

COGPLEXITI · SYSTEMS & DECISION ANALYSIS

TWO EXPERIMENTS, ONE VACANCY

Wildland Fire, the Security
Frame, and the Empty Tiers
Above the Fire Enterprise

JAYSON COIL

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WHITE PAPER

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July 2026

How to read this paper. This paper asks whether the national wildfire problem is legitimately a national security problem. The answer it defends is narrow. Wildfire qualifies in two dimensions — consequence and capacity — and does not qualify in a third, causation. The distinction matters because it determines what the security frame should transfer to the fire enterprise and what it must not. The paper examines two live experiments from 2025–26 in importing security logic, identifies the vacancy both expose, names four security instruments that transfer, and recommends a first move. The Red Team and Dissenting Alternative sections are not decoration. Read them; the strongest argument against this paper appears there, and the recommendation concedes part of it.

A note on stance. This is analysis, not doctrine. Nothing here directs anyone to do anything. The paper applies the discipline used throughout this line: every actor is treated as locally rational, and the question is never who failed but what conditions made the outcome likely. That commitment covers the executive branch, the Congress, the agencies, and the association whose work this paper examines. It also covers the author, whose ties to the source material are declared in Section 3.6. One rule follows from it and runs through the paper: judgment on the two 2025–26 experiments is suspended. Neither is treated as a failure. The verdict on both is open, and the paper's claim is about what they need above them in order to succeed.

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1 • Executive Summary

Wildland fire meets the working definition of a national security problem in what it does and what it demands. It has never been given national security method. Being treated as a security consequence and being studied with security tools are two different things. That gap is the paper's subject, and 2025–26 supplied two field trials that make it concrete.

The first experiment ran top-down. The United States Wildland Fire Service stood up by executive action in January 2026. It is security-style structure — unified command, broad authority, a half-billion acres to protect — without the analysis that comes before structure in the defense system. Congress declined to fund it. No net assessment preceded it. The strains on record in The System Tier are the load structure carries when the method behind it is missing.

The second experiment ran bottom-up. In March and April 2026, the Western Fire Chiefs Association convened the National Wildland Fire Technology Summit (WFCA 2026a; 2026b). It applied a requirements framework adapted from USSOCOM to wildfire technology buying: five tiers, performance floors, strict traceability. This is security method, borrowed by name and applied well, by thirty-five senior leaders and some eighty-five experts. It works at the buying tier. Above it, the strategy tier is empty, and the leaders said so. No ratified national plan exists. The gap between their agreement on priorities and their belief in ten-year delivery ran 33 to 36 points (WFCA 2026a).

One experiment imported structure without method. The other imported method without strategy. Neither is a failure, and this paper does not call them one. Both are rational answers to a real problem, made with the tools their makers held. But both records point at the same empty space above them: no net assessment of the national fire problem, no strategic reserve doctrine, no threat-informed planning, no industrial-base treatment of the workforce. Absent those tiers, each experiment risks becoming the failure it is not yet — a structure without a defined purpose, a requirements floor with no strategy to trace to. The four missing pieces are the instruments this paper argues transfer from the security world. It argues just as hard that the frame's reflexes must be refused: emergency politics, centralized command, hardware-heavy spending. The record shows each reflex at work, and each adds strain the experiments did not need.

The recommended move is a chartered national net assessment of the wildfire problem: bounded, low-regret, and built on the chartering precedent this line has used before. Building the missing tiers is also how the two investments already made — the reorganization and the summit — get their chance to pay off. The recommendation is the instruments, not the label. Whether the nation calls wildfire a security problem matters less than whether it finally analyzes wildfire the way it analyzes the problems it takes seriously.

