

*This blog post was co-authored with Dave Owen, at UC Law SF. The draft article this blog post series is based is [here](#).*

Every year brings another reminder of why fire is at the top of environmental and natural resource issues for the United States, and how our legal system struggles to adjust to fire. The recent fires that destroyed hundreds of homes in Spokane, Washington are just the most recent example.

The core problem is that fire does not just present a single policy or legal problem. It is an interconnected complex of policy and legal problems. It is a federal land management issue, in which federal land management agencies struggle to manage fire risks on their lands at the speed and scale required. It is an air quality issue, where wildfire is now one the single largest causes of harmful air quality in the United States, but the air quality regulatory system provides little incentive for addressing wildfire smoke and hamstringing the ability of landowners to use managed fire to reduce the risks of catastrophic fire. It is a land-use issue in which leapfrog development in areas with high fire risks (the wildfire-urban interface or WUI) heightens dangers to people and property and prevents us from restoring fire, the most feasible long-term solution to fire risks. And it is an insurance issue, as the rising risk of property losses from fire cause insurers to withdraw from high fire risk communities, threatening their economic viability.

A key to solving the fire problem is thus to tie solutions together – to connect land management, air quality, land-use, and insurance solutions. The need for connections arises in part because one cannot improve federal land management without addressing the air quality issues. Combining solutions also allows for more give and take – for instance, states and local governments may be more willing to consider land-use regulation that could reduce fire risks and improve fire management if appropriate regulation would unlock support for failing insurance markets.

That is the core lesson from [a forthcoming piece co-authored by Dave Owen at UC Law SF and me](#): Any effective solution to wildfire should consider how the different components of the wildfire problems interact with each other, both in terms of the nature of fire and in terms of the incentives of federal, state, local and private actors to address the problem.

In the following blog posts, we will lay out why we think the problem is a hard one to address and the specifics of each of our proposals for federal land management,

air quality, land-use, and insurance.