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USDA Invests \$63M for Fuel Breaks to Protect Communities, Increase Firefighter Safety, as Part of Investing in America Agenda

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Press Office

DURANGO, CO, May 4, 2023 - Today, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the USDA is investing \$63 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to expand wildfire barriers, known as fuel breaks, to protect communities and firefighters across the West.

Fuel breaks slow a fire's spread, create a safe zone for firefighters to work, and a safer place to conduct hazardous fuel reduction treatments like prescribed burns.

This new round of investments will support projects in Colorado, Montana, Oregon, South Dakota and Wyoming to improve firefighter response, protect critical infrastructure and natural resources, ensure clean drinking water, support local timber industries, enhance rural economies and create jobs.

“For nearly a decade, scientists at the USDA Forest Service and risk management experts have tested and refined building these defensible spaces before a wildfire starts,” said Secretary Vilsack. “With climate change fueling the wildfire crisis, we are investing in this work through President Biden’s Investing in America agenda on an even larger scale as one of the many actions we are taking to protect the people and communities we serve.”

These opportunities were identified through a cross-boundary process that brings together Tribes, local wildland fire managers, business owners, elected officials and scientists to plan for future fires. In addition to using the best available science about fire operations and risks to communities, ecosystems and responders, this process supports the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#) as well as [complementary fuels treatment efforts](#).

Through this planning process, the Forest Service works with local communities to identify fire barriers such as roads, rivers and other landscape features that can prevent wildfires from spreading. In 2015, scientists at the Forest Service’s Rocky Mountain Research Station began work with research universities, federal agencies, states, and independent land and resource management partners to identify these fire barriers in the development of wildfire strategies.

Reinforcing these barriers and constructing adjacent fuel breaks will help reduce the risk of high-severity wildfires in the project areas, all of which are in, or adjacent to, high-risk firesheds that are outside of the initial [21 Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscapes](#).

This announcement is part of President Biden’s Investing in America agenda to grow the American economy from the bottom up and the middle out by rebuilding our nation’s infrastructure, driving over \$435 billion in private sector manufacturing investments, creating good-paying jobs, and building a clean energy economy to tackle the climate crisis and make our communities more resilient.

Learn more about how USDA is confronting the wildfire crisis on the [Forest Service website](#).

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