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COVER NOTE

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To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
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Brussels, 4.5.2026
COM(2026) 188 final

2026/0103 (NLE)

Proposal for a

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

on integrated wildfire risk management

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

• Reasons for and objectives of the proposal

In recent years the EU has experienced a sharp rise in wildfire intensity and frequency. The burnt area exceeded the historical average in four of the past five years, resulting in a rise in the number of Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) wildfire response missions¹. In 2025, for the first time, the total area affected by wildfires in the EU surpassed one million hectares, a size larger than Cyprus. At the same time, there is a growing occurrence of megafires, i.e. very large wildfires that pose a significant challenge to traditional firefighting methods. Such extreme events are expected to occur more and more often in the future.

Wildfires can have far-reaching and devastating effects on the environment, infrastructure, the economy and society. They lead to the loss of life, disruption of livelihoods, degraded air quality, destruction of ecosystems and significant damage to agriculture and forestry. The direct economic cost alone, linked to damage to property and infrastructure, is estimated at approximately EUR 2.5 billion per year².

Climate change and unsustainable land management are the main causes of the heightened risk of wildfires. As climate change accelerates, extreme weather patterns such as heatwaves and droughts become more common, creating conditions conducive to the spread of wildfires. Additionally, land abandonment, inappropriate forest management and the expansion of urban areas into forests and wildlands have led to an accumulation of combustible materials, with the result that people and infrastructure are more exposed to wildfire risks.

Human activity is responsible for the vast majority of wildfire ignitions, including negligence, arson, and sparks from infrastructure. These risks are further exacerbated by poor policy coordination between public authorities at various levels, which limits the overall effectiveness of wildfire risk management measures, and insufficient attention to prevention measures.

Responsibility for managing wildfire risks lies primarily with the Member States and their regional and local authorities. The EU plays a supporting role by providing funding, data, coordination and knowledge sharing as well as additional resources if a wildfire event exceeds national response capabilities. In view of Europe's varied landscapes and climate conditions, wildfire risk management needs to be tailored to local contexts while benefiting from coordinated efforts at EU level.

Against this background, the Commission issued a Communication on integrated wildfire risk management³ where it outlined a comprehensive set of measures considered necessary to tackle the growing threat from wildfires.

Following on from these findings, the Commission believes an integrated approach needs to be taken at EU level to strengthen wildfire risk management at all stages of the risk management cycle, i.e. prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. At the same time, the ecological, social, economic and cultural impacts of wildfires also need to be considered.

¹ There were 9 UCPM missions in 2021, 12 in 2022, 13 in 2023, 16 in 2024 and 19 in 2025.

² <https://discomap.eea.europa.eu/ClimatePreparedness2025/?page=Wildfires-in-Europe>.

³ COM(2026) 330 of 25.3.2026.

These objectives can best be achieved through a Council recommendation that, if adopted, would allow Member States to tailor measures to their specific geographical, climate and socio-economic conditions while also striking the right balance between EU-level coordination and the primarily national responsibility for risk management.

In particular, the recommendation should promote action in the following areas:

(1) **Enhancing prevention through landscape management and ecosystem restoration**, including through sustainable agriculture and forest management that promotes varied landscapes and integrates wildfire risk into restoration and conservation policies;

(2) **Strengthening preparedness through better data and statistics, monitoring and research**, such as improved wildfire risk assessments, early warning systems, modelling capabilities and the use of EU tools such as the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS), Copernicus services and Destination Earth;

(3) **Boosting population awareness and preparedness**, including through improved access to information, targeted communication strategies, participatory approaches and the inclusion of persons in vulnerable or marginalised situations, and ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities;

(4) **Strengthening coordinated response capabilities**, including through improved coordination, interoperability, analytical capabilities, training, equipment and pre-positioning of firefighters, in particular under the UCPM, which includes the European Civil Protection Pool and rescEU;

(5) **Supporting resilient post-fire recovery**, including the restoration of ecosystems and communities and improved data collection on wildfire impacts;

(6) **Strengthening governance, coordination and funding**, including by integrating policies, mobilising investments and making effective use of EU support instruments.

(7) **Strengthen international engagement** with international partners on integrated wildfire risk management.

- **Consistency with existing provisions in the policy area**

This proposal recommends an integrated approach to wildfire risk management with regard to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The proposed approach draws on existing EU support in the areas of civil protection, data and monitoring, research and innovation and technical support.