2 · Support & Analysis

2.1 The Definitional Case

Strip the term to its function. National security means protecting people, territory, critical infrastructure, and government itself against threats too large for routine civil means. Wildfire now meets every part of that definition, at scale, on the record. The Camp Fire killed eighty-five people and erased a town in a day. The 2023 Canadian smoke episode degraded air quality for more than a third of the U.S. population and pushed emergency-room visits upward across the eastern seaboard (Hill and Turner 2023). A single urban fire event now costs tens of billions of dollars. Fires destroy the grid, water, and communications that every other critical function leans on.

The strategic-risk community has a name for this class of threat. After the January 2025 Los Angeles fires, analysts argued that the security world must adjust for “actorless” threats — dangers with no enemy behind them that still hit at enemy scale (Council on Strategic Risks 2025). The military dimension is documented, not speculative. Retired flag officers warned in 2014 that climate-driven disasters would stress military capacity and must enter war planning (CNA Military Advisory Board 2014). A 2019 Pentagon study found wildfire threatening roughly forty-five percent of the bases it examined, rising toward fifty-four percent within two decades (U.S. Department of Defense 2019). European defense ministries have already faced the open trade between war readiness and fire response, and have changed what they buy because of it (Hill and Turner 2023).

That settles the consequence test. The capacity test — whether the means exist to meet the threat, and who counts them — is settled by the two experiments in Section 2.3. The causation test is set aside on purpose. Most fires have no author with intent, and Section 2.4.3 sizes the exception honestly. The paper's scope rule follows from the three dimensions together: wildfire is a security problem in what it does and what it demands, not in where it comes from.

2.2 The Security-Adjacent Record

The claim must be stated precisely, because the imprecise version is falsifiable. Wildfire has not been ignored by security analysis. The climate-security literature has treated it repeatedly. The CNA Military Advisory Board did in 2014; readiness analyses followed the Canadian smoke season (Hill and Turner 2023); strategic-risk work followed Los Angeles (Council on Strategic Risks 2025). California now operates a state center that carries “threat intelligence” in its name. Executive Order 14308 framed federal wildfire response in the language of national capability (Exec. Order No. 14308, 2025).

That record shares a common shape. In every case, wildfire appears as a consequence — of climate change, of eroding readiness, of disaster exposure — inside an analysis about

something else. The treatment comes and goes with events, and no standing body owns it. No one performs net assessment of the national fire problem. No doctrine governs the national surge reserve. No planning process is threat-informed. The precise claim survives contact with the record: wildfire has been treated as a security consequence and has never been given security method. Consequence without method is the condition the record shows. The 2025–26 record then adds something the literature could not: two attempts to close that gap, each partial, each worth studying — and each made in good faith.

2.3 Two Experiments, One Vacancy

A reading note before the cases. Neither experiment is treated here as a failure, and the paper suspends that judgment throughout. The reorganization answered real fragmentation with the tools an executive holds. The summit did serious, disciplined work the enterprise needed. The claim is narrower, and it cuts the other way: absent the two tiers above them, both efforts risk becoming failures they do not have to be. The case for building those tiers is, in large part, the case for letting these two investments succeed.

2.3.1 Top-down: structure without method

The defense system runs a sequence. Threat assessment comes before strategy; strategy before structure; structure before buying. The federal wildfire reorganization of 2025–26 ran the sequence backward. Executive Order 14308 directed the merger in June 2025. The United States Wildland Fire Service stood up in January 2026 with protection duty for more than 500 million acres governed by four different statutory missions. Congress declined to fund it; the Senate funding record states plainly that the bill does not endorse the merger. The agency runs on the legacy accounts of the organization it replaced. The System Tier records the as-built strains in full. Authority sits sealed inside a fire agency under a suppression default. Land managers hold the accountability without the authority. Every agreement tying the federal core to the states, tribes, and districts is being rewritten at once.

For this paper's purpose, one feature of that record matters most. The reorganization is a securitization of the wildfire problem in the technical sense: a move from normal deliberation to emergency politics, taking extraordinary steps outside the usual approval path (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). It imported the security frame's structural reflex — unify command, centralize, act now — and none of the frame's analytic discipline. No net assessment defined what the merged agency was for. No reserve doctrine sized it. None of that is a verdict on the agency or its people. The verdict is open, and under local rationality the move made sense to those who made it. The finding is about the frame: this is the load structure carries when the method is left behind, and the agency deserves better than to carry it alone.

