**Great Plains Fire Science Exchange**

**Operating Guidelines and Governance Charter**

**As approved by the Board of Directors 01, January, 2013**

**Introduction**

In 2011, collaborators from Oklahoma State University, Iowa State University, and Missouri State University were funded by the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) to develop a proposal for the Great Plains Fire Science Exchange, herein referred to as the Exchange or GPE. In January of 2012, the proposal developed by collaborators from Missouri State University, National Park Service, Kansas State University, and University of Nebraska-Omaha to implement the Exchange was approved. Funding arrived in June 2012 and operations began in earnest.

The operating and governance guidelines defined below describe how the Exchange functions and defines the roles of those individuals who govern the Exchange. This document is intended to be living and dynamic, meaning that it can be modified, as per the described process, to support the current and future work of the Exchange.

**General Provisions**

In 2012 the Joint Fire Science Program provided funding to initiate the Great Plains Fire Science Exchange (GPE), a Great Plains regional organization for fire science delivery across 10 states that contain grassland ecosystems (Figure 1). These Operating Guidelines enhance and expand the basic governance provisions contained in the proposal to JFSP from Missouri State University.



Figure 1. JFSP Knowledge Exchange Consortia boundaries as of 10/30/2013.

**Overall Purpose**

The purpose of the Great Plains Fire Science Exchange is to enhance fire science delivery across the Great Plains and to encourage communication and partnerships among members of the fire community to bridge the gap in information sharing. Specifically we aim to:

1. Maximize integration of science and management through partnerships and enhanced science translation and delivery
2. Provide leadership and commitment through an integrated organizational framework that links science and management to address priority natural resources issues in the Great Plains.
3. Increase efficiency and leveraging of limited resources, minimize duplication, and support collaborative efforts in pursuit of shared goals.
4. Implement communication and information sharing that enhances problem solving, demonstrates measurable results, and increases public support for appropriate fire management in the Great Plains.

**Great Plains Fire Science Exchange Goals and Values**

The GPE aims to establish a two-way path by which the fire research community and fire use practitioners aid each other’s efforts toward meeting management objectives and expanding relevant knowledge. We do so by coordinating, improving, and increasing access to existing fire science dissemination mechanisms, while developing syntheses and enhancements to existing web-based platforms to fill gaps in available resources. GPE activities range from a web-based resource platform, to new research fact sheets, field days, and other experiential learning opportunities. The ultimate objectives of these activities are to facilitate research application on the ground and through incorporation into adaptive management strategies, while needs for new research are relayed from managers to the research community.

In order to attain these goals and perform as a successful organization, we will abide by the following core values established by the Joint Fire Science Program Board of Governors:

1. Be **inclusive**, making sure all relevant partners have the opportunity to be involved.

2. Serve as **neutral** science partners.

3. Be **customer driven**, both in structure and function.

4. Operate **collaboratively**, fostering joint management and science communication.

5. Be **innovative**, pursuing new and creative ways to disseminate knowledge.

6. **Facilitate** communication and dialog of fire science information, new science findings, and needs of resource managers and policymakers.

Additionally, we will:

7. Be accountable to all partners, end-users, and JFSP rather than just individual institution interests.

8. Maintain focus on six key JFSP objectives, through which our role is to:

a. Disseminate information and build relationships.

b. List and describe existing research and synthesis.

c. Assess the quality and applicability of research.

d. Facilitate research demonstrations on the ground.

e. Promote adaptive management using fire science findings.

f. Illuminate new topics, synthesis or validation needs for the research community.

**Mission:**

The mission of the Great Plains Fire Science Exchange is to enhance on-going fire science delivery by using new and existing mechanisms and outlets for outreach across the Great Plains and to stimulate communication among the fire community to bridge the gap in information sharing.

**Outcomes**

It is essential that the Exchange produce measurable and meaningful outcomes in support of its mission and goals. Toward this end, an Action Plan will be developed, reviewed, and implemented on a routine basis (Appendix I).

**Funding**

GPE is funded by a grant from the Joint Fire Science Program to the National Park Service. The Great Plains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit facilitated the funds dispersal to Missouri State University (Springfield, MO) and Kansas State University (Manhattan, KS). (Task Agreement # J-6370-12-0116). The Coordinator and Outreach Specialist are both half time appointments.