The proposal is consistent with current environmental and agricultural policy and EU action in the area of civil protection and with the Preparedness Union Strategy. If adopted, it would strengthen coordination under the UCPM, support risk prevention and preparedness in line with the EU's environmental objectives. In doing so, it contributes to fair living and working conditions in vibrant rural areas in line with the Vision for Agriculture and Food, help make forests more resilient in line with the EU Forest Strategy for 2030 and support ecosystem restoration in line with the Nature Restoration Regulation. It would also contribute to improving risk assessment, cross-border cooperation and ecosystem-based approaches while remaining within the scope of existing policy frameworks.

- **Consistency with other EU policies**

The proposal contributes to broader EU objectives related to climate neutrality and resilience, disaster risk management, environmental protection and sustainable land use, while supporting coordinated action between Member States. The integrated approach proposed by the recommendation would ensure a wildfire management that is not only coherent with but amplifies the EU's broader resilience goals, such as those embedded in the UCPM, the EU Forest Strategy for 2030, the EU Adaptation Strategy, the Nature Restoration Regulation and the common agricultural policy.

2. LEGAL BASIS, SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY

- **Legal basis**

This proposal is based on Articles 192 and, 196 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in conjunction with Article and 292 thereof.

In accordance with Article 292 TFEU the Council shall act on a proposal from the Commission, in all cases where the Treaties provide that it shall adopt acts on a proposal from the Commission.

Article 192 TFEU is the legal basis for the adoption by the Union of measures to pursue the objectives of preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment, protecting human health and ensuring the prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources.

Article 196 TFEU is the legal basis for the adoption by the Union of measures to encourage cooperation between Member States in order to improve the effectiveness of systems for preventing and protecting against natural or human-induced disasters.

- **Subsidiarity (for non-exclusive competence)**

The proposal respects the principle of subsidiarity laid down in Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

Adopting a Recommendation at Union level is justified by the cross-border nature of wildfires, the shared environmental and climate impacts, the need for coordinated preparedness and response as well as the importance of adopting an integrated approach and ensuring policy coherence.

This proposal however respects Member States primary competence in the field of wildfire risk management. In particular, it recommends that certain actions be taken by Member States while leaving full flexibility to tailor approaches to Member States' governance systems and territorial realities.

- **Proportionality**

The proposal for a Council recommendation on integrated wildfire risk management respects the principle of proportionality laid down in Article 5(4) TEU.

Neither the content nor the form of the proposed recommendation exceeds what is necessary to achieve its objectives. The proposed recommended actions respect Member States' practices and the diversity of systems across the EU, any commitments by Member States would be voluntary in nature, and each Member State would be free to decide on the approach to take to implement them.

- **Choice of instrument**

A Council recommendation (Article 292 TFEU) is the appropriate instrument to support coordinated action between Member States while ensuring flexible implementation and respecting their competence. As a legal act, though non-binding, a Council recommendation signals the Member States' commitment to the proposed measures and provides a strong political basis for cooperation while fully respecting Member States' prerogatives.

3. **RESULTS OF *EX POST* EVALUATIONS, STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS**

- ***Ex post* evaluations/fitness checks of existing legislation**

[n/a]

- **Stakeholder consultations**

This proposal follows on from the **Commission Communication on integrated wildfire risk management**. The Commission consulted four expert groups composed of Member States' representatives (the Expert Group on Forest Fires, the Disaster Prevention Expert Group, the Expert Group on the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plans, and the Standing Forestry Committee) as well as relevant stakeholders and experts in fields related to wildfire risk management.

The discussions and the written contributions received highlighted the increasing wildfire risk in the EU, the need for a more integrated approach across the wildfire risk management cycle and the importance of coordination at EU level as regards tools, the use of data and response capabilities, among other things. In particular, the input received suggested a need to focus on the following areas: landscape management and recovery, wildfire risk governance, further development of the EFFIS, public awareness and preparedness, joint response operations, cross-border cooperation, equipment needs, pre-positioning of firefighters and early warning.

- **Collection and use of expertise**

The Commission used results from research into wildfire risk management carried out in the last five years, especially from EU-funded projects under Horizon Europe, peer review reports and other studies and publications referred to in the Communication on integrated wildfire risk management.

- **Impact assessment**

Given the non-binding nature of a Council Recommendation and the absence of direct regulatory or financial obligations for Member States imposed by it, no impact assessment has been carried out as the proposed initiative primarily aims to support Member States' actions and their coordination within existing policy frameworks.

- **Regulatory fitness and simplification**

[n/a]

- **Fundamental rights**

The proposal respects fundamental rights and observes the principles enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

The proposal does not entail any additional direct budgetary implications. Measures related to wildfire risk management are supported through existing EU instruments, including funding, data services, research and innovation programmes and technical support mechanisms.

