evapo-transpiration and increases in summer temperatures - conditions which are set to prolong the period that vegetation will be susceptible to wildfires and result in more severe wildfires.

Wildfire fires are extreme weather events (i.e. high temperatures, low humidity) brought about by climatic changes (i.e. drought caused by low spring and summer rainfall), inappropriate land use/management and human motives (deliberate or accidental).

The years of 1995 and 2003 saw the driest springs and warmest summers in recent years and consequently suffered a far greater the average number of wildfires; the number of primary fires recorded by the Fire and Rescue Services during these years disproportionally account of almost 40% of fires in the entire nine year period between 1995 and 2004. By 2040 the temperatures seen in 1995 and 2003 will be average temperatures, and consequently it is predicted that the number of fires experienced in these years will also become the norm.

Table 2: Number of wildfires in United Kingdom 1995 - 2004

Calendar Year	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003***	**2004***
Primary wildfires**	627	511	380	107	197	183	118	169	303	155
Secondary wildfires***	13,510	7,629	6,060	3,456	5,721	4,081	6,097	5,466	13,100	5,360

Notes:

* = Excluding incidents not recorded during periods of industrial action in November 2002 and Jan/Feb 2003
** = Primary fires include grassland and heathland fires where 5 or more fire appliances attended
*** = Secondary fires include grass, straw and stubble fires where less than 5 fire appliances attended
Red = United Kingdoms lowest rainfall and highest temperatures during spring and summer and worst wildfire years.
Source = Fire Directorate, Communities and Local Government Fire Statistics, HM Government 1995 to 2004 (19 June 2006).

This increase in fires is likely to result in an increase in green house gas emissions and reduce carbon sinks from vegetation and soils. Due to poor data recording the South East region is unable to define the net loss of carbon and release of green house gases due to wildfire.

Whilst what were once relevant government performance targets (eg National Indicator 188: Planning to Adapt to Climate Change) are no longer compulsory, it is noted that local authorities may find these useful as guidance when considering the progress of climate change events using risk assessments. This would mean the definition of a baseline, identifying future impacts, conducting comprehensive risk assessments and action planning as well as implementing, monitoring and reviewing progress. In order to do this two elements are required; a risk analysis tool and a monitoring and recording system.

3.5 Social – recreation, cultural, aesthetics, life, health and well being and community

For Fire and Rescue Services and their partners, wildfire poses a direct and indirect risk to the communities they protect. Directly there is the risk to life, and indirectly large wildfires can seriously reduce emergency resilience to other incidents, especially during critical periods (e.g. school holidays, periods of sustained high temperatures, rush hours etc.). Wildfire creates safety issues for those living in isolated properties either in forests or on, or properties adjacent to heathland. Many sites that are at risk of wildfire are also heavily used for recreation, putting walkers, cyclists and dog owners in danger. In the worst case scenario fires can result in serious injury and loss of life.

The risk of wildfire can create a conflict between the interests of land owners and managers and those that wish to access the countryside: it is believed the vast majority of wildfires in the South East are caused by members of the public[5]. Land managers are keen to protect their assets and to protect the biodiversity. However, access to the countryside is a key priority for promoting health and recreation objectives. This potential for conflict could be ameliorated through improved public understanding of the risks and impact of wildfire and of fire prevention.

3.6 Economic – food, fibre, fuel, sporting, tourism, operational costs

Wildfire has potentially huge and wide-ranging economic costs:

- Loss of income from the land - a fire can eliminate income from field sports for as long as 10 years and destroy timber crops.
- The costs of fighting large scale wildfires are high due to the number of personnel and equipment required and due to the prolonged time periods involved.

[5] Moorland Association (2003) Burning Issues

- Damage to assets – from buildings to fences. Restoring damaged habitats is a hugely costly and time consuming operation.
- Landscape damage from fire also impacts on tourism enterprises which rely on attractive rural settings. Negative publicity in the media could have a significant impact on the numbers of visitors coming into the area.
- Longer term, land or home owners may be unable to obtain fire insurance cover at a reasonable cost.

The combined effect of the various costs can severely impact the viability of individual businesses, threaten jobs and damage the sustainability of local economies.

