

Departments of the Interior and Agriculture  
**Joint Annual Report**  
Fiscal Year 2022

Improving Fire Regime Condition Class on Federal and Indian Forest or Rangelands

*As required by Section 40803 subsection (b) of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law*

## **Preface**

President Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, commonly called the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) on November 15, 2021, making this once-in-a-generation investment in the Nation’s infrastructure and economic competitiveness a reality. This landmark investment will rebuild America’s critical infrastructure, tackle the climate crisis, advance environmental justice, and drive the creation of good-paying union jobs. By addressing long overdue improvements and strengthening our resilience to the changing climate, this investment in our communities across the country will grow the economy sustainably and equitably so everyone gets ahead for decades to come.

The Department of the Interior (Interior) will receive approximately \$1.5 billion for Wildland Fire Management over five years in funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, including nearly \$900 million for fuels management and wildfire risk reduction. Interior will stand up new programs and expand existing work to deliver results by boosting local economies, building resilience to the devastating effects of drought and wildfires, putting Americans to work to reclaim abandoned coal mine sites and plug orphaned oil and gas wells, restoring important ecosystems and watersheds, strengthening tribal water infrastructure and climate resilience, and identify domestic supplies of mineral resources needed to advance new technologies.

Through BIL, the Department of Agriculture – Forest Service (USDA-FS), will receive approximately \$5.5 billion over five years for reducing the risk of unwanted wildland fire and restoring ecosystems. Of that, approximately \$3.5 billion targets reducing wildfire risk. This investment supports the agency’s 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy to increase the pace of landscape scale treatments to reduce wildfire risk to communities and natural resources and restore fire-adapted ecosystems.

Section 40803 of the BIL, subsection (b) established a requirement for Interior and Agriculture that by not later than September 30, 2027 “Of the Federal land or Indian forest land or rangeland that has been identified as having a very high wildfire hazard potential, conduct restoration treatments and improve the Fire Regime Condition Class of 10,000,000 acres that are located in – (1) the wildland-urban interface; or (2) a public drinking water source area”. Further, subsection (h) requires an annual report to congress that describes “the number of acres of land on which projects carried out using funds made available under this section improved the Fire Regime Condition Class of the land described in subsection (b)”. This is the first annual report to address this requirement.

## Summary of Fiscal Year 2022 Accomplishments

In FY 2022, Interior and USDA-FS spent approximately \$206 million in BIL funding focused primarily on federal lands across the United States to proactively reduce wildfire risk. These investments include Interiors locally identified areas of shared priorities and USDA-FS's 10 initial Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes. These investments will reduce the risk from wildfire to the places that we live, work, and play, such as the Sagebrush biome, where wildlife habitat and rural economies are threatened by annual invasive grasses that have altered the fire regime, and the Klamath Basin encompassing 12,000 square miles from southern Oregon to northern California, where fuels have accumulated, increasing wildfire risk, as a result of more than a century of fire suppression.

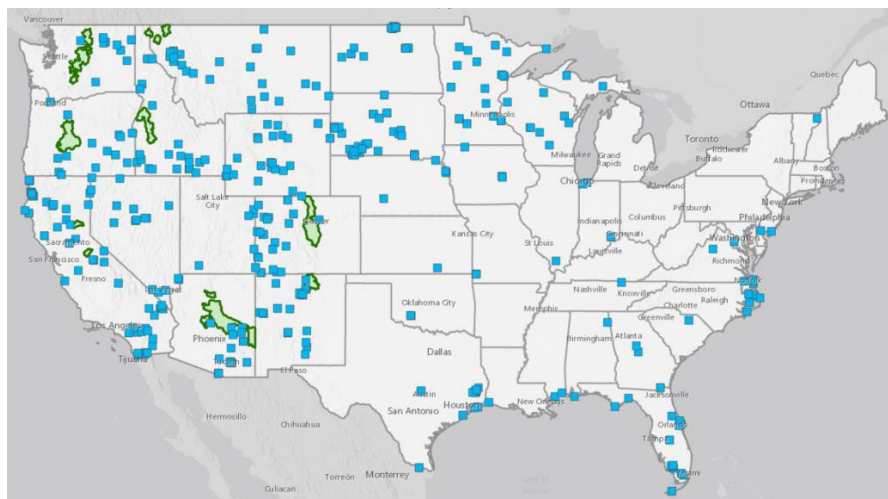


Figure 1. FY 2022 wildfire risk reduction investments in the continental United States by DOI and USDA-FS.

■ Interior     ■ USDA-FS

### Interior

In FY 2022 Interior completed more than 2,034,089<sup>1</sup> acres of priority wildfire risk reduction treatment. This includes 1,846,101 million acres and 116% of the fiscal year 2022 target of approximately 1.6 million acres with base program funding and 187,988 acres of BIL funded treatments or 54% of the 350,000 acres planned. Interior completed 81% of BIL funded within the Wildland-Urban Interface to protect the places where people live on or adjacent to federal lands. Further, Interior reported 700,000 acres treated with regular and disaster relief funding and more than 77,000 acres treated with BIL funding moved to a better Fire Regime Condition Class.

### USDA-FS

In FY 2022, the USDA-FS completed approximately 3.2<sup>2</sup> million acres of priority wildfire risk reduction treatments, 84% of the FY 22 target. About 253,000<sup>3</sup> of these acres were within the 10 initial Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes<sup>4</sup> associated with BIL, representing 122% of the FY 22 target, and more than half of these acres were within the Wildland Urban Interface.

Over the last 15 years the USDA-FS moved away from tracking Fire Regime Condition Class based on improved, evolving science around mapping and mitigating wildfire risk. Currently the USDA-FS has incorporated Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment (QWRA), Potential Wildfire Operational Delineations (PODS), and Firesheds in our processes for identifying the areas with the highest risk from wildfires. USDA-FS currently tracks acres mitigated as an indicator for reducing wildfire risk. Acres mitigated is usually the results of several treatment actions occurring on a single land base over

<sup>1</sup> The National Fire Plan Operations Reporting System is the authoritative data source for Interior fuels management accomplishments.

<sup>2</sup> The Forest Activity Tracking System is the authoritative data source for USDA-FS hazardous fuels reduction accomplishments.

<sup>3</sup> This figure comes from data reported in the Forest Activity Tracking System (FACTS). Activities accomplished within Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes were identified using FACTS and a spatial mapping application.

<sup>4</sup> Shown in Figure 1 and Table 1

multiple years until the risk of wildfire has been reduced as planned in NEPA (e.g. precommercial thinning, piling fuels, burning piles, broadcast burn, etc.). These actions would improve Fire Regime Condition Class in dryer forest ecosystems. In FY 2022, the USDA-FS mitigated 1.1 million acres with 71,000 acres occurring within the Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes. For future fiscal years, the USDA-FS will add Fire Regime Condition Class to the suite of other wildfire risk tools (that are based on the best available science). The USDA-FS highlights below better illustrate the use of QWRA's, PODS and Firesheds which provided the structure for work under BIL.

## USDA-FS – Highlights

The USDA-FS developed an assessment of wildfire threats to communities based upon simulated exposure of human-built structures to wildfire over ten thousand seasons. This assessment, commonly known as the “fireshed assessment”, was used as the foundation of the January 2022 Wildfire Crisis Strategy<sup>5</sup> and associated Implementation Plan to address the threat of catastrophic wildfire. Subsequently, the Forest Service identified 10 initial Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes in the Western United States to conduct focused work to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire, based in part on the location of the highest risk firesheds.

*Table 1: List and Location by State of USDA-FS 10 Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes*

<b>Landscape Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
4FRI	Arizona
Prescott	Arizona
North Yuba	California
Stanislaus	California
Colorado Front Range	Colorado
Southwest Idaho	Idaho
Kootenai	Montana
Enchanted Circle	New Mexico
Central Oregon	Oregon
Central Washington Initiative	Washington State

Expected outcomes from work on these landscapes include mitigating the risk of wildfire to communities, infrastructure, watersheds, habitat, industry, and recreation, and creating restoration-based job opportunities. In dry site, frequent fire forest these activities will improve FRCC. These landscapes will face challenges to implementation which will include gaining social license, labor shortages (both internally and externally), volatile timber markets, endangered species habitat, and the inherent complexity of prescribed fire in and around the wildland urban interface. The success for all these efforts will be founded in collaboration and partnerships.