2.3.2 Bottom-up: method without strategy

The second experiment inverted the first. In March 2026, thirty-five senior leaders from across the federal, state, tribal, local, and national fire organizations met in the Phase 1 summit; some eighty-five subject matter experts followed in April (WFCA 2026a; 2026b). The method is borrowed from defense buying by name: a five-tier requirements ladder adapted from the USSOCOM Capability Attribute Framework. Mission outcomes sit at the top, capability families beneath them, performance measures below that. The traceability rule is stated in the defense idiom: a requirement that cannot be traced to a mission outcome “is not a requirement; it is a preference” (WFCA 2026a). Phase 2 produced nineteen field-defined capabilities with performance floors and hard dependencies (WFCA 2026b). This is rigorous work — the strongest requirements discipline the enterprise has produced — and it is security method working at the buying tier.

The record names its own ceiling. The leaders' first deliverable — D1.1 — is a ratified National Wildfire Protection Plan with success measures and signatures at every level, targeted for 2036. It is a deliverable because it does not exist. One leader stated the condition in nine words: “no coordinated and unified national plan or strategy exists” (WFCA 2026a). The summit's own diagnosis is that the barriers are structural, not technical: split governance, systems that cannot talk to each other, uneven funding, and no unified national purpose. That is not the summit failing. It is the summit succeeding well enough to expose the floor missing above it (Figure 1).