Case Study D: Thursley Wildfire

Thursley Common Fire 14th – 21st July 2006

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service have estimated that the cost of responding to the Thursley Fire was in the region of £200,000. This includes additional costs labour (not normal wages), damage to vehicles, other Brigades costs, additional fuel etc.

The first call to the Service was received shortly after midday on the 14th July. Initial crews were faced with a serious fire situation and quickly requested additional appliances (4 fire appliances, 3 land rovers, 1 water carrier and further specialist appliances from by Hampshire).

A combination of the difficult access, firefighting terrain and the environmental conditions saw rapid fire spread however and this was matched by the attendance of 20 fire appliances and 8 land rovers, coming from all over the region. The fire was declared a major incident at around 1500hrs and silver commend was set up at Thursley Cricket Club.

By 1900 hours on the first day of this incident over 40 hectares of undergrowth and woodlands were involved in the fire and appliances from West Sussex, Hampshire and Royal Berkshire as well as Surrey were deployed at the incident.

By midnight on the first day there were 3 fire fronts and 5 firefighting sectors in use. Firefighting continued throughout the second day, but with difficult conditions again being faced the fire grew to cover an area of 60 hectares. East Sussex's forest firefighting vehicle was called in to assist the operations.

Steady progress was made over the next 4-5 days with the stop message being sent on the 20th July at 0955 hrs. In total 156 hectares of undergrowth and woodlands had been affected by the fire, over 300 appliances of different types and from different Services across the South East had been used, up to 1000 firefighting personnel deployed and 140 gruelling shifts undertaken by officers – some of them returning day after day.

3.7 Increasing Risk

Risk is defined by the likelihood and severity of wildfire incidents in the South East. The likelihood of Wildfires occurring is predicted to increase within the region for the following reasons:

Climate Change:

The UK Climate Projections[6] for the South East in the 2020s predict that global warming will bring hotter and drier summers. As described in section 3.4 the extreme temperature experienced in 2003 will become the norm. It is under these conditions that wildfire is more likely to occur and be of significantly greater severity and difficulty to control.

Increased regional population:

The South East is home to 8.2 million people, predicted to grow by 64,300 p.a. to 9.5 million by 2026. Whilst it has the nation's highest quality of life, there is considerable pressure to provide accessibility to the 80% of the region that is defined as rural. Already the impact of the increased future population and desire for rural recreation has created conflict with Priority Habitats[7]. As the majority of wildfires in the south east are caused by the public, this increase in population will inevitably result in a corresponding increase in the risk of accidental and / or deliberate ignitions.

The severity of these wildfires will also increase, with the following being the major influence on this:

Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

Xxxxxxx Insert Text xxxxxxxx

[6] UK Climate Projections (2009) Key Findings for South East England, 2020's, medium emissions scenario

[7] Impacts caused by proposed development on site defined for nature conservation of European importance which require a Habitats Regulations Assessment

4 Why is this project needed?

Despite the risks and impacts outlined in the previous section, Fire and Rescue Services and members of both fire groups have identified a number of key weaknesses in their preparedness, prevention and response to wildfires.

4.1 Need for joint working

To effectively reduce the risk and impact of wildfires we must bring together the knowledge and responsibilities of the fire and land management sectors. This is because:

- Due to relative infrequency of wildfires in comparison to urban incidents, the Fire and Rescue Services and land managers suffer from a lack of regular experience in jointly responding to these incidents. Joint training and exercising between these organisations will improve the overall response to any such incident.
- Landowners and managers have no statutory responsibility for providing effective preparedness and prevention measures. They require increased awareness and guidance to reduce the severity and likelihood of wildfires, and enable effective communications with the Fires Services.
- Landowners and managers and Fire and Rescue Services have no framework for joint working. This is a critical hurdle restricting the effectiveness of response to wildfire incidents.
- Incidents require specialised equipment to extinguish wildfires. This equipment exists but we need to identify owners and investigate the barriers and solutions to sharing equipment.
- To provide a cost effective approach to wildfires to reduce the financial burden upon; landowners, local authorities, fire and rescue services and land management agencies as well as communities. With the pressure on public spending ever increasing it is vital that joint working and best practice is adopted in order not only to reduce the impact of wildfires but the costs of preparedness. SEEWG will work with its partners to promote the introduction of Wildfire Adapted Communities and other such schemes as made available through the identification and adoption of international best practice.

