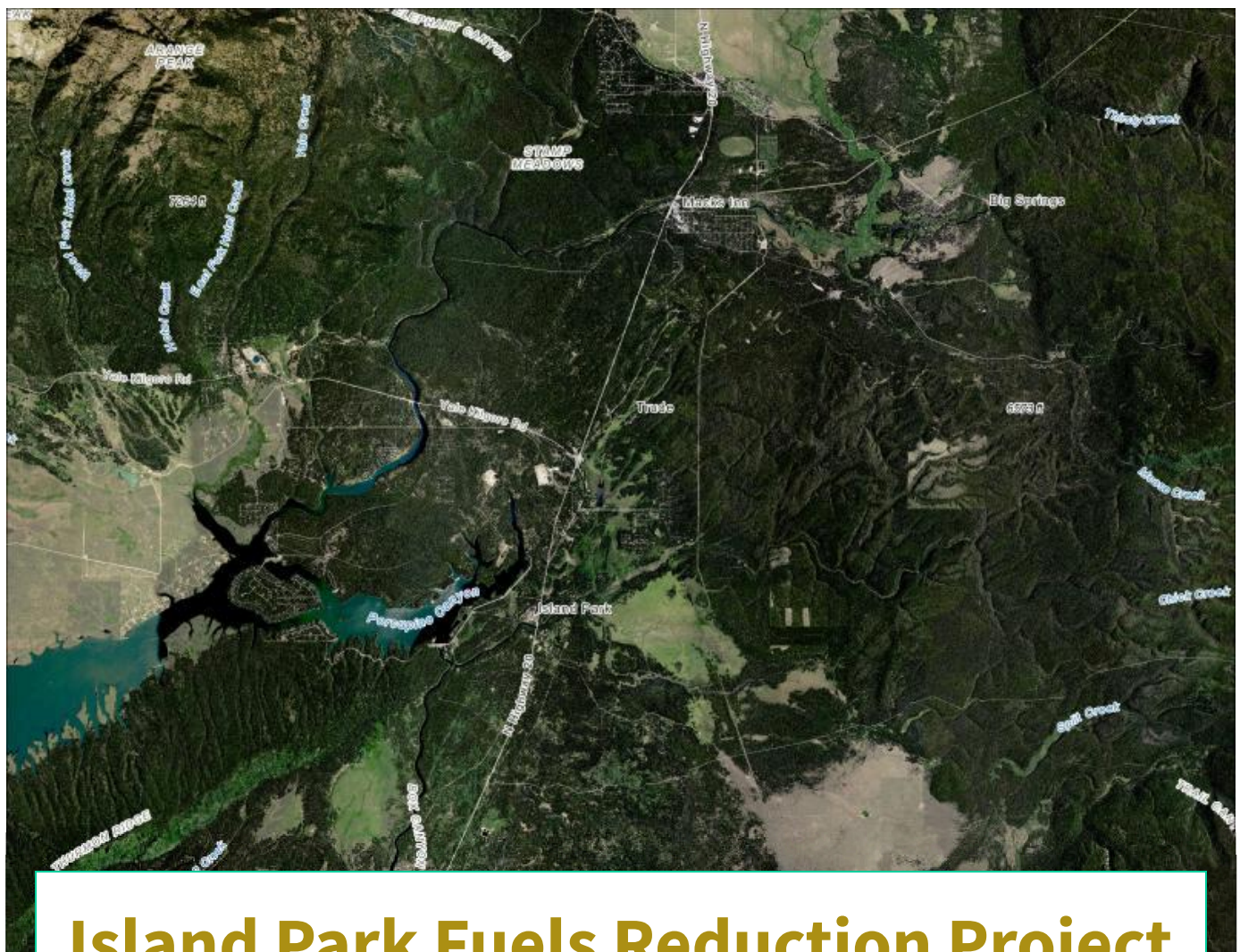


Island Park Fuels Reduction Project



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Reducing Wildfire Risk in Island Park: A Forest
Health and Community Protection Project

Caribou-Targhee

September 16, 2025

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The Principle

Focusing on a High-Risk Landscape

Our framework begins with a core principle: we must focus our efforts where the risk is greatest. National data has identified the Island Park area as a **High-Risk Fireshed** under the USDA Forest Service's **Wildfire Crisis Strategy**.

