Integrated Fire Management in Occitanie

Wildfires are a natural component of Mediterranean landscapes, but their frequency and impact are increasing due to climate change, land abandonment, and urbanisation. In Occitanie, Integrated Fire Management (IFM) faces numerous social, ecological, economic, and institutional challenges. This summary presents the main barriers identified and potential pathways for action.

Social Context

- **Abandonment of agricultural and pastoral activities, leading to a decline in traditional vegetation fuel-reduction practices.**
- **Expansion of peri-urban development in high-risk areas (wildland–urban interface).**
- **Limited awareness of, or resistance to, fire-based management practices (e.g. prescribed burning).**

Environmental Context

- **Accumulation of flammable biomass linked to insufficient forest management.**
- **Increase in summer droughts and strong winds, exacerbating wildfire risk.**
- **Changes in ecosystem composition, reducing resilience to extreme wildfire events.**

Economic Context

- **Low economic value of Mediterranean forests, providing limited incentives for active management.**
- **Fragmented private landownership, complicating coordinated action.**
- **Lack of sustainable financing mechanisms to encourage vegetation clearing and grazing.**

Governance Context

- **Complexity of responsibilities across municipalities, departments, and regions.**
- **Uneven implementation of mandatory vegetation-clearing obligations, often poorly monitored or weakly enforced.**
- **Effective cooperation remains localised and dependent on voluntary initiatives by engaged actors.**

Current Practices

- **Prevention through regulatory vegetation clearing and DFCI infrastructure (Forest Fire Defence), including firebreaks, tracks, water tanks, and water points.**
- **Growth of awareness-raising campaigns, particularly following the 2022 wildfire season.**
- **Summer patrols and active surveillance in the most sensitive areas (public forests and parks).**
- **Local initiatives involving grazing or experimental prescribed burning, still limited in scope.**

Major Challenges

- **Partial application of mandatory vegetation-clearing obligations.**
- **Lack of human and financial resources in some municipalities.**
- **Weak multi-level coordination, particularly in “new territories” not historically exposed to wildfire risk (outside southern France).**
- **Cultural reluctance to use fire as a land management tool.**

Suggested improvements

- **Strengthen inter-institutional coordination, particularly through departmental leadership.**
- **Create economic incentives for active management of private forests (subsidies, payments for ecosystem services, insurance schemes).**
- **Deploy targeted awareness campaigns on vegetation-clearing obligations, especially in peri-urban areas.**
- **Support the return of grazing and prescribed burning through training and outreach tools.**
- **Promote an approach of “coexistence with fire” by adapting policies to local realities.**

Better understanding these barriers can help reduce territorial vulnerability, limit wildfire risk, and reintroduce fire as a sustainable land management tool.

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