



WRP Wildland Fire (Response/Prevention) Fact Sheet

A Year-Round National Security Threat

The WRP Wildland Fire (Response/Prevention) Deep-Dive Chapter in the [2026 WRP Report](#) details these three risk categories with associated summary information, case studies, best practices and findings for further agency collaboration.

Strategic Overview

115 Million
Americans in
High-Risk Fire
Areas

65 Million
Impacted by
Wildfire Smoke
Annually

90%
West's Drinking Water from
Public Lands

506K acres
Burned in
California
(2025)

327K acres
Burned in
Arizona
(2025)

KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

- **U.S. Wildland Fire Service (Jan 2026):** Consolidates BIA, BLM, FWS, NPS & aviation under a single Fire Chief via Executive Order
- **USFS Reorganization:** HQ relocates to Salt Lake City; 15 State Directors replace Regional Offices; field authority expanded
- **USDA 6-Month Feasibility Study:** Evaluating potential consolidation of federal wildland fire management functions

CROSS-CUTTING FINDING: Wildfire is now a year-round domestic defense mission. Durable resilience requires unified federal–state–tribal governance, sustained fuels investment, real-time airspace deconfliction, and integrated post-fire recovery planning, before the next ignition.

Key Takeaways:

- Wildfire is no longer a seasonal suppression challenge but a year-round domestic defense mission.

- Roughly 115 million Americans now live in high-risk fire areas. Sixty-five million are significantly impacted by smoke each year. In 2025 alone, the WRP Region saw approximately 506,000 acres burned in California and 327,000 acres in Arizona, alongside substantial fire activity in Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah.
- The national security dimension is real: 90% of the West's public drinking water originates on public lands. Sixty percent of California's water comes from national forests. Protecting forests is protecting water supply.
- On the policy side, January 2026 marked a major structural shift with the establishment of the U.S. Wildland Fire Service, consolidating Interior's fire programs from BIA, BLM, FWS, NPS, and aviation offices under a single Fire Chief. This is the most significant organizational change in federal wildland fire management in decades. USFS remains separate; transferring its functions would require Congressional action. Both departments are now actively working to align aviation systems, qualifications, surge staffing, and contracting.
- Jurisdictional fragmentation remains the central coordination challenge. Federal, state, tribal, and local authorities manage adjacent lands under different rules, funding streams, and decision timelines. Identifying a single champion in each state is essential to fixing that.
- Unauthorized drones forced aircraft to stand down 218 times over active wildfires in 2025, nearly double the seven-year average. That is an operational safety crisis that needs action: real-time UAS situational awareness, expanded DOW MOUs, and improved airspace deconfliction tools.
- Post-fire recovery is not a follow-on mission; it begins while the fire is still active. Utah's Post Wildfire Mitigation Team is the model: a unified state structure that coordinates FEMA grants and begins planning before the fire is out.
- **The closing finding:** Wildfire resilience requires unified governance, sustained fuels investment, real-time airspace coordination, and integrated recovery planning, before the next ignition.

Highlights of the WRP Wildland Fire (Response/Prevention) Deep-Dive focus areas:

1. Preparedness and Pre-Planning: Cross-boundary coordination, evacuation infrastructure, year-round readiness.

- Jurisdictional patchwork (federal/state/tribal/local) creates coordination gaps, single state champion needed.
- Insurance industry partnerships incentivizing community-level mitigation credit.
- **Best Practice on State Collaboration:** California treats over 700,000 acres each year, prescribed fire has doubled



and supported over 2,200 projects backed by \$2.5B state funding.

- **Best Practices** to Support DOW Mission, Seasonal Fire Outlook and Fire Collaboration.
- Year-round readiness requires ecosystem-based prevention: groundwater restoration,

2. **Mitigation:** Fuels Management Coordination, Planning and Treatments.

- **Best Practice:** Good Neighbor Authority (GNA): produced largest-ever Colorado state-federal forestry investments.
- BLM treated 1.2M high-risk acres in 2023; targeting 2M acres annually via shared stewardship.



3. **Aerial Response/Drones:** Aviation fire response and integration of Unmanned Aircraft (UAS) coordination into wildland fire operations.

- Need for effective wildland fire aviation response, airspace deconfliction.
- **Best practices** regarding use of Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR) and use of drones.



4. **Post-Fire Landscape Resilience and Recovery:** Need for post-fire to be part of the fire management cycle.

- **Best Practice regarding State Coordination:** Utah Post Wildfire Mitigation Team.
- **Case Study on the Silver King Fire**
- Debris flow prevention, native seeding, gray and green infrastructure.



5. **Science, Data and Technology:** Available tools and how to support informed, risk-based decisions.

- **Federal efforts:** many USFS and USGS **Tools** (Combined Wildland Fire Dataset, Wildland Fire Trends Tool, Post-Fire Debris Flow Hazard Viewer).
- Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) review of technologies used in wildfire management.
- **Case Study:** USGS Landslide Hazards Science in support of Postfire Public Safety and Risk Reduction.



For more information please see [2026 WRP Report](#).