Case Study E: Sandhurst Ranges & Swinley Wildfire 2004

The fire, lasting four days, occurred on the boundary of two landowners (Ministry of Defence and Crown Estates) and the operational boundaries of three Fire and Rescue Services (Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire). By effective joint working, these services and agencies (as well as two other supporting Fire and Rescue Services) managed to restrict and contain the fire resulting in far less damage. This was achieved by the bringing together of different specialist skills, equipment and knowledge from foresters and fire fighters. Examples include; the use of specialist earth moving and vegetation clearing equipment, vegetation species types and attributes, fire behaviour, logistics and communication

4.2 SEEWG and HCWG

A wildfire group is a partnership of public and private organisations that work together on a range of activities to reduce the risk of wildfire occurrence and promote preparation of an effective response when they do occur. Due to the nature of wildfire risk and wildfire fighting, working in partnership is seen as essential.

Wildfire Groups have developed in the years since their inception and are now a key mechanism for tackling the risks posed by Wildfires - fire and rescue services cannot tackle these issues on their own. Established wildfire groups, such as the Peak District Fire Operations Group and Northumberland Fire Group have had considerable success in improving the response to and reducing the effects of wildfires.

However the achievements of these groups to date have been delivered by members of the group undertaking these tasks in addition to their prescribed job roles. There is no doubt that to reach their potential further development of the groups is required and they would benefit from dedicated staff time and funded resources. For a number of activities the groups have established working groups to define what they would like to achieve but do not have the capacity to deliver.

The amount of time and resource required cannot be found from within the groups as they are due to existing workloads and commitments – an important part of the groups work going forwards must be to secure additional funded resource if possible.

4.3 Structure and Organisation

Wildfire activity in the South East operates on two levels: there is a strategic group that operates at a regional level and several groups that work on more operational issues based on logical landscape areas that fit with wildfire risk.

The SEEWG is a group of key organisations that wish to drive forward the wildfire agenda at a regional level and promote cooperation across administrative boundaries. This group tends to deal with strategic and policy issues. This group focuses on ensuring coordinated activity between fire services and across county boundaries in the South East. It also creates a forum that is capable of influencing key policies which operate at regional level.