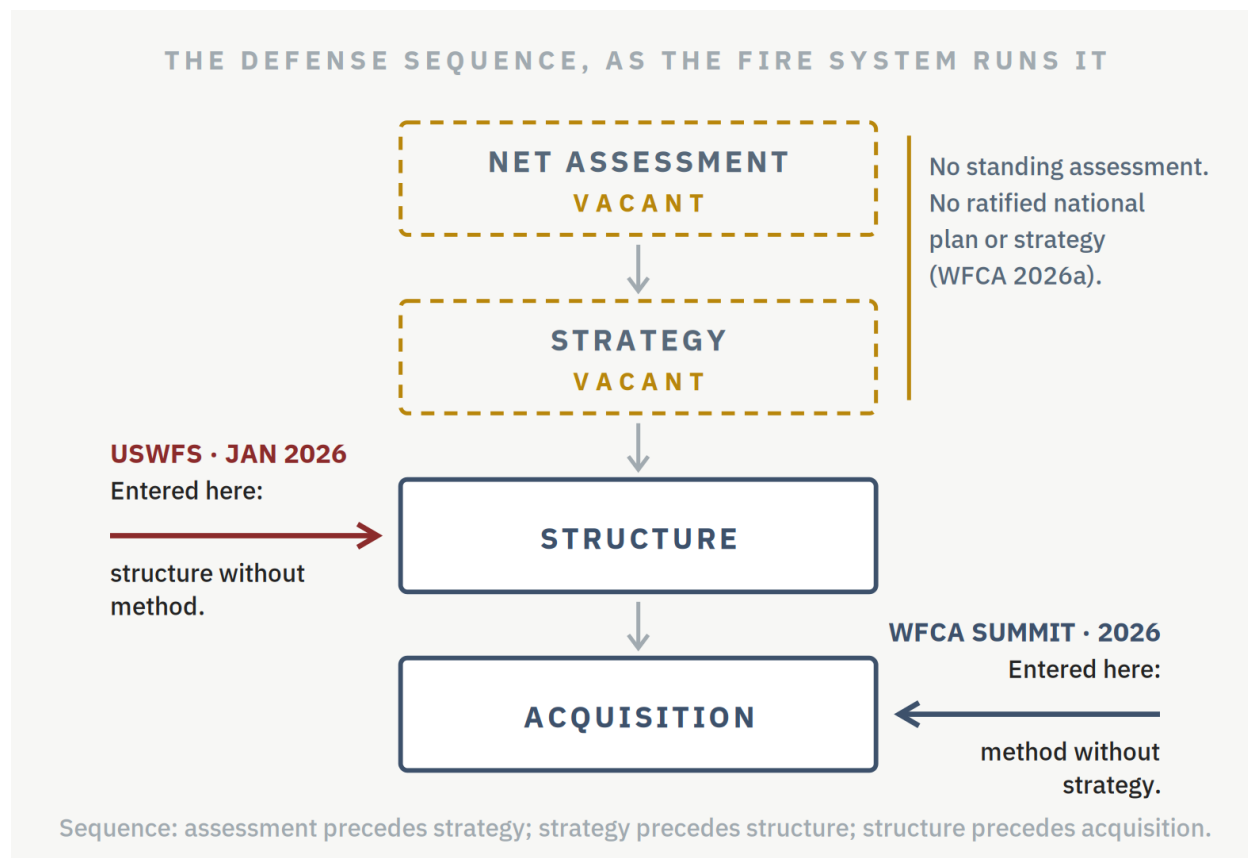
2.3.3 The displacement observation

Note who convened this work. In the defense system, requirements generation is a core governmental function, performed inside institutions that hold acquisition authority. In the wildfire system, that function was performed by a nonprofit trade association, funded by a foundation, staffed in part by volunteers. The association can move where the agencies cannot — above the procedural constraints and jurisdictional seams that bind them. Under local rationality this is not a criticism of anyone. The agencies cannot convene this way; the association can; the work needed doing. But the migration is diagnostic. When a system's requirements work moves outside government, the system is routing around what it cannot do itself, and the vacancy above the requirements tier is visible in the wild. The congressional presence in the Phase 1 record sharpens the point without a word of editorial: a sitting member of Congress and Senate staff attended a nonprofit's requirements summit (WFCA 2026a). The people who hold allocation authority went outside government to find requirements government does not produce.

FIGURE 1

Two experiments entered below the vacancy

The defense system runs a four-tier sequence. In 2025–26, one experiment entered it at structure and one at acquisition. Neither touched the tiers above, because in the fire system those tiers are empty.



Structure without method. Method without strategy. The vacancy is what they share.