**Process for Revisions**

As the GPE develops and grows, the operating guidelines and governance structure outlined herein may need to evolve to better serve the Exchanges goals and mission. This document may be revised at the discretion of the Board of Directors and the project PI in order to improve the effectiveness and performance of the consortium.

**Program Structure and Governance**

The GPE’s **Lead Principle Investigator** (PI) is Sherry Leis. Tom Bragg is also a Principle Investigator and Mike DeBacker serves as a co-PI in the capacity of a federal funding partner. Sherry Leis is a Missouri State University Employee and a National Park Service (NPS) Partner. Mike DeBacker is the Program Coordinator for the Heartland Inventory and Monitoring Program of the NPS and Tom Bragg is faculty at University of Nebraska-Omaha. The PIs were responsible for obtaining grant approval and funding. Going forward they will assist with renewal proposals and guidance.

The **GPE Coordinator** position will provide overall leadership and oversight for the Exchange. Specific duties include: (1) organizes and presides at Board of Directors meetings, (2) represents the GPE at conferences and meetings, (3) leads web‐ and publication‐based activities, (4) serves as first point of contact for fire researchers, (5) supervises contractors, (6) oversees maintenance of contact database, (7) directs content of GPE newsletter, (8) coordinates social media projects, (9) arranges speakers and delivery of webinars, (10) oversees science‐delivery publications and videos, (11) hosts and develops partners to host conferences and workshops, (12) solicits research‐demonstration areas from researchers to add to network, (13) solicits scientist participation (facts sheets, syntheses, field tours, etc.), (14) manages incentives, and (15) assures completion of evaluation of effectiveness. The Coordinator reports to the GPE Board of Directors. Although the lead PI and Coordinator were the same person at the start of the GPE, these positions are distinct and may be filled by separate individuals if the need arises.

The **Outreach Specialist** will focus primarily on establishing collaborative relationships with agencies and producers within the Great Plains Fire Science Exchange region to increase the availability and application of fire science information for natural resource management. The Outreach Specialist also will especially solicit rancher and fire practitioner participation in GPE activities and help identify subject areas where education is lacking or where applied research on specific management issues is needed. The specialist will act as a conduit for the transmission of this information to the regional scientific community. The Outreach Specialist will organize, coordinate, and assist with the establishment of demonstration sites that will provide fire practitioners with the opportunity to see the results of differing fire and management practices, as well as being able to interpret this knowledge for application to their own managed landscapes. Additional activities planned in coordination with the PI, may include organization of webinars, field tours, presentations at conferences, and workshops. The Outreach Specialist reports to the PI.

**Governance**

The Exchange is guided by a Board of Directors (BOD), charged with oversight of the plan of work and budget. Its members are representatives of the fire community including practitioners, private landowners, and researchers from the region. The BOD will strive to maintain membership from a variety of specialties, organizations, and broad geographic representation within the region to ensure the board is not biased from either the management or research perspectives. The BOD provides guidance for the organizational and administrative functions of the Exchange. Board Members not funded by the Exchange are supported by their respective organizations. Specifically, the BOD will:

* Guide the direction, content, and appropriate scale of Exchange activities.
* Review and evaluate Exchange activities to ensure goals are being achieved.
* Further develop and strengthen Exchange partnerships with fire/land managers and the scientific community.
* Contribute to development of Exchange activities, publications, and products.
* Encourage others to participate in Exchange activities.

***Board of Directors Membership and Structure:***

The **Board of Directors** will consist of 7-10 well respected members of the region’s fire community (including landowners, practitioners, and researchers), as well as the Principal Investigators, who will be ex‐officio, voting members. The BOD is chaired by the Lead PI and co-chaired by one elected member of the Board. The elected co-chair is nominated for two years and elected by simple majority. Nominations may be made and seconded by any BOD member. The Chair is responsible for signing documents on behalf of the BOD as well as scheduling, planning, convening, and documenting Board meetings. The co-chair assists the chair in developing BOD meeting agendas and assists in running the meeting. The co-chair will lead BOD meetings in the absence of the chair. The co-chair also assists in developing the annual progress report to be shared with the JFSP and BOD.