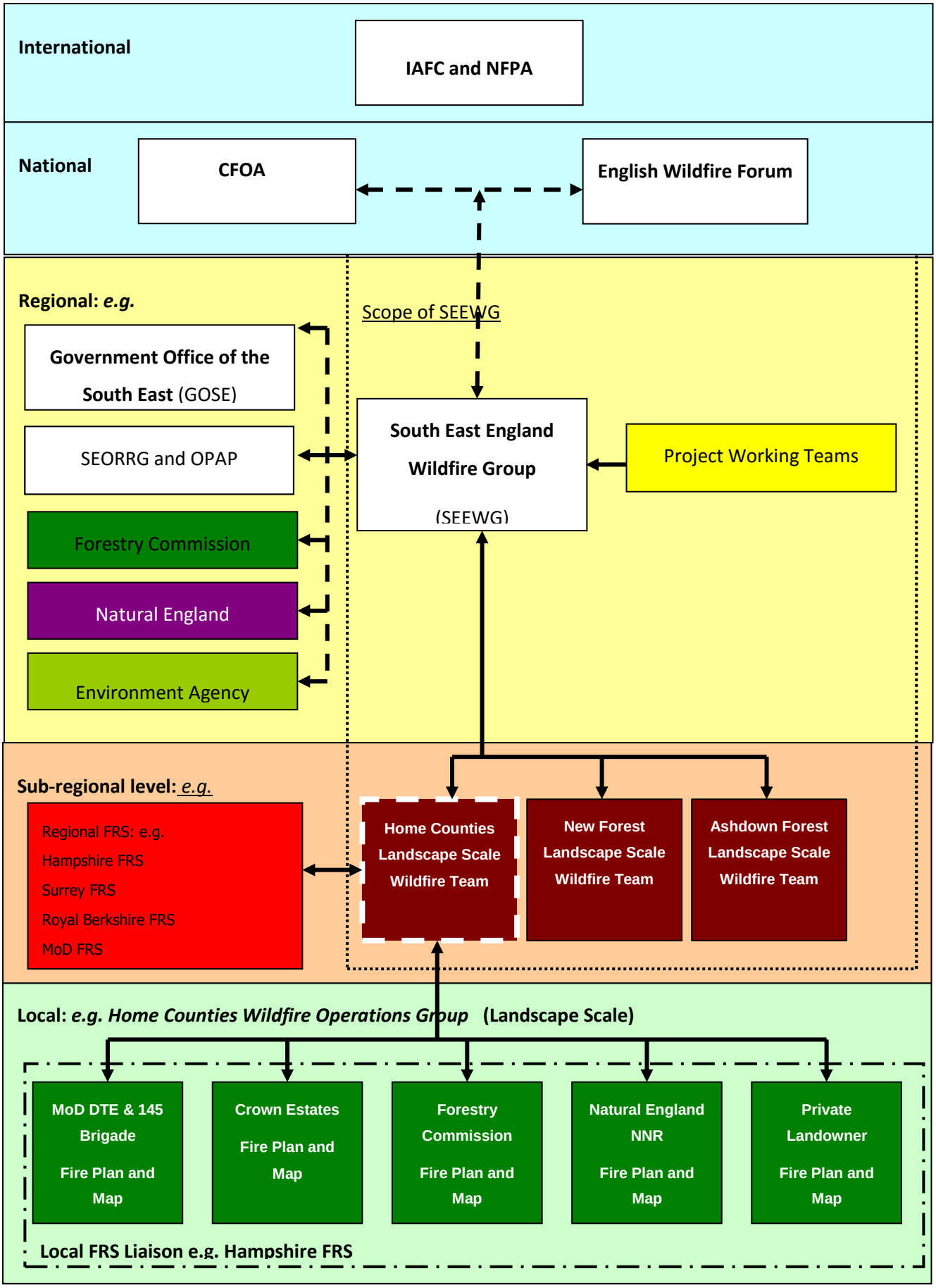
The HCWG is a pilot area for an operational level group. Within this landscape scale area this group will work on the delivery of the majority of the project activities, such as fire plans, public awareness and training. This is where local knowledge and contacts are really important. Due to geographical size of the South East Region, it has been agreed that it would be too ambitious to attempt to establish operation groups in all areas where they are required in this early stage. In the long term, beyond this two year development phase, other operational groups are planned, including Ashdown Forest, and further development of the New Forest Wildfire group is already active. The lessons learned from the Home Counties can be applied to these other areas.

To ensure good communication between the two groups, the chairs of the operation groups will sit on the SEEWG and vice versa. It is essential that ideas can be fed up to the SEEWG as well as down to the operational groups.

Chairman:	Rob Gazzard (Forestry Commission)
Lead Organisation:	Alan Clark (Surrey Fire and Rescue Service)
Project Manager:	to be decided

A diagram of the groups' structures can be found below and further details can be found in the Terms of Reference in Appendix 3.

SEEWG & HCWG National and International Structure



4.5 What has been achieved to date?

Since 2005 the group has achieved the following:

- Identified significant demand for wildfire groups in the South East of England and achieved a strong core membership
- Generated letters of support for the establishment of the group and preliminary work programme (see Appendix 4)
- Held regular meetings of both SEEWG and HCWG
- Agreed terms of reference
- Fire Plan Working Group, agreed template, symbology and working towards process for collection and use
- Local Risk Register - Wildfire Guidance (Text for Community/Local Resilience Registers within SE England Region.)
- Land management policy working group established and objectives identified
- Linked the regional group both nationally and internationally, drawing on best practice and influencing local working arrangements
- Forged links with other relevant partners in the wildfire prevention workstream including, for example, statutory water undertakers

Further details of these achievements can be found in Appendix 5: 'Review of SEEWG Outcomes'.