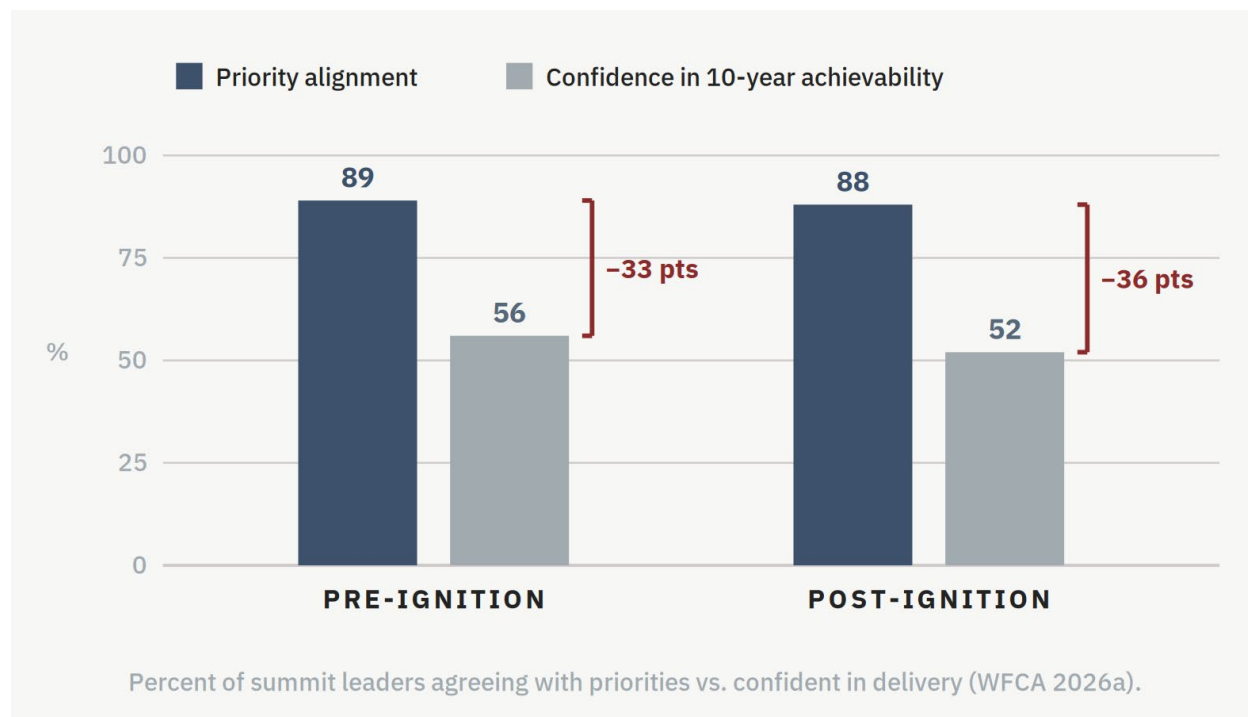
2.3.4 The confidence gap as measurement

The summit data measures the vacancy. Pre-ignition, 89 percent of leaders agreed or strongly agreed with the priorities; 56 percent believed they could be delivered in ten years. Post-ignition, the figures were 88 and 52 (WFCA 2026a). Read those gaps through the frame this line uses for strategy: ends, ways, means, and risk, in balance or not. The leaders affirm the ends and doubt the means. Their written comments name the missing means directly — political churn, thin funding, workforce gaps, outdated purchasing rules. A 33-to-36-point spread between what the field agrees must happen and what it believes the system can deliver is an ends-means imbalance measured by the practitioners themselves (Figure 2). In the defense system, that measurement is what a net assessment exists to produce and answer. In the wildfire system, it surfaced once, in a survey, at a summit government did not convene.

FIGURE 2

The field measured the vacancy

Summit leaders backed the priorities and doubted the system could deliver them — before ignition and after it.



A 33-to-36-point spread between agreed ends and believed means — priced by the practitioners themselves.

2.4 The Instruments That Transfer

Four instruments from the security world answer gaps the 2025–26 record shows. Each is named with its fire-system counterpart and the evidence already in print.

2.4.1 Net assessment

Net assessment is the long-view comparison of a threat's path against the capacity arrayed to meet it, done by a standing office shielded from daily tempo and budget fights. The wildfire enterprise has no such function. Its strategic documents are the Cohesive Strategy of 2014 and the 2023 commission report with its 148 consensus recommendations (WFLC 2014; Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission 2023). Both are negotiated frameworks and lists of recommendations, not assessments of threat against capacity. The cost shows in both experiments: a reorganization launched without an assessment behind it, and a requirements process whose own leaders had to certify the strategic vacancy themselves. Net assessment is the instrument the vacancy calls for by name, and it is the first move recommended in Section 5.

2.4.2 Strategic reserve doctrine

The defense system plans for simultaneity — reserves sized against the chance that demands arrive together. The wildfire system's national surge machinery assumes the opposite. Order It and It Comes decomposed the mutual-aid architecture's master assumption — that capacity ordered will be capacity delivered — and found non-simultaneity load-bearing throughout. The system works because everyone is not burning at once. Conditions no longer support the assumption. The summit record supplies the demand signal from the other side: D2.1 calls for a national workforce size and structure, counted and published, as a 2036 deliverable (WFCA 2026a). A counted national requirement, sized against everything burning at once, with responses decided before the indicators move — that is reserve doctrine, and no one owns it.

