

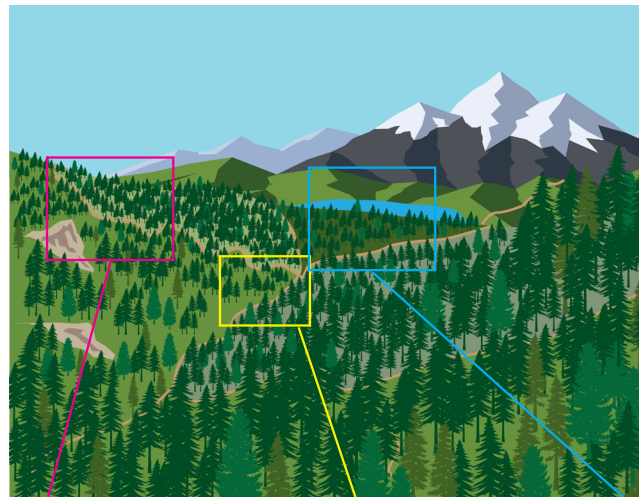
PODs in Practice

POD Boundaries and Fuel Breaks are not Synonymous: Considerations for potential operational delineations (PODs) and strategic fuel breaks

Take Home Point: Reducing PODs (potential operational delineations) to a network of suppression-focused fuel breaks may dilute the intent and diminish the richness of the framework. Using PODs and fuel breaks to perpetuate fire exclusion is not likely to be effective and may set us up for failure. In many forest types, we may need to rethink design of fuel breaks along POD boundaries to support expansion of proactive use of fire.

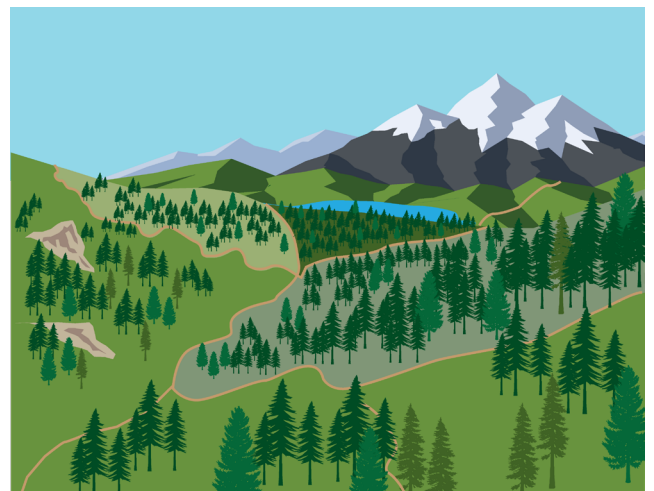
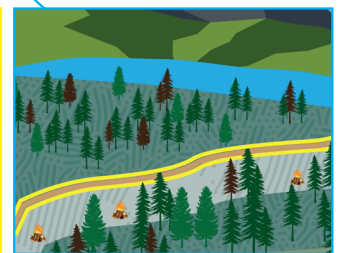
There is a compelling need to determine how to best integrate fuel breaks and PODs in ways that reduce landscape, community, and responder risk while providing strategic value.

- The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) earmarked \$500,000,000 to develop or improve potential control locations (PCLs) including fuel breaks (§40803).
- The BIL also established a new categorical exclusion for linear fuel break projects (§40806).
- The USDA Forest Service has since announced [significant investments](#) for priority landscapes across the western United States that emphasize implementation of fuel breaks along PCLs and POD boundaries.
- The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy Addendum Update identified a need for a significant increase in the use of proactive fire.



Stylized illustration of a coordinated system of landscape fuels management activities—a strategy—that builds fuel breaks along POD boundaries to expand proactive application of fire and reduce wildfire risk. Figure by Angela Hollingsworth, Colorado Forest Restoration Institute

— Road
— POD Boundary
— Fuelbreak
— Prescribed Fire



POD boundaries provide a logical basis for designing fuel break networks; treating fuels at strategic locations could strengthen and improve POD boundaries.

- Both PODs and fuel breaks emphasize safety and accessibility and are built with fire operations in mind.
- Both benefit from analytical tools that can stratify landscapes based on suppression difficulty, control likelihood, operational hazard, fire transmission, and fire impacts.
- Both are more successful through coordinated cross-boundary planning and implementation that use the best features regardless of jurisdiction and build shared understanding of realistic opportunities for controlling large wildfires.

However, POD boundaries and fuel breaks are not synonymous and there are important differences to keep in mind.

- Not all POD boundaries are suitable candidates for fuel breaks; for example, highway corridors surrounded by light fuels or areas with low fire risk or invasive species concerns. Risk to sensitive resources, feasibility of implementation and maintenance, and opportunities to treat POD interiors are important considerations for prioritization.
- The PODs framework is about much more than containment along PCLs, notably a focus on how the land base within POD polygons will respond to fire (positively or negatively) and how that aligns with forest plan objectives.
- Because fuel break networks alone are rarely if ever adequate to meaningfully reduce risk at scale, adjoining treatments (where appropriate) and ignition resistant homes are essential.

Therefore, it may be most beneficial to design fuel break projects along POD boundaries in service of a broader strategic land and fire management framework that coherently combines activities.

- PODs provide a spatial template to prioritize and coordinate treatments that are complementary; for example, implementing fuel breaks as anchors that de-risk expansion of beneficial fire.
- Shaded fuel breaks can achieve dual benefits of improving forest health and enhancing control likelihood.
- Incident response planning should identify how fuel breaks will connect with other PCLs and POD boundaries and estimate resource deployment needs accordingly.

Questions & Comments:

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Want to learn more?

[Weaving Spatial Strategy into Collaborative Engagement](#)

[The Role of Shaded Fuelbreaks in Support of Washington's 20-year Forest Health Action Plan](#)

About Wildfire Risk Management Science Team & PODs

The [Wildfire Risk Management Science \(WRMS\) Team](#) is housed at the Rocky Mountain Research Station and includes collaborators from Colorado State University and Oregon State University. WRMS develops and applies risk analysis, economics, and decision science research to improve the scientific basis for wildfire management. The team's scientists create actionable knowledge through continual learning and management partnerships which improve the science behind PODs and better support the needs of practitioners who are using PODs on the ground. The WRMS Team develops scientifically backed tools, processes, and information to help manage risks.



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