



TAKING CARE OF FIRE IN EUROPE

MANIFESTO

Since the beginning of humanity the production, control and use of fire has been a determining factor in the evolution of the human species. The first energy Age began more than 300,000 years ago, when humankind began to use the energy obtained from fire by burning biomass. With the control of this powerful energy, human beings moulded the space they occupied and shaped themselves as individuals, on a physical and cognitive level, and as social beings.

During the Neolithic period, fire was decisive in the creation and expansion of pastoral societies and played a key role in changing the landscapes of Europe. Traditional, rural, native or indigenous fires have coexisted with natural fires since human occupation of the European continent. The fires associated with traditional communities have created a heterogeneous landscape. In those societies known as traditional, rural and indigenous, the ancestral uses of fire continue for a wide variety of purposes: renewing pastures, deforestation to open up new pasture areas and to plant agricultural crops, to encourage and facilitate hunting, for biomass management and fuel reduction, to stimulate fruiting, to control pests and diseases, to control wild animals, to expand housing areas or for cultural and ceremonial purposes.

Over the centuries, although these uses of fire were intended to sustain a subsistence system for human communities, they have also provided benefits for the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of landscapes. Fire can play a negative or positive role for human communities and ecosystems, depending on how, when and where it occurs.



With the onset of industrialisation in Europe from the 18th century onwards, a process of socio-economic changes gradually began which had a strong impact on rural areas, such as the migration of the rural population to urban centres, the motorisation of agriculture, the intensification of farming, the introduction of inorganic fertilisers and changes to property regimes (privatisation of communal land). New societies, essentially urban and urbanised, have a strong influence on rural areas, causing the exclusion of fire from the landscape, which has distorted the importance of anthropogenic fire in the ecological processes of ecosystems adapted to and dependent on fire.

From the 1970s onwards, by adopting the prescribed fire training practised in the USA, fire was reintroduced into European forests as a fuel management tool, the so-called prescribed fire or technical fire (controlled fire in Portugal), promoted essentially by state institutions with influence in forest management and fighting wildfires.



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The cumulative changes that have taken place in the rural areas of European territories have led to forest fires that now behave differently from the past, with a combination of climate change (global warming and changes in rainfall patterns) and changes to the landscape (fragmentation, abandonment of ancient practices and land use), which have been exacerbated since the First Industrial Revolution.

In just over two centuries, a whole complex ancestral system was destroyed that was sustained by practices developed since the Neolithic period, based on the balanced management of resources and where fire was the transversal tool for the most diverse purposes, promoting the maintenance of landscapes.

Currently, wildfire seasons in Europe are becoming longer and more intense and are gradually affecting the whole of European territory. It is in this current context of change that there is a need to return fire to the landscape, as a way of mitigating the impact of the large and destructive wildfires that affect the territory every year.

The revitalisation of traditional fire-related knowledge and practices is becoming an important strategy for adapting to the threats posed by wildfires. It is therefore vitally important to reintroduce prescribed fire (traditional or technical) in the management of territories, habitats and resources of rural communities and to increase the resilience of European landscapes to the impacts of climate change and the potential risks arising from it.

The PRESCRIBED FIRE ASSOCIATION OF EUROPE - NODFYR PORTUGAL (NODFYR) exists with the aim of promoting environmental, ecological, social and economic sustainability and general well-being by educating, training and practising safe prescribed fire techniques to empower local communities, both technically and institutionally and in terms of traditional knowledge and use of fire, enabling the ecological management of habitats and landscapes and fostering the resilience of territories in the face of climate change.



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NODFYR presents this manifesto with the aim of returning native fire to European landscapes, through the implementation of the use of prescribed and ecological fire, respecting and complying with the technical criteria and ancestral knowledge of the use of fire by the peoples of Europe (not just the European Union), focused on the sustainable management of resources for the maintenance of soils and the conservation of habitats and biodiversity. Thus, in fulfilment of the object and purpose of this manifesto:

1. NODFYR aims to bring the possible uses of prescribed fire and the common definition of traditional fire within Europe to political discussion and debate in the different states and regions of Europe.
2. NODFYR advocates integrating the use of prescribed, traditional and institutional fire for the protection of classified landscapes and protected areas.
3. NODFYR aims to defend and integrate the role of prescribed fire in reducing emissions and increasing soil carbon retention.
4. NODFYR advocates the reintroduction and maintenance of fire in the habitats and ecosystems of European landscapes, adapted to and dependent on fire, considering their fire regime and based on a holistic and integrated vision with traditional practices.
5. NODFYR considers it essential to empower and capacitate local communities in Europe in the use of fire as an ancestral and safe tool, with a view to reducing the risk of wildfire and the impact of large wildfires.
6. NODFYR aims to reintroduce Europe's traditional knowledge of fire, based on the holistic framework that characterised its use for thousands of years and enabled the sustainability of resources.
7. NODFYR aims to value and disseminate the traditional knowledge and use of fire of local communities in Europe who still look after fire, as well as to promote, disseminate and reinforce the culture of fire that encompasses diversity, equity, inclusion, justice and sovereignty in all areas of territories and their inhabitants.
8. NODFYR advocates integrating traditional knowledge into the training and capacity building of prescribed fire and institutional fire technicians.
9. NODFYR wants to promote the use of traditional fire as an intangible heritage of humanity.
10. NODFYR advocates the introduction of prescribed fire, of a traditional and institutional nature, in the management and conservation of pastures within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