5 Action Plan

The project activities / objectives all fall into one of the four areas of work:

A. Prevention

B. Preparation

C. Project Management

D. Communication

Communication and, to an extent, good project management are cross cutting themes relevant to every project objective. However there are certain tasks that are implicit to these themes and they include promoting best practice and the activities of the group generally,

5.1 Prevention

Raising Public Awareness

Addressing the causes of wildfire is a priority if the group is to reduce the number, areas burnt and impact of fires on the environment, heritage, infrastructure etc. Although there are no quality statistics on the causes of wildfires in the UK, it is widely acknowledged that very few are caused entirely by natural events. There are three main causes of wildfire are but no data to support which causes are most prevalent in the South East. However, it is the anecdotal experience of group members that all three of the following are significant:

- Deliberate ignition
- Accidental - members of the public and other legitimate site users, e.g. public playing with fire, barbecues and bonfires, military training, land management operations, etc.
- Out of control prescribed burning due to poor management or sudden change in weather conditions.

This is a key element of the project and it must be effective. Due to the relative lack of understanding of where to target effort and what methods to use to achieve greatest impact, there will be benefits in drawing on research undertaken or identified best practice, whether in academia or elsewhere by partners.

However, the focus of the Group must be practical in nature based on what is currently known and achievable. This will include:

- Producing a communication strategy and toolkit to include general wildfire prevention guidance for the local and national presses, through a nationally recognised body where possible (eg CFOA) (1a)
- Holding, with partners wherever possible Wildfire awareness events - one per year per County being a minimum target ((1b)
- Promoting the use of prevention initiatives such as Firewise and Fire Adapted Communities both regionally and nationally where possible and appropriate (1c)

Informing Land management Practices to reduce wildfire risk

There are serious concerns in the South East that the risk of severe wildfire is being exacerbated due to land management practices. Key concerns include the fuel load and lack of fire breaks. During the first phase of this project the group produced wildfire guidance to inform land management policy which it must now seek uptake for as widely as possible.

The group's aims here must again be practical and deliverable and hence it will:

- Hold workshops and site visits in identified higher risk areas demonstrating lessons learned and good practice (1d)
- Lobby national bodies and / or government to ensure that the wildfire guidance for land managers is taken up (1e)

Influencing Planning

There is a critical relationship between land management, planning policy and wildfire incidents. Developments that are adjacent to land at risk of wildfire, which do not take this into account during the planning stage, may increase the factors, frequency and impact of incidents. The group will therefore seek to:

- Lobby key organisations and influence policies to include potential impacts related to wildfire. (1f)

Spatial Risk Analysis

As the South East Region is both very large (geographic size, population etc.) and diverse (habitats, land use etc.) there is a need to prioritise the approach to reducing wildfire incidents. Using member's experience and professional judgement, three broad areas of greatest wildfire hazard have been defined; New Forest, Home Counties and Ashdown Forest. In order to effectively focus and reduce the wildfire risk within these areas it is necessary to risk assess at a site or management unit level. This would then exclude large areas of non-susceptible habitat and target resources and effort more efficiently.

This risk-based approach will significantly improve preparedness, prevention and ultimate response to wildfire incidents. Additionally it will promote appropriate land management techniques to reduce vegetation fuel loading. Further this can then be linked to better wildfire reporting systems and thus help inform Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management Plans and help inform development of policies that could impact on wildfire risk.

The risk associated with wildfire is identified by two key factors, the likelihood of occurrence and severity of the impact. The aim is to look at wildfire risk in a holistic way, incorporating a wide range of factors that contribute to risk. This process would define:

- priorities during wildfire incidents (in order: life, property and environment)
- historical occurrences
- identify habitat / species hazards and risks
- provide a risk assessment (hazard severity and likelihood of occurrence)
- use of control measures to reduce to a low risk
- manage the impact of public access upon risk
- identify risk factors (key infrastructure and assets)

There are a number of opportunities and challenges when it comes to mapping areas of high risk. It will be the aim of the group to:

- Develop a toolkit that enables an agreed wildfire risk analysis process, that sets out the guidelines on how to map wildfire risk (1g)

Promotion of Good Prevention Practice

It has been the experience of the group / its individual members that there are examples of good practice around the country (or even further afield in Europe, America, Canada etc) with regards to general prevention initiatives / techniques for Fire and Rescue Services, Land Managers, the public or wildfire groups. Fundamental to successfully reducing the number and size of wildfire incidences in the UK will be to promote best practice where it occurs.