A fireshed is a large landscape where a wildfire could significantly impact communities and resources we all value. This designation means that the current condition of the forest—with its dense vegetation and high fuel loads—poses an imminent threat to the communities within the fireshed. Therefore, our primary objective within this framework is to develop a strategy that reduces the potential impacts of a wildfire on critical infrastructure, homes, and vital evacuation routes.



Dense conifer forests like this allow fires to climb into the canopy of the trees and promote crown fires, which are extremely difficult to suppress.

The Scope

Defining the Blueprint's Area of Focus

This conceptual framework is focused on **approximately 25,000 acres** in the Island Park area on the Ashton/Island Park Ranger District, primarily along the Highway 20 corridor. The blueprint encompasses several key watersheds, including the Henry's Fork Headwaters, Buffalo River, and others.

The core values we aim to protect are the communities, infrastructure, and access routes. The blueprint specifically includes strategies for areas adjacent to communities like Mack's Inn and Stonegate, critical infrastructure like powerlines and substations, and essential escape routes such as Highway 20 and the Yale Kilgore Road.

Populated Areas:	Critical Infrastructure:	Escape Routes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Stonegate ~ Island Park Village ~ McGee ~ Harris ~ North Fork ~ Mack's Inn ~ Flat Rock ~ Fransenville ~ Henderson Pines ~ Ranch McCrea ~ Wilding Homesites ~ Silverhawk ~ Lakeside ~ Elk Creek Estates ~ Buffalo River Estates ~ Tom's Creek ~ Pond's Lodge ~ Pinehaven ~ Big Springs Acres ~ Two Top Estates ~ Sawtell Estates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Bonneville Power Administration powerlines ~ Fall River Electric powerlines ~ Three substations that serve these powerlines ~ Island Park Landfill ~ Island Park wastewater disposal facility ~ Fremont County Road and Bridge facilities ~ Fremont County Emergency Management Services facility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Highway 20 ~ Big Springs Loop (FS Road 059) ~ Lucky Dog (FS Road 437) ~ Moose Creek (FS Road 143) ~ Flat Rock (FS Road 130) ~ Yale Kilgore (A2) ~ Buttermilk Loop (FS Road 126) ~ Silverhawk (FS Road 142) ~ Box Canyon (FS Road 284)

