

REDUCTION OF RISK OF DAMAGE CAUSED BY WILDFIRES IN CYPRUS' FORESTS

Cyprus is characterized by a Mediterranean climate dominated by mild, rainy winters and a prolonged, hot dry period often extending from May to October, i.e., 6 months. These conditions, combined with the flammable vegetation predominating Cyprus' mountains, the very rugged topography in forest areas and increasing abandonment of rural areas render Cyprus' natural landscapes extremely vulnerable to forest fires that cause losses in human lives, properties, and in valuable ecosystems and landscapes. Scenarios on future climate conditions foresee that the year average and summer temperatures will rise, rainfall will be reduced and the dry period will further expand. As a consequence, more frequent and intense fire incidences are expected. Therefore, the competent authorities and particularly the Department of Forests being by Law responsible for fire prevention and extinguishment in an area that includes state forests and a zone of two kilometers around them, i.e. 57% of Cyprus' territory must upgrade their capabilities to cope with increased future fire hazards.

The Norway Grants have two goals – to contribute to a more equal Europe, both socially and economically – and to strengthen the relations between Norway, and the 13 beneficiary countries in Europe. The objective of the Grants is to reduce social and economic disparities and strengthen bilateral relations. This strengthens the internal market, leading to a more prosperous Europe.

The Norway Grants are funded by Norway and consist of €1.3 billion during the 2014-2021 funding period (<https://eeagrants.org/about-us>).

As part of the Norwegian grants, the Department of Forests will implement the project entitled "Reduction of Risk of Damage Caused by Wildfires in Cyprus' Forests".

Project Scope

In general, the project aims at contributing to the reduction of fire incidents and / or the forest area burnt by forest fires through enhancing the capabilities of the Department of Forests and raising public awareness on forest fire danger.

Objectives

The main objectives are to upgrade the firefighting equipment of the Department of Forests including vehicles, machinery and tools, to acquire and maintain strategic stocks of necessary firefighting materials necessary to cope with mega fires that may be more frequent in the future, to enhance awareness of the Cyprus society about the growing forest fire danger.

Project Duration

The project starts on 22/7/2020 and finishes on 31/10/2023.

Project Budget and purchases

The project is granted by the Norway Grants and the total budget is € 882.353.



Norway
grants

Purchase of firefighting equipment

Through this grant the Department of Forests will be enhanced its capabilities with new equipment:

- 1 Surveillance Cameras
- 2 Hand tools for the fire squad task force
- 3 Light fire vehicles
- 4 Jeeps for the teams of quick intervention
- 5 Firefighting Uniforms
- 6 Quality boots for Firefighting

Awareness campaigns and Project Publicity

Among the main objectives of the Department of Forests, are the environmental education and the creation of forest consciousness in the population. In order to gain the support and co-operation of the public, information campaigns are organized annually. These campaigns are undertaken during certain periods of the year, such as the “arbor day” celebration and the “save our forests week” and aim at informing and educating the public with emphasis on youth, about the importance of forests and the danger of fire. This activity will be focused mainly to the residents of mountainous communities. Most of forest fires in Cyprus break-out outside but near forest boundaries. In order to mitigate this problem an information campaign is conducted, that includes mainly oral communication, the enforcement of the law and the distribution of short publications and posters. This campaign targets the few young people that still live in such areas and have increased awareness about the environment. Most of them are members of volunteerism firefighting squad teams.

Also, main activities will include presentations conducted by forest officers at schools and broadcasting of relevant programs through the media.

Positive effects of the proposed project

The main positive effects of the project are the enhancement of citizens’ safety, the protection of their property and the preservation of the natural environment from the forest fires. This can be achieved through the strengthening of the existing fire protection system which it is used by the Department of Forests, in order to be ready to respond effectively and efficiently to the future major fires.

The targeted reduction of fire incidents and/or the forest area burnt, which is the ultimate project objective is expected to result into a range of benefits which are directly associated with a reduced number of forest fires, one of the principal impacts of the climate change on forest ecosystems in the Mediterranean countries in the coming years:

- Protection of valuable landscapes, natural ecosystems and biodiversity elements across the Troodos Range
- Protection of human properties in rural areas
- Involving local communities in forest fire protection
- Improving safety conditions for the forest staff
- Improvement of life quality in rural areas