I. Project Context

Country Context

Russia, the largest country in the world, also has the world’s largest area of forest. Every year a vast area of that forest burns, ranging from 4 to 17 million ha according to satellite imagery. Nearly 90% of Russia’s forest fires are of human origin, which means that some danger and loss to human lives and built assets is always present. While these losses are of global concern in terms of carbon emissions to the atmosphere, the summer of 2010 presented more immediate threats and distress. The unusual feature of the fires in 2010 was their heavy incidence in more highly populated European Russia, including in Moscow Oblast (province) itself and in other major metropolitan regions such as Nizhny-Novgorod, Vladimir, and Ryazan, rather than being concentrated in the sparsely populated Siberia and the Far East regions of Russia as is more typically the case. Several plumes of smoke rose to the stratosphere over western Russia, and by August coalesced into one massive cloud 3,000 km long. In Moscow on August 7, air samples showed 6.6 times normal levels of carbon monoxide, and illness and pollution due to extreme air pollution reached high levels.

Historically, the Soviet Union was very advanced in terms of forest fire identification and suppression, with 600 aircraft, 8,000 smokejumpers, and 70,000 full time forest guards. This capability was decimated by budget cuts after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Indicators of the consequences of this were the 70 percent decline in aircraft flight hours for fire control between 1991 and 2002, and the decline over the same period in the percentage of fires detected by aviation, from 89 percent in 1991 to 44 percent in 2002. In addition, the average size of fires at detection and initial response consistently increased from 1991 to 2002 as a result of shrinking fire management resources. These negative trends were exacerbated as an unintended consequence of a major reform embodied in a new Forestry Code, which took effect January 2, 2007. This code completely decentralized responsibility for fighting forest fires to the 89 subjects (oblasts, krays, republics) of the Russian Federation, many of whom were not truly prepared for this burden. Furthermore, the removal of any central authority with the ability to shift resources in real time from regions free of severe fire stress to those suffering overwhelming attack, removed the main source of flexibility from Russia’s fire response system.

II. Sectoral and Institutional Context

The government’s strategy for recovering central capabilities, responsibility, and leadership in forest fire protection, and in broader forestry management, is not yet complete, but the overall direction is clear. A Presidential Decree was issued on August 27, 2010, moving the Federal Forestry Agency (FFA) from the Ministry of Agriculture and placing it directly under the Prime Minister’s office. A federal role in operational forest fire monitoring and control is again required, to prevent repetition of the 2010 experience. This responsibility should be exercised by a forestry agency constantly monitoring the state of the forests, since forest fires not caught before they reach around 100 ha in extent are not likely to be brought under control by human intervention. To aim for the earliest possible detection, and the follow up capability to extinguish small fires quickly and efficiently, Interregional Forest Fire Centers (IFFCs) will be established and equipped to backstop efforts by regional bodies, coordinate across sectors (fires in agricultural land and peat areas are the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, fires in Protected Areas the responsibility of MNRE, and once fires cross into villages and towns they are the managed by EMERCOM – The Ministry of Emergency Situations), and to provide additional support where fire outbreaks threaten to overwhelm local forces. Three such major operational centers will be supported under the project.

These actions also support the country’s Forest Sector Development Strategy through 2020, a national policy document approved by Executive Order of the Ministry of Industry and Trade and Ministry of Agriculture in October 2008. According to the Strategy, the systemic problems facing forest sector development include (i) significant loss of forest resources from fires, pests and diseases; (ii) low quality forest regeneration; and (iii) a high level of illegal timber logging. The primary objective of the Strategy is to support sustainable forest management and to maintain and strengthen forest resources, as well as the environmental capacity of forests.

III. Project Development Objectives
The Project Development Objective is to improve forest fire prevention and suppression in select forest ecosystems, including targeted protected areas, and to enhance forest management in pilot regions.

IV. Project Description

Component Name
- Enhancing Forest Fire Prevention, Management and Control
- Building Forestry and Protected Area Management Capacity
- Project Management

V. Financing (in USD Million)

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VI. Implementation

The Federal Forestry Agency (FFA) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) will be responsible for project implementation. In particular, they will: (i) provide general project oversight; (ii) prepare terms of reference for consulting assignments and technical specifications for goods purchases; (iii) ensure compliance with the provisions of the project’s loan agreement, including the timely contracting of the project’s financial audits and preparation of annual reports; (iv) oversee disbursement requests; and (v) monitor project results. These agencies will also ensure that loan proceeds are provided to the PIU (see below) in a timely manner for the project’s implementation.

In addition, an Interagency Committee has been established to support interagency coordination, monitor project progress on a quarterly basis, as well as settle controversies that might arise during project implementation. The Committee will be chaired by the Head of FFA, and will consist of the Deputy Head of FFA, as well as representatives from MNRE, Ministry of Economic Development (MoED), and MINFIN.

VII. Safeguard Policies (including public consultation)

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<td>Projects in Disputed Areas OP/BP 7.60</td>
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</table>

VIII. Contact point

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