The Foundation

Addressing the Underlying Problem

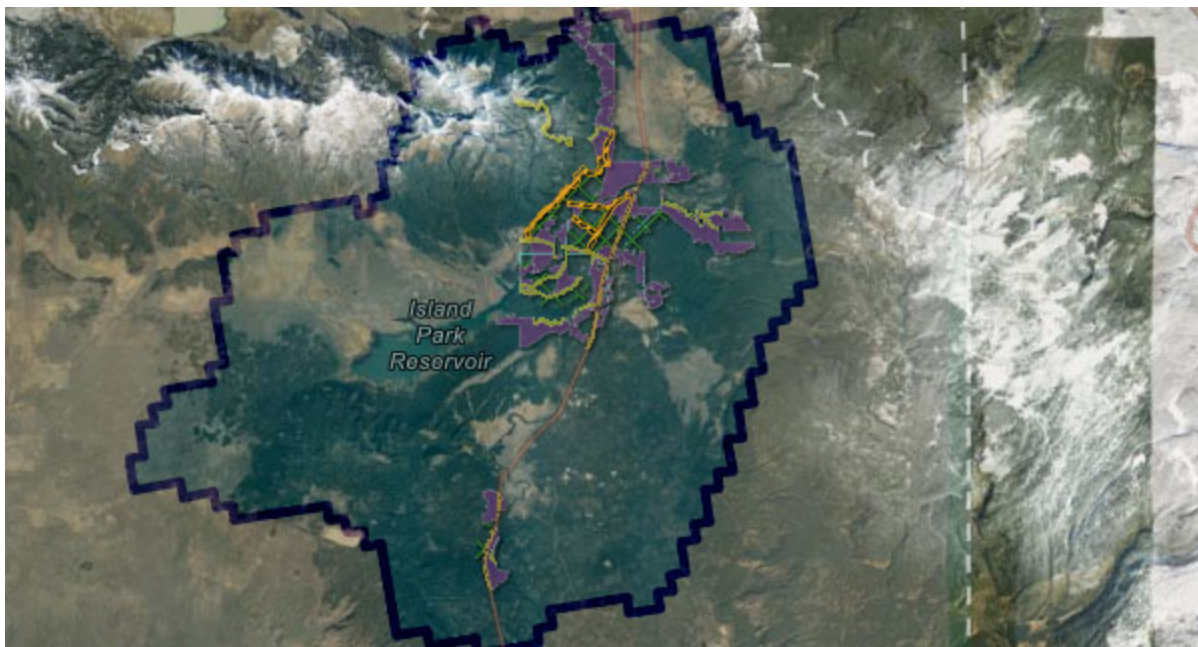
This framework is built upon a clear understanding of the foundational challenge: current forest conditions create an unacceptably **high risk** of destructive wildfire. The dense forests, coupled with significant surface and ladder fuels, increase the potential for fires to become uncontrollable crown fires that threaten public and firefighter safety.

Our proposed strategy is guided by the long-term vision of the **Targhee Revised Forest Plan (RFP)**, which calls for healthier, more resilient ecosystems. This framework seeks to directly address the dense vegetation to create defensible space and change future fire behavior, aligning our short-term needs with the forest's long-term health.

Island Park is one of many communities across the country where the threat from wildfires has gotten increasingly tangible over the years. The **Fire Problem** is a documentary film that explores the causes of this escalating wildfire crisis and proposes solutions by featuring insights from fire scientists, land managers, and firefighters.



Damage to powerlines in Island Park from wildfires would lead to widespread and extended loss of electrical power, disrupting the daily lives of thousands of homeowners and impacting essential services and businesses, requiring significant recovery efforts.



Montana State Library, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Safe...

10 km

Powered by Esri

Island Park Fuels Reduction Conceptual Framework Map

To expand the map to the width of your screen, click the Expand button on the top right side of the map.

To zoom in and out, click the plus and minus buttons on the bottom right side of the map. To see the map legend, click the Legend button on the bottom left side of the map.

The Strategy

A Proposed Toolkit for Resilience

To achieve our objectives, this framework proposes using a flexible toolkit of treatments applied strategically across different **Emphasis Areas**. The goal is to apply the right treatment in the right place to achieve the project's objectives.

- **Emphasis Area: Community and Infrastructure Protection**
 - **Objective:** Create defensible space around homes, communities, and critical infrastructure (e.g. utilities, telecommunications, etc.).
 - **Proposed Strategy:** To modify fire behavior and intensity of a potential wildfire, allowing firefighters to more **safely** and effectively engage in fire suppression activities



An example of a local fuels reduction project adjacent to home.



An example of a local powerline corridor widening project.

- **Emphasis Area: Powerline Corridors**

- **Objective:** Clear hazardous fuels along powerline corridors and around substations to protect powerline infrastructure from a wildfire event while also reducing the risk of wildfire ignitions from powerlines and ensuring grid reliability.

- **Proposed Strategy:** Remove excess trees and hazardous fuels to limit the fire behavior, making it easier for firefighters to defend.

- **Emphasis Area: Escape Routes**

- **Objective:** Create fuel breaks along major roads (e.g., Highway 20), to provide safe evacuation for the public and safe ingress for firefighters during a wildfire.
- **Proposed Strategy:** Open the canopy and reduce surface fuels to limit the fire behavior along these escape routes.



