Night operations on the Pine Gulch Fire in Colorado.
Location: Pine Gulch Fire
Credit: CO, Kyle Miller, Wyoming Hotshots, USFS

FACT SHEET

Co-Management of Risk

Wildfires and their effects don't obey jurisdictional boundaries. Effectively managing wildfire risk across boundaries requires collaboration and coordination across multiple levels – local to national agencies and organizations. Differences in missions, mandates, organizational culture, and even terminology can make successful collaboration and coordination complex and challenging.

Building relationships with the fire management officers, agency administrators, incident management teams, fire analysts, community partners, landowners, and local authorities can significantly strengthen collaboration and improve risk management. These relationships are key to managing risk—start building them early.

Opening Lines of Communication

To build a foundation for wildfire communication, start by reaching out to the agencies and organizations in your local area.

Relationship Building

Relationship building is an active, early approach to building community support, resilience, and preparedness. Collaboration in pre-planned events, like prescribed fire and other mitigation activities, are great opportunities to practice coordination, build trust, and strengthen relationships.

Boundaries

It is important to discuss boundaries between agencies, organizations, and landowners up front. Identifying ways to overcome these boundaries creates opportunities for all responsible parties to understand each other, share resources, and work together.

OVERCOMING BOUNDARIES

Boundary-spanning features (listed below) help people from different sides of a boundary come together and collaborate to solve complex problems.

Boundaries across organizations can be caused by different land ownership, primary functions, culture, and perspectives.

People/Organizations These are the people or organizations that connect different groups or sides of a boundary (cooperative extensions, collaborative groups, land trusts).

Objects These are tools or physical items that help different groups understand each other (maps, models, agreements, charters).

Concepts These are ideas or terms that create a shared understanding across different groups (ecosystem, resilience).

Settings These are the environments or spaces—either physical locations or organizational structures—where collaboration can happen (institutions, funding sources, policies, meeting venues).

Risk

There are many types of fire risk. Identifying your categories and perceptions of risk will help you share those perceptions before and during active fires.

Values at risk during a fire may include people, infrastructure, the natural environment, and social, political, and economic stability.

Identify Risk Urgency

1. Immediate and tactical risk during fire season
2. Event-level risks across a wildfire
3. Long-term risks after the event

INCIDENT RESPONSE

Co-management means different things to different people. Because these perspectives influence how wildfires are managed, assumptions about span of control, unclear expectations, or unclear authority may lead to conflict.

Multi-agency coordination (MAC) groups can help develop a unified command space and facilitate a shared mission with agreed-upon objectives and desired outcomes.
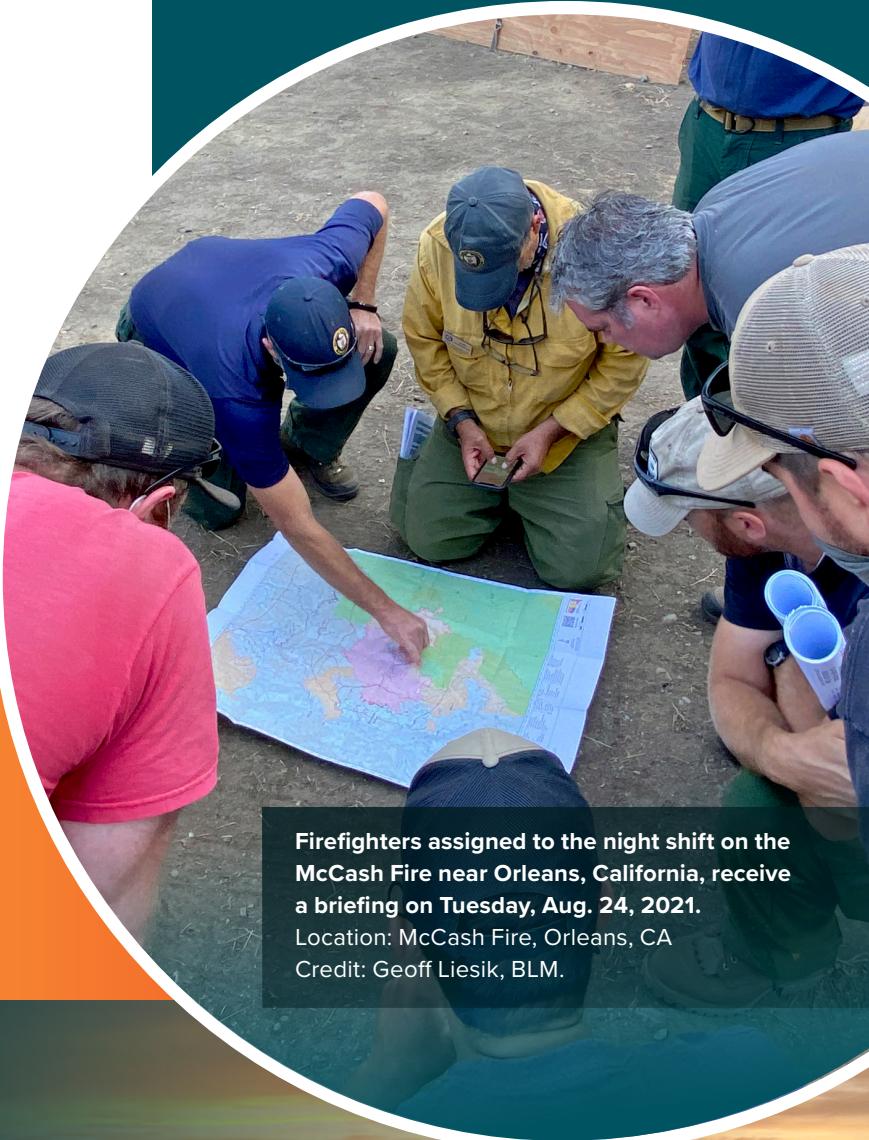
Conclusion

By intentionally developing and strengthening relationships ahead of the ever-expanding fire season, challenges to the co-management of risk can be overcome before they have a chance to cause conflict, duplicate responsible party efforts, or lead to negative wildfire outcomes.

Firefighters assigned to the night shift on the McCash Fire near Orleans, California, receive a briefing on Tuesday, Aug. 24, 2021.
Location: McCash Fire, Orleans, CA
Credit: Geoff Liesik, BLM.

Dig deeper into the science behind this summary on FireScience.gov.

Co-Managing Risk or Parallel Play? Examining Connectivity Across Wildfire Risk Mitigation and Fire Response in the Intermountain West. Principal Investigators: Emily Jane Davis, Darren J. McAvoy, Heidi R. Huber-Stearns, and Tony S. Cheng. Project ID: 17-1-06-6.

Effective Network Governance for Co-Management: The Role of Cognitive Alignment in Risk Perception and Value Orientation toward Collaboration. Principal Investigators: Branda L. Nowell and Toddi A. Steelman. Project ID: 17-1-06-14.

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The **Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP)** provides research funding, exchange, and communication for science associated with wildland fire, fuels, and fire-impacted ecosystems to dynamically respond to the emerging needs of fire managers, practitioners, and policymakers.