5. OTHER ELEMENTS

- **Implementation plans and monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements**

[n/a]

- **Explanatory documents (for directives)**

[n/a]

- **Detailed explanation of the specific provisions of the proposal**

[n/a]

Proposal for a

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

on integrated wildfire risk management

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 192, and 196 in conjunction with Article 292 thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) The summer of 2025 saw a number of severe wildfires across Europe, highlighting the urgent need to act against this growing threat. Although prevention and preparedness efforts had been stepped up at both national and Union level, the cumulative burnt area in the European Union exceeded one million hectares for the first time, and the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) was activated more frequently than ever before to provide firefighting support to Member States.
- (2) In recent years, wildfire activity has intensified significantly across the Union. The recorded burnt area was above average in four of the last five years, and wildfires are also becoming larger and more intense. The situation is exacerbated further by the fact that megafires, i.e. very large fires that are difficult to bring under control with traditional means of firefighting, are becoming more frequent, a trend that is expected to continue.
- (3) Wildfires pose a complex challenge, with the potential to cause far-reaching damage to society, the economy, the environment, the climate, infrastructure and cultural heritage. They can result in the loss of lives and livelihoods, significantly damage property and infrastructure and lead to the deterioration of air quality and the degradation of ecosystems, negatively affecting agriculture and forestry.
- (4) The heightened wildfire risk is mainly caused by climate change and changes in land management. Climate change leads to more frequent and more intense heatwaves and droughts, resulting in dry vegetation that provides fuel for wildfires, and with further global warming these conditions are only expected to worsen, also affecting larger parts of Europe. At the same time, land abandonment, rural depopulation and inappropriate forest management lead to the accumulation of flammable materials. This, combined with the expansion of urban areas into forests and wildland, increasingly exposes people and infrastructure to wildfire risks.
- (5) Human activity accounts for the vast majority of wildfire ignitions in the Union, including through negligence, arson and infrastructure-related sparks. These risks are compounded by poor policy coordination between authorities at various levels, which makes wildfire risk management measures less effective.
- (6) Responsibility for wildfire risk management lies primarily with the Member States, regional authorities and land managers, while the Union provides support through funding, data, coordination and knowledge sharing. Europe's varied landscapes, forest

structures and climate conditions mean that wildfire risk management needs to be locally adapted while benefiting from coordinated Union support.

- (7) To tackle the growing wildfire risk more effectively, an integrated approach is required that covers the entire disaster risk management cycle, including prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. It should also take account of the ecological, social, economic and cultural dimensions of wildfires.
- (8) With wildfires becoming more frequent and more difficult to control, response capabilities need to be strengthened by improving coordination, interoperability, training, equipment and analytical capabilities as well as Member States sharing resources and expertise.
- (9) This requires strengthened governance to ensure policy coordination across various levels of administration, as well as more integrated funding and the mobilisation of public and private investments at all stages of the risk management cycle.
- (10) Post-fire recovery should seek to ensure that ecosystems and the services they provide are restored and communities recover in a manner that prevents long-term degradation and supports sustainable land use, while taking future climatic conditions into account⁴. Data collection on wildfire impacts also need to be improved to be able to quantify losses more accurately and as a basis for future risk management.
- (11) Wildfire risks are to a large extent determined by the way land is managed. Rural depopulation and land abandonment result in the build-up of flammable vegetation and the creation of landscapes with a high potential for extreme fire behaviour. Traditional practices that reduce the fuel load, such as prescribed burning and extensive grazing, have declined but should be encouraged as an integral part of land and forest management at local level, as well as active sustainable forest management interventions such as thinning, pruning, and species diversification. More diverse landscapes consisting of forests, grasslands and cropland can slow the spread of fires and reduce the likelihood of large-scale fires.
- (12) Adaptive land management and holistic landscape planning are essential to create multifunctional fire-resilient landscapes. This includes sustainable forest management, support for rural livelihoods and targeted measures in the wildland-urban interface, where prevention measures can significantly reduce wildfire risks.
- (13) Nature protection and restoration contribute to wildfire risk management by making ecosystems more resilient and reducing the risk and impacts of extreme events. Restoring wetlands, peatlands, rivers and floodplains creates natural fire breaks and helps stabilise hydrological cycles, thus reducing wildfire risks. Biodiversity, water resilience and wildfire risk management objectives therefore overlap and should be pursued in a mutually supportive manner.
- (14) Wildfire monitoring and risk assessment in the Union face considerable challenges, including shortfalls in data availability, consistency and cross-border integration and insufficient integration of cascading risks such as landslides, air pollution and soil erosion. This limits the effectiveness of prevention, preparedness and response.
- (15) To strengthen preparedness, there is a need to improve wildfire risk assessment methods, enhance early warning systems and expand fire behaviour modelling

⁴ as described inter alia in the Joint Research Centre brief from 2026, *Forest resilience against wildfires*, <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC145919>.

capabilities. Moreover, systematic use must be made of the available data and tools to support evidence-based decision-making.

