

Fire and its impact on water and water infrastructure: An all-hands approach to an all-human need
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Humans have mapped their landscapes into all sorts of cultural, political, and management jurisdictions. Man-made water infrastructure is designed to adhere to such jurisdictional borders, although the natural path of water does not, nor does the natural path of fire. There are many natural, and therefore border-ignoring drivers that promote the free-roaming aspect of fire, from wind speed and direction, to topography, to vegetation type and density. Fire breaks serve to do little if they do not cross jurisdictional boundaries, therefore, for example, allowing neighboring untreated landscapes to provide a path for ingress of fires into new forests. Jurisdictional boundaries also put red-tape in the way of effective fire mitigation. An attitude of fire mitigation and suppression as the only acceptable response to forest fire from the time of Spanish settlement on, has changed landscape and plant-life in the absence of what was once a natural and reoccurring event. Unfortunately, this has led to situations in which naturally ignited fires have enough fuel supplied to them to pose far more risk to life, property, and infrastructure than ever before.

As natural ignitions and fire movement on the landscape pay no heed to borders of human systems, it is in the best interests of human populations to work together to keep water infrastructure safe and restore the landscape to a more fire-adapted condition. The complexity of fire movement on the landscape deserves a cross-jurisdictional mindset that invites all populations and their resources to unite in protecting our lands, forests, and water.