CFOA is now working to collate this good practice to create a national toolkit freely available to all. Whilst the communication of best practice is inherent in the general communication methods detailed in section 4 the group can support the creation of this prevention 'manual' in the following ways:

- Contribute to the manual / web resource by making available good practices identified within the groups individual members (1h)

- Promote the use of the toolkit amongst members and further afield wherever possible (1i)

- Promote any learning from the National Wildfire Conferences (1j)

- Attend and promote learning from key identified seminars / other learning opportunities. (1k)

Joint Vegetation Fire Reporting

At present wildfires are still incorrectly reported in both numbers, size and location and there is a strong need to improve the wildfire evidence base not only to ensure effective regional and local decision-making but also to ensure that well informed dialogue can be held nationally when required to further wildfire prevention..

Accurate fire reporting can facilitate:

- Enhanced Fire and Rescue Service Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs)
- Enhanced Regional and Local Authorities Emergency Plans

- Accurate CO2 and Green House Gas emissions due to wildfire incidents
- An understanding of the costs and impacts of wildfires on the South East infrastructure and sustainable development
- Evidence and targets for future wildfire projects and business plans

The group will therefore seek to:

- Create and maintain a joint vegetation fire reporting resource (1l)

5.2 Preparation

Fire Plans

A fire plan is an essential tool to enable fast and efficient response to wildfire. The plan consists of a map and additional information document which contain vital information such as key contact details, location of water sources, access points etc. The group aims to:

- Have all SSSIs and coniferous woodlands in the Thames Basin Heaths area mapped by 2015. (2a)

Standard Operating Procedures

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) are vital to the effective and efficient management of a wildfire incident. Whilst in the past these have varied between FRS, the South East Operational Policy and Procedures group (SEOPAP) have - in conjunction with group members – agreed a common operational procedure and associated training package. From this has come a Wildfire Handbook, an instant guide as to how a FRS will be working on the incident ground.

FRS understand that good partnership working is fundamental to the successful extinguishment of wildfires. Whilst other agencies working on the fireground will be operating within the safe working practices defined by the Incident Command System (and any such personnel will be provided a full safety briefing before undertaking any tasks on the incident ground) it would be beneficial if other agencies were aware in advance of the operating procedures of FRS in wildfire situations, The group will therefore seek to provide:

- Availability of the agreed regional SOP on request(2b)

- Copies of the Wildfire Handbook to all partners.(2c)

Equipment and Resources

Access to the right equipment is vital to bring a wildfire under control; it can also mean that fewer fire tenders are required reducing resilience issues. However, the fire services often do not have access to equipment designed for working on heathland and wildfires. In the event of a wildfire knowing what equipment other FRS and partner organisations hold (and have the ability to call upon it when required) will be a vital tool to ensure that wildfires are extinguished as expediently as possible. The group will therefore:

- Promote the creation and use of a regional asset register amongst its members (2d)

Training

Training is fundamental to ensuring that FRS respond appropriately and safely to wildfire incidents. However it is also important that other agencies that may be called upon in a wildfire situation understand how to operate safely on the fireground. Whilst training firefighters to an appropriate level is the responsibility of each FRS, there is a clear role for the group to not only ensure that its (non FRS) members (and others as identified) are trained appropriately but also to assist FRS in the following ways:

- Encouraging land managers / owners to make their land available to FRS and partners for joint training purposes (2e)
- Assisting FRS to run wildfire exercises where planned, both through a physical presence / participation and through the provision of expertise and land to hold them on. Such exercises could include the testing of navigational skills as well as the practising of wildfire techniques and testing of vehicles and equipment. There will be a need for non FRS group members to ensure that they bring their knowledge of the land (and the risks it poses) to these exercises to ensure that the opportunities that they offer are optimised. (2f)

In addition to these exercises, it is the experience of other wildfire groups that live fire exercises are an excellent method of putting the training theory into practice and are a very good mechanism for developing relationships between partner organisations by working together on these exercises. The group will encourage members to offer areas of land where burning is required and will not cause any damage to the habitat. A typical scenario could then see a structured programme carried out over one or two days.

- Encouraging and supporting the use of live fire exercises (2g)

It has also been identified that fire service personnel would benefit from a better understanding of ecology and recognition of habitat types and their relative importance. This is something that the group could help with:

- Develop a guide for fire fighters to improve their understanding of ecology (2h)

5.3 Project Management

Good Project Management, including the promotion and maintenance of good partnership working between the different bodies and individuals that can contribute to reducing the wildfire risk, is core the work of this fire group. Sharing expertise, experience and resources will lead to more effective approach to prevention, preparation and fighting of wildfires.