An example of a local escape route treatment.



An example of a local fuel break treatment.

- **Emphasis Area: Fuel Breaks**

- **Objective:** Strengthen key landscape features, like roads, to act as control lines and slow fire progression during a wildfire to increase firefighter safety and effective response time.

- **Proposed Strategy:** Various treatments would be applied to create wider fuel breaks along these road corridors, opening up the canopy and reducing surface fuels to lessen the potential for high-intensity fire to cross these critical lines.

- **Emphasis Area: General Forest Resilience**

- **Objective:** In the broader forest landscape, farther from critical infrastructure, transition from a homogenous, high-risk condition to a mosaic of age classes.
- **Proposed Strategy:** : Create a healthier, more diverse and heterogeneous forest that is able to withstand and recover from disturbances (i.e., wildfire, insects, and disease). Quaking aspen will be promoted where it exists, leading to stronger fire breaks and better wildlife habitat. A suite of vegetation management tools would be used to create a mosaic of different tree sizes and age classes.



An example of a local healthy aspen stand.



Aspen does not compete well against conifer trees and will eventually be removed from the landscape if not given an opportunity to flourish.

The Tools

There are a number of ways to implement the treatments described above. At this point we are not excluding any options. Here are examples of the typical tools and equipment that we could use to accomplish our objectives with this project.

- Timber harvest

- Hand thinning
- Pile burning
- Broadcast burning
- Mastication

The Approach

Partnership as a Core Principle

A core principle of this framework is **shared stewardship**. We believe the best blueprint is one developed with our partners. The Forest Service is actively collaborating with the **Island Park Sustainable Fire Community (IPSEFC)** and other local groups to ensure this framework aligns with community goals. This effort is designed to help achieve our shared objectives, including those laid out in the IPSEFC strategic plan to improve evacuation options and create a more resilient landscape by 2030.

Other local groups that support this project include The Nature Conservancy, Fall River Rural Electric Cooperative, Fire Learning Network, the Greater Yellowstone Fire Action Network, Idaho Department of Lands and Idaho Fish & Game.



Broadcast burning in action as a wildland firefighter monitors conditions on the line.



Island Park Sustainable Fire Community



Partnership Logos

The Process

An Expedited and Collaborative Path

Given the imminent threat identified by the High-Risk Fireshed designation, we will be using the Emergency Action Determination (EAD) authority from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Section 40807 as we progress through the development of this framework. This provides an expedited pathway for analysis and decision-making. However, it is a pathway that explicitly includes environmental analysis and public involvement.

The Evidence

A Model for Success

The strategies outlined in this blueprint are based on a proven approach. The nearby **Yale Creek Fuels Reduction Project** serves as a case study, demonstrating how a combination of thinning and fuel reduction can significantly improve community safety and forest health. This past success gives us confidence that the principles in this framework will lead to positive outcomes for Island Park.

See two examples below:



Before



After

These photographs show before and after fuels reduction implementation within the Yale Creek Project near the Yale Creek subdivision in Island Park. The Before photo was taken in 2014, a hand thinning treatment occurred in 2018, and the After photo was taken in 2025.

**Before****After**

These photos were also taken within the Yale Creek Project and show the effects of fuels reduction activities within a lodgepole pine stand. Lodgepole pine is by far the dominate tree species within the Island Park area.

Invitation

Refining the Blueprint Together

This is where our blueprint becomes a community plan. Public input is essential to help us refine these broad strategies and develop a final proposed action that reflects local knowledge and values. We invite you to share your perspective on this framework to help us identify potential issues and improve the proposal. If you are interested in receiving information on future public meetings and the formal comment period, as well as other updates to the Island Park Fuels Reduction Project, [CLICK HERE](#) and include ***Island Park Fuels Reduction Project Updates*** in the subject line.