2.4.3 Threat-informed planning

The adversary dimension is real and it is a minority of the problem; both halves of that sentence are load-bearing. Fire as a weapon against landscape fuels is an established military concept — the Japanese Fu-Go balloon campaign of 1944–45 is the historical case (Mikesh 1973). Pyroterrorism appears in extremist publications. Arson as gray-zone action is cheap, deniable, and aimed at a target a century of built-up fuels has already staged. Hostile spread of false information during major fires is now on record as part of the incident environment (Council on Strategic Risks 2025). Threat-informed planning means these vectors enter preparedness work with intelligence support — and it means they are sized honestly. A planning process that centers the adversary inflates the causation dimension the scope rule reserves. It also hands the frame's critics their best exhibit.

2.4.4 Industrial-base treatment of the workforce

The defense system treats its industrial base — the people, plants, and pipelines that produce capability — as a strategic asset tended over decades. The wildfire system treats its workforce as an input. The pre-ignition record states the gap in the participants' own framing. Staffing and leadership are treated as inputs rather than strategic priorities, though the workforce delivers every other outcome (WFCA 2026a). The Reveal's stock-and-flow work on the Command and General Staff pipeline shows what input-treatment produces at the top of the qualification ladder: an insolvency premortem the enterprise has not answered. Aviation runs the same pattern. Industrial-base treatment means counted requirements, protected development pipelines, and multi-year money shielded from the annual cycle — the treatment D2.1 and D2.2 ask for without naming the doctrine that delivers it (WFCA 2026a).

2.5 The Refusal List

The instruments transfer. The reflexes do not, and each refusal is anchored to the record rather than asserted (Figure 3). First, emergency politics. Securitization's signature move is shifting a problem from deliberation to exception (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). The USWFS record shows the move made — structure by instrument, funding by accounting, approval deferred. The result is an agency, and the people in it, standing on ground that holds only as long as the executive position does. That is a condition imposed on the agency, not a mark against it. Second, centralized command. Most of the system's capacity is state, local, tribal, and volunteer, coordinated through brokered machinery that lasts because it accommodates. The System Tier's capacity work shows a federal command reflex fighting the architecture as built rather than using it. Third, hardware-heavy spending: the security frame's buying instinct funds the visible and the kinetic, and Section 3.3 shows the fire-system version of that pattern already priced. These are design constraints on any adoption of the frame, stated in advance. The premortem in Section 3.7 shows what breaking them looks like.

FIGURE 3

What transfers, and what must be refused

Four instruments answer deficits the record documents. Three reflexes reproduce failures the record already shows.

THE INSTRUMENTS TRANSFER	THE REFLEXES DO NOT
Net assessment Trajectory against capacity, held by a standing function.	Emergency politics Structure by instrument; authorization deferred.
Strategic reserve doctrine Surge capacity sized against simultaneity, not hope.	Centralized command Fights the brokered architecture as built.
Threat-informed planning Adversary vectors entered at honest weight.	Hardware-weighted investment Deepens the suppression bias already priced.
Industrial-base treatment Workforce and aviation as strategic assets.	

Each entry is anchored to the record in Sections 2.4 and 2.5 — imported discipline, refused pathology.

Import the method. Refuse the reflexes.

3 · Red Team Assessment

This section attacks the paper's argument with the strongest material available, most of it drawn from the paper's own sources. The order runs from the frame's known pathologies to the author's implication in the record, and closes with a premortem of the recommendation itself.

3.1 The frame's first field trial supports the critics

The securitization literature predicts that declaring something a security issue moves it into emergency politics — extraordinary steps, compressed oversight, action outside normal approval (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). That prediction was tested on this exact problem in 2025–26, and it held. The frame this paper examines was partly applied, and its first application left the strains The System Tier catalogs — strains imposed on the new agency, not made by it. A reader is entitled to ask why importing more of the frame would go better. The paper's answer — structure was imported without method, and the method is the corrective — must carry that burden explicitly. The counter-reading is simpler: