



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA Forest Service scientists and managers prepare for fires with collaborative pre-planning

PODs Collaborative Planning Workshop 2021



The best time to manage wildfires is before they start. USDA Forest Service risk management experts are leading the way in collaborative planning efforts using PODs, potential operational delineations. “PODs are a great example of Forest Service research meeting the on the ground needs of the agency and the nation. As a science-based agency, and a learning organization, we are using PODs to integrate our best knowledge about fire management and the ability to collaboratively plan,” announced Chief Vicki Christiansen as she kicked off the PODs workshop on February 24-25, 2021. Over 450 land managers, planners, fire responders, scientists and consultants participated in this two day event hosted by the Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) Wildfire Risk Management Science (WRMS) team.

The PODs Approach

PODs blend local knowledge and values with risk management science and advanced spatial analytics. PODs give land managers a formal process for developing landscape-scale wildfire response options before the fire season even begins. PODs are containers defined by potential control features, such as roads and ridge tops. The PODs framework combines local fire knowledge with advanced spatial analytics to help managers develop a common understanding of risks, management opportunities, and desired outcomes to determine fire management objectives. The PODs approach to pre-planning for fire is proactive, cross-boundary, and collaborative. Pre-planning for fire is necessary to minimize risk by identifying the best locations to engage fire, enhancing the capability for using fire on the landscape to achieve ecological objectives, and preparing for future fires. The PODs approach creates opportunities to engage across boundaries, involve all parties in decision making before the smoke is in the air, and structure communication around fire objectives and opportunities. PODs bring all options for fire management to the table. Managers can then work together ahead of fires to develop cross-ownership agreements and plan fuel treatments and prescribed burns within these containers.

Workshop Highlights

- Workshop kickoff by USDA Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen
- Case studies presented by a diverse panel of speakers
- Presentations of challenges facing PODs implementation and use
- Five breakout sessions for closer engagement with the 450 participants
- Launch of the PODs Community of Practice



Andy Mandell, District Fire Management Officer on the Tonto National Forest and Incident Commander on the 2016 Juniper Fire and 2017 Pinal Fire, said during his presentation at the workshop, “The PODs concept for us was the tool to articulate and explain our risk and the justification for the values at risk that we are protecting. Creating the relationship between the decision-makers and the incident commanders, having that conversation before there is smoke in the air, is critical.” He adds, “We got really good feedback on the fire, largely in part from the community. We also got much better buy-in from our firefighters that came to the fire after we had had a year to articulate and talk about the PODs strategy.”



“Plans are useless, but planning is essential”

This quote from Dwight D. Eisenhower has become the motto of the PODs approach. Preplanning for fire puts all options on the table and provides context and communication opportunities for decisions that happen when the smoke is in the air. Through PODs science and implementation, the USDA Forest Service is actively working to address the risks, benefits, and challenges that will arise each fire season, proactively collaborating across boundaries to create plans that are supported by communities impacted by fire.

Upcoming events and projects built on the PODs Workshop

- Connection with local, state, and federal legislators to advance the application of PODs on the landscape
- Formal analysis of participant discussion during the workshop
- Formation of the PODs Community of Practice
- Publication of the PODs Cookbook, a guide for managers interested in building PODs on their landscapes

PODs Community of Practice

The workshop also kicked off the PODs Community of Practice, a group for PODs users, from beginners to experts. The Community of Practice will continue to grow and adapt with PODs, as members of the group share their unique experiences with PODs on their local landscapes. The Community of Practice will allow PODs users to learn from other’s experiences and develop new applications for PODs on the landscape. PODs science will continue to advance at RMRS while PODs users advance the on the ground applications of PODs for each upcoming fire season.