Group Membership

The majority of land currently at risk from wildfire is owned by public bodies, notably the Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Defence, and to a lesser extent local authorities. Their interest in the groups work is immediate. However, looking to the future, with the risk of wildfires becoming more prevalent in areas that are currently less affected by this risk, land owners / managers such as the Country Landowners Association (CLA) will also have an interest in the work of the group.

There are also smaller, but significant, areas are owned or managed by conservation bodies, notably Natural England, the National Trust, the Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB that have an interest in the work of the group.

To ensure the group is fully effective we will seek to attract all relevant partners, be they land owners, managers or other body that have an interest in working alongside us in preventing wildfires.

A number of activities have been identified in this workstream:

- Use the existing members to encourage new members through the contacts that they have made during the course of their everyday business. (3a)
- Create a directory of members / contacts / roles. (3b)
- Develop a strategy for maintaining organisations' involvement in the event of staff change over. (3c)

Group Meetings

During the initial phase of the project the group met 4 times a year to ensure the necessary relationships were built and that the project work was given momentum. Whilst it may only be necessary to meet twice a year, pre and post fire season, once the initial project phase is over this will need to be balanced with the circumstances at the time and the need to deliver further against the project objectives

The group will therefore hold:

- A minimum of 2 meetings per year in normal circumstances. (3d)
- Additional ad hoc meetings where required to respond to an identified risk (eg drought / severe weather) or to move the project on (3e)

Project Sustainability

This project plan is for the next two year phase that, building on the success of the first plan and further developing wildfire prevention activities in a cohesive manner in the South East. The approach will continue to be to deliver the projects objectives through partner organisations mainstream activities. However it will be key to the group to both forward plan and review its activities during the course of the project plan. As such the group will:

- Undertake a 12 monthly review of the project plan (3f)
- Undertake a forward planning exercise based on the outcomes of the above review (3g)

5.4 Improving communication

Communication will be an important part of the groups work, whether this be locally, with other fire groups, to the public, government or nationally. There are therefore a number of different strands to this workstream.

Use of Web / Social Media

The internet is a powerful communication tool alongside tools such as Facebook, twitter, RSS feeds etc. A web site will enable good communications and the sharing of information between group

members and those interested in the groups' activities. Facebook, twitter etc can be used to encourage new membership, raise awareness to an even wider audience and pass on critical information in real time when required. The group will therefore focus on the following activities:

- Development of a website and / or links to another recognised web site to promote the group (4a)
- Develop a Facebook and twitter presence (4b)

Use of Other Media

The group will need to use local and national media to raise awareness of the risks of wildfires and the preventative works required. They will:

- Release localised press articles, both seasonal and in response to risk, to improve awareness of the risk of wildfires and encourage group membership / participation in prevention (4c)
- Provide information to inform national press interest (either proactively or on request), acting as an informed partner to groups such as CFOA or the EWWF (4d)
- Group members either collectively or individually will seek to use the trade presses to promote both the work of the group and key wildfire prevention messages (4e)

6 Project Plan

The project delivers a range of soft and hard outputs. The project will deliver a number of outputs which cannot easily be quantified or measured, for example improved communication between members of the rural community and the protection of the environment and heritage of the region.

Achievements:

- ✓ Completed
- ◉ On target for completion by original target date
- ● Will not be completed by the original target date, but will be completed by a revised date and late completion will not impact on service
- × Will not be completed by the original target date and it is likely to impact overall departmental service delivery

ID	Task and milestones	SEEWG Action Plan reference	Start date	Task due date	Key action/stages to achieve this	Lead Officer	On / Off target	Minimum Outputs Expected	Current Position
1	Develop a wildfire prevention programme appropriate to the regions needs and complimenting nationally lead work	1a, 1b, 1c	Sept 2013	Mar 2015	Raise public awareness in the South East region of the dangers of wildfire and encourage uptake in Wildfire prevention initiatives	`		1. Communication Strategy developed 2. Wildfire Awareness events held 3. Fire Adapted Communities uptake	
		1d, 1e			Promote good land management practices amongst members of the group and the land managers or owners in the region			1. Conduct regular workshops and site visits for and managers 2. Lobby national government where appropriate	
		1f			Influence the planning process where there is a link			1. Lobby key organisations as necessary	