- (16) The risk of wildfires can be reduced by boosting public awareness and encouraging behavioural changes, among other things by making fire risk information more easily accessible. It also requires targeted communication strategies and inclusive approaches that take into account vulnerable groups and various social contexts.
- (17) Communities' wildfire preparedness should be strengthened in a participatory manner, involving farmers, foresters, local authorities, social partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders, as well as through education, training and awareness-raising activities.
- (18) Wildfires are a global phenomenon that calls for regional and international cooperation, in particular with neighbouring countries. Regional initiatives, such as the Cyprus Regional Aerial Firefighting Station (CRAFS), could further promote cooperation of the Union with Europe's southern neighbourhood in the field of wildfire risk management.
- (19) Measures such as peer reviews, advisory missions, expert exchanges and the pre-positioning of firefighting assets could help boost interoperability, situational awareness and first responder readiness. They would also encourage stronger commitment and better coordination between Member States.
- (20) To be used effectively, Union funding, technical support and real-time intelligence and data sharing – particularly on forest fire behaviour – need to be better coordinated. Furthermore, decision-making can be improved by harmonising national and regional forest fire risk management strategies and action plans. Used effectively and aligned with operational needs, Union data, tools and services such as those provided by the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS), operated under the Copernicus Emergency Management Services⁵, can enhance wildfire monitoring, mapping and risk assessment, while advanced modelling and forecasting tools such as Destination Earth can improve wildfire risk modelling and foresight.
- (21) Union instruments, including the Recovery and Resilience Facility, provide support to Member States in designing and implementing reforms, strengthening governance and building capacity in the field of wildfire risk management.
- (22) The Union Civil Protection Mechanism, which includes the European Civil Protection Pool, rescEU and the Knowledge Network, can strengthen preparedness and response by facilitating cooperation, training, the exchange of expertise, resource deployment and the sharing of best practices between Member States.
- (23) Research and innovation supported at Union level, including through Horizon Europe, contribute to the development of new technologies, operational solutions and land management techniques. The uptake and operationalisation of these results in wildfire risk management could, however, be improved.

RECOMMENDS:

Measures to prevent wildfires through landscape management and restoration

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/696 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing the Union Space Programme and the European Union Agency for the Space Programme and repealing Regulations (EU) No 912/2010, (EU) No 1285/2013 and (EU) No 377/2014 and Decision No 541/2014/EU.

1. Member States should set up incentive mechanisms to support sustainable land management and restoration in fire-prone regions, including through available EU funding instruments under their management.
2. Member States should promote sustainable forest management and diverse forest structures, where possible, including the use of alternatives to monocultural plantations of highly flammable species, in line with the sustainable forest management criteria as defined by Forest Europe, and, where relevant, the existing guidelines on closer-to-nature forest management and biodiversity-friendly afforestation and reforestation.
3. Member States should draw up locally adapted fuel load management guidelines and tools and should involve social partners and local authorities in this work. In this respect, Member States should look into prescribed burning as a way to reduce the fuel load in land and forest management and review their permitting rules to ensure appropriate safety and ecological safeguards.
4. In line with their strategic plans under the common agricultural policy, Member States should take account of specific wildfire challenges when issuing calls for proposals for tailor-made solutions for integrated wildfire risk management under the European Innovation Partnerships (EIP-AGRI).
5. Member States should consider the risk of wildfires when developing national, regional and local nature conservation plans and strategies, including national restoration plans and management plans for protected areas. Similarly, wildfire risk management planning should consider biodiversity conservation and restoration objectives, taking future climatic conditions into account as well. Emphasis should be placed on measures that promote both wildfire risk prevention and nature protection and restoration.
6. Member States should consider taking measures to restore wetlands, peatlands, rivers and floodplains that also help reduce wildfire risks and integrate wildfire risk management in their water management policies.
7. Member States are encouraged to implement innovative land-based wildfire prevention measures, including nature-based solutions, and effective practices in sustainable farming and sustainable forest management that have been successfully demonstrated in various EU-funded projects.