<sup>5</sup> [Confronting the Wildfire Crisis \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/land-management/land-use-planning/wildfire-crisis-strategy)

To accomplish this critical work the initial ramp-up of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes has focused on building internal capacity by hiring key positions, working with partners to build external capacity through agreements, conducting field preparation for implementation, and awarding contracts to begin treatments. These landscapes represent the most complex and often expensive acres to treat. As a result, increases in treated acres accomplishments will take time, and are expected to increase as new employees are hired and trained, partners ramp up in response to the opportunities presented, and contracts are completed.



*Figure 2 A firefighter ignites a prescribed burn outside of Sisters, OR.  
Photo Credit: Oregon Department of Forestry*

For more specific information on each of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes please visit: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/a23d2e0cb7834d75bd5f830ae51720d9/>



## Community Wildfire Defense

While the USDA-FS focused BIL fuels management funding toward landscapes in the west, they also recognize the importance of landscapes managed by other jurisdictions including private. The BIL provides funding to the USDA-FS to implement a Community Wildfire Defense Grants program which will support Fire Adapted Communities in places that people live across the country. These grants are complementary to Interior and USDA-FS fuels funding and will help at-risk local and Tribal communities implement the three goals of the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy \(Cohesive Strategy\)](#):

- **Restore and Maintain Landscapes** *Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to fire-related disturbances in accordance with management objectives.*
- **Fire Adapted Communities** *Human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property.*
- **Wildfire Response** *All jurisdictions participate in making and implementing safe, effective, efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions.*



*Figure 4: A home that survived a 2020 wildfire due to mitigation work done by the Oregon Department of Forestry completed with federal grant funding - similar opportunities are anticipated for communities across the Northeast. Photo Credit: Oregon Department of Forestry, Jenna Trentadue.*



*Figure 3: Smoke billows from a wildfire burning in the Wharton State Forest, New Jersey 2022. Photo Credit: Dave Hernandez, for NJ.com/TNS*

Grants are prioritized in communities located in an area identified as having high or very high wildfire hazard potential, are low-income, and/or have been impacted by a disaster.

The grants provide funding for two project types:

1. The development and revision of Community Wildfire Protection Plans.
2. The implementation of projects described in a Community Wildfire Protection Plan less than ten years old.

The new program received more than 400 applications for \$530 million nationally.

## Interior - Highlights

### Fuel Treatments Protect Communities



*Figure 5 The glow of a 2020 wildfire in New Mexico at dusk. Photo credit: USFS.*

likelihood of destructive fires like the Las Conchas Fire near Los Alamos or the Little Bear Fire near Ruidoso.

Since the 1940s, three large wildfires have burned on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula near the city of Soldotna and nearby communities. In the 1940's the Kenai wildfire burned over 300,000 acres, in 2009 the Shanta Creek wildfire burned 13,000 acres, and in May 2014, the Funny River wildfire started on the western side of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and grew to nearly 200,000 acres.

Management of wildfire in this area is challenging due to the proximity of people and fire-prone habitats. Fuels management projects help to reduce the negative impacts of wildfires on people, communities, and natural and cultural resources by reducing flammable vegetation.

Fuelbreaks constructed by the Fish and Wildlife Service provided an opportunity for firefighters to successfully defend homes threatened by the Funny River fire with one dollar invested in fuels management facilitated protection of \$164 dollars of residential, commercial, and industrial structures.