ID	Task and milestones	SEEWG Action Plan reference	Start date	Task due date	Key action/stages to achieve this	Lead Officer	On / Off target	Minimum Outputs Expected	Current Position
					to wildfire prevention				
		1g			Develop a toolkit that can be applied nationally to conduct spatial risk analysis			1. Develop a spatial Analysis toolkit	
		1h, 1i, 1j, 1k, 1l			Identify and promote good prevention practice where it occurs and help to share it freely			1. Contribution to a national web based prevention toolkit 2. Promote the use of the prevention toolkit in the region 3. Identify and promote good practice from the Wildfire conference in the region 4. Identify good practice from seminars / other learning opportunities 5. Contribute to the development of an joint vegetation fire reporting resource	
2	Contribute to effective preparedness arrangements for wildfire incidents in the region	2a			Enable the creation of standardised Fire Plans across the region			1. Map all SSSIs and coniferous woodlands in the region	
		2b, 2c			Ensure all FRS, land managers and agencies have a shared understanding of a set of common operational procedures			1. Ensure the regional SOP is freely available to partners 2. Ensure the wildfire handbook is available in the region	
		2c			Enable the sharing of resources across the region			1. Create and promote a regional asset register	

ID	Task and milestones	SEEWG Action Plan reference	Start date	Task due date	Key action/stages to achieve this	Lead Officer	On / Off target	Minimum Outputs Expected	Current Position
					where required				
		2e, 2f, 2g, 2h			Ensure access to adequate training and information for all appropriate personnel			1. Promote the use of private land for training and maintain a register for this purpose 2. Assist in the planning and delivery of wildfire exercises where required 3. Encourage and support the running of live fire exercises each year 4. Develop a guide for firefighters on ecology	
3	Ensure effective project management takes place	3a, 3b, 3c	Sept 2013	Mar 2015	Ensure the membership of the group is as inclusive of all relevant partners as possible			1. Promote membership of the group 2. Develop a directory of contacts 3. Strategy for Maintaining Organisational Involvement	
		3d, 3e			Ensure the group meets at suitable intervals			1. Hold a minimum of 2 meetings per year 2. Hold ad hoc meetings when circumstances dictate	
		3f, 3g			Ensure the project is sustainable and continues to promote wildfire prevention in future years			1. Hold a 12 monthly review 2. Undertake an annual forward planning exercise	
4	Promote communications	4a, 4b	Sept	Mar	Use social media to ensure the messaging the group			1. Develop a web site containing prevention	

ID	Task and milestones	SEEWG Action Plan reference	Start date	Task due date	Key action/stages to achieve this	Lead Officer	On / Off target	Minimum Outputs Expected	Current Position
	throughout group members and the wider wildfire community, both in the region ad beyond		2013	2015	wishes to promulgate is received by as wide an audience as possible			materials or contribute to the creation of a national resource 2. Develop a presence on Facebook and Twitter	
		4c, 4d, 4e			Use all other media to the best possible effect to get the safety and other messaging from the group to its target audience			1. Release seasonal local press articles that help to build a standard suite of prevention literature 2. Release articles to the national press when pertinent, the group to determine a strategy for this 3. Promote the work of the group in the trade presses through a coordinated set of articles	

SEEWG ORGANISATION

Chairman: Rob Gazzard (Forestry Commission)

Lead Organisation: Alan Clark for Surrey Fire and Rescue Service

Partner Organisations

- Natural England (South East)
- Forestry Commission (Forest Enterprise - SE England Forest District and New Forest District)
- Environment Agency (EA)
- Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Surrey Fire and Rescue Service
- West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service
- East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service
- Dorset Fire and Rescue Service
- Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Defence Training Estate (MoD)
- Defence Fire & Rescue Service (MoD Defence Fire Risk Management Organisation)
- Crown Estate Commissioners
- Government Office of the South East

Name - Rob Gazzard	**Signature:**
Position – Chairman, South East England Wildfire Group	
Date	
Contact	