Measures to strengthen preparedness through better data and research

8. Member States should participate in the development and promotion of Destination Earth, for instance through pilot use cases for wildfire risk modelling and foresight.
9. Member States should make systematic use of Union tools and data, including Copernicus services and the EFFIS, to support evidence-based wildfire risk management and project funding decisions.
10. Member States should update their wildfire risk assessments and use improved fire behaviour analysis tools to designate priority areas for prevention and preparedness.
11. Member States should develop wildfire behaviour analysis capabilities and decision support systems for wildfire risk management purposes.
12. Member States should further investigate the causes of wildfires to better understand ignition factors and the role of the public.

13. Member States are encouraged to continue research in land management practices for fire prevention, notably on forest management, ecosystem conservation and restoration, grazing and agroforestry.
14. Member states should make use of the solutions and tools to strengthen early warning systems, forest management, and community preparedness against wildfires provided through the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change.

Population awareness and preparedness measures

15. Member States should raise awareness among farmers and foresters about fire ignition risks and involve them in the development and use of early fire-detection tools.
16. Member States should actively encourage the exchange of young firefighters to promote a common European preparedness culture.
17. Member States should explore innovative tools for raising awareness among children and young people, such as educational games or social media campaigns. They should also integrate relevant materials, including materials prepared in cooperation with the European Commission, in their school curricula.
18. Member States should encourage tourism operators, farmers, foresters, local authorities and fire safety experts to cooperate to make tourists more risk aware.
19. Member States should support business continuity by promoting training for small and medium-sized enterprises and offering targeted financial assistance in the wake of a disaster. They should also encourage insurance companies to enable quick payment of claims.
20. Member States should ensure that older people, people with disabilities and people facing discrimination, poverty or social exclusion have easy access to relevant information.
21. Member States should integrate wildfire risk management considerations into building standards and spatial planning decisions to address for example the management of wildfire risks in the wildland-urban interface.
22. Member States should put in place measures to support local communities in wildland-urban interface areas to strengthen wildfire risk preparedness.

Measures to support a coordinated response

23. Member States should actively share best practices and lessons learnt on prevention and actions covering the entire disaster risk management cycle, including through UCPM lessons learnt meetings.
24. Member States should collect and share real-time data on wildfire behaviour to enhance fire analysis. Relevant fire indicators should also be used in internal operational procedures for requesting assistance and to support decision-making at Union level to ensure mobilised resources are used efficiently.
25. Member States should make use of the pre-positioning or exchange of experts and provide staff and experts to the UCPM to enable the sharing of good practices. They should also strengthen their host nation support capabilities with a view to integrating international UCPM assistance into their national response systems.
26. Member States should collect relevant data on firefighting staff and assess workforce needs, taking due account of the seasonal nature of firefighting activities, to ensure the availability of an appropriately sized and well-prepared workforce.

27. Involving social partners as relevant, Member States should provide safe and sustainable working conditions for firefighters, including adequate training, protective equipment and health support.
28. Member States should strengthen coordination between governance levels to ensure optimal situational awareness during emergencies.
29. Member States should ensure the availability of sufficient aerial assets, including by making use of Union funds.
30. Member States should continue to commit forest firefighting assets to the European Civil Protection Pool. This applies in particular, but not exclusively, to assets procured with the support of Union funding.
31. Member States should seek to improve the interoperability of firefighting equipment.

Post-fire recovery measures

32. Member States should collect additional cross-sectoral and socio-demographic data to quantify and assess the physical and financial impacts of wildfires.
33. Member States should identify post-fire recovery measures with a view to guiding local communities towards a sustainable and inclusive recovery.

Measures to strengthen governance and funding

34. Member States should plan for and make available long-term funding at all stages of the wildfire risk management cycle and make full use of available funding opportunities both at national and Union level.
35. Member States should incentivise the uptake of private insurance covering wildfire risks and other climate risks in order to reduce economic losses and fiscal pressure from disasters and support recovery, for instance by promoting the recognition by insurers of adaptation measures when setting premiums, through public-private partnerships or through risk-sharing between economic actors, such as risk transfers to capital markets.
36. Member States should develop integrated wildfire risk management strategies and action plans nationally or locally.
37. Member States should embrace new technologies and innovations and put them into use via capacity building grants under relevant EU programmes.
38. Member States should make full use of the support provided through Union initiatives to strengthen early warning systems, risk assessments, community preparedness and any other identified priority area.

Measures to strengthen international engagement

39. Member States should seek to further strengthen wildfire risk management cooperation with international partners, in particular with the Union's neighbouring countries.
40. Member States should consider how they could contribute to and create synergies to support the objectives of the Cyprus Regional Aerial Firefighting Station (CRAFS).
41. Member States should collaborate with Forest Europe and its newly established Forest Risk Facility (FoRISK) to promote capacity building and knowledge exchange on fire prevention.

Done at Brussels,

*For the Council
The President*