Fire managers from the Bureau of Indian Affairs work closely with the Tribal Pueblos and Reservations of New Mexico to identify and implement projects to reduce excess vegetation that fuel wildfires. These projects protect communities from wildfires as well as create economic opportunities. From 2013 to 2022, the BIA Southwest Region completed fuel treatments on 124,000 acres. Including more than 60,000 acres of mechanical treatments and nearly 33,000 acres of prescribed fire. To maintain the historic fire regime, approximately 65,000 acres per year would need to be completed. To accomplish this, the region is developing a landscape level approach to apply prescribed fire over large areas to reduce the



*Figure 6 A Wildfire burning in Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska. Photo Credit: Mike Hill, FWS.*



## Fuel Treatments Support Safe and Effective Wildfire Response

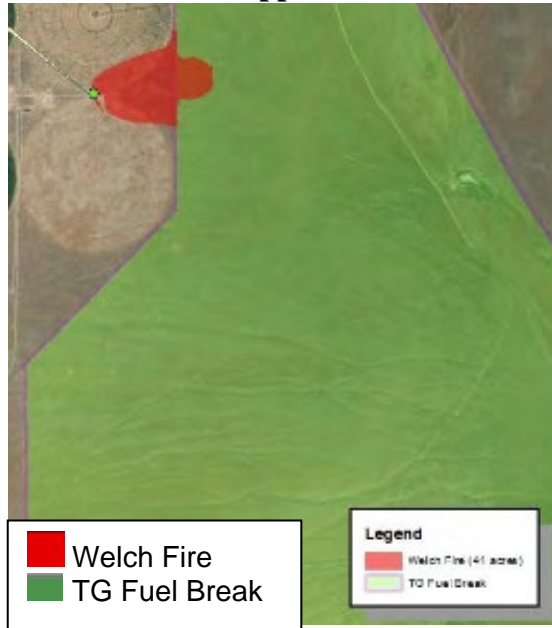


Figure 7 An aerial image shows the Welch Fire perimeter and its intersection with the Targeted Grazing Fuel Break.

In Nevada, the effectiveness of fuel treatments implemented in 2021 was tested by the Welch Fire that burned that summer. From April to June, the Bureau of Land Management used targeted grazing to reduce fuels and consume cheatgrass, a continuous flashy fuel, that ignites easily and is rapidly consumed by fire when dry. The Welch Fire started in July and West winds pushed it into the treated area. As it encountered the targeted grazing fuel break, the fire's rate of spread decreased from more than 1,000 feet per hour to less than 400 feet per hour, which made it possible to construct a fireline and extinguish the wildfire at just 41 acres.

In Florida, the Yellow Bluff wildfire burned more than 600 acres in Timucuan National Preserve managed by the National Park Service and closed I-95 for 19 hours during the 2019 Memorial Day weekend. The fire served as a wakeup call for the preserve and in 2020, it implemented mechanical treatments to break up the continuity of vegetation that could fuel wildfires and created new access into areas for fire response.

In June 2021, these fuel treatments were put to the test by the Red Trail and Sohm wildfires that were ignited by an afternoon thunderstorm. The Red Trail wildfire was contained on two sides by the fuel treatments completed the prior year, reducing the risk to firefighters by minimizing the need for suppression actions. Two days later, the Sohm Fire became visible and a prior fuel treatment that improved access helped interagency fire personnel respond more quickly.

### Conclusions and Look Ahead

With the additional investments in restoration and risk mitigation efforts like those described above, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will improve Interior and USDA-FS ability to safeguard lives, protect millions of dollars' worth of homes, businesses, infrastructure, and natural resources. Continued investments will be necessary as the vegetation treated through these efforts regrows, new homes are added within the Wildland Urban Interface, and wildfire hazard conditions increase over time. To address this and as required by the BIL, by November 15, 2026, Interior and USDA-FS will publish a long-term, outcome-based monitoring, maintenance, and treatment strategy to maintain forest health and reduce wildfire risk. The reduction of wildfire risk will be accomplished by working together in a cross-boundary approach that treats hazardous fuels at an annual level necessary to address the 20,000,000 acres needing priority treatment over the 10 years. For 2023 the Interior and USDA-FS will coordinate on opportunities to maximize cross-boundary treatment efforts while exploring opportunities to synchronize monitoring and maintenance work.



Figure 8 A single engine airtanker makes a drop on a prescribed fire on land managed by the National Park Service in Florida. Photo Credit: National Park Service.