***Board of Directors terms:*** Inaugural members will serve two-year terms, providing consistency through the start‐up period. After the initial two year start-up period, term lengths will be three years. Three members will be asked to renew or resign their board membership every year so that there is consistency among the board and refilling the positions is manageable. If a member leaves the BOD during their term, he/she may nominate a successor for consideration of the remaining Board members. When a member’s term ends replacement members for that seat will be nominated by the Board of Directors. The BOD will select the new member through a voting process with a nomine being selected by a simple majority. New member selection shall take place before the leaving BOD members relinquish their seats.

***Board of Directors meetings:*** The entire BOD will meet at least annually. Meetings will be held through conference calls and/or web meetings. Once every two years the BOD will meet in person. The Exchange will provide travel funds (within budgetary guidelines) for board members unable to participate without those funds. Email communication will be used to communicate progress updates and decisions on project deliverables. An agenda will be emailed out prior to each BOD meeting. Any member who cannot attend or otherwise participate in a meeting of the Board may not designate an alternate. If a Board member cannot attend a meeting, they should indicate their positions on issues in an email to the BOD chair and co-chair prior to the meeting. Notes will be taken at each BOD meeting and be made available to all Board members through email and a copy will be archived.

***Board of Directors Procedures****:* Email and conference calls will be used to communicate progress updates and decisions on project deliverables. The Board may approve recommendations in writing by electronic mail. In such cases, the Chair will be provided a copy of each voting member’s message indicating their vote on the matter.

BOD decisions and recommendations will normally be reached through consensus following thorough discussions. If necessary, issues will be resolved by a vote carried by a simple majority with a quorum of four voting members of the BOD required for a vote. All BOD decisions will be documented and kept by the Chair as official minutes to be distributed to all members within two weeks of each meeting.

**Committees**: Adhoc committees will be formed by volunteers or appointment as needed to respond to a need. Committee members may include people outside the Board and may use resources outside of the GPE to complete committee tasks.

**Partners**

A GPE partner is defined simply as an organization that shares the GPE mission and provides monetary or in-kind support. Partnerships are critical for assisting with project development and dissemination. Partnerships will increase the sustainability of the GPE over the long-term.

Partners may ask for GPE support when submitting funding proposals. Funders, JFSP in particular, will favor proposals where the PI has engaged consortia. While we welcome this interaction, we will not actively solicit PIs to ask for letters of support.

Criteria for writing a letter of support:

* Is the research relevant to fire management in the Great Plains?
* Does this project lend itself to opportunities for science partnership with the Exchange? Examples include, but are not limited to the following: Are the scientists willing to work with us to at a minimum 1) present a webinar and/or presentation at a workshop or field day; 2) write or work with a science writer to create a fact sheet about their research results?

**Reporting**

**JFSP Annual Progress Reports**

Annual Progress Reports on Exchange activities will be approved by the Board of Directors and submitted to the Joint Fire Science Program by the PIs and Coordinator as per JFSP reporting requirements. A one-page summary will be available to partners via the web.

**Quarterly Activity Updates**

An abbreviated summary of GPE activities and progress in the form of email updates will be sent to Board of Directors at least quarterly. The Newsletter may suffice.

**Program Evaluation**

Every two years the GPE will be evaluated by the JFSP. JFSP will provide detailed guidance on the information required for the program evaluation. This evaluation will have a significant impact on future funding from JFSP.

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**Appendix I. Action Items**

The development of products and events that target or include private land managers is a priority for the Exchange. Other audiences of priority are policy makers and extension/outreach participants. We also value practitioners on public lands as well as researchers in the fire community.

Topic areas of priority include: benefits of burning, woody encroachment, and economic benefits to individuals and the community. Several other topic areas were identified as secondary importance: fire effects on invasives, laws and liability, skill building for fire operations, burn planning, and carbon sequestration.

Strategies:

* Develop web page of value added information products*.*
* Sponsor and co‐sponsor presentations and sessions at management and scientific conferences.
* Sponsor travel for program personnel and experts to meetings and field tours.
* Form a network of research and management demonstration sites and sponsor field tours.
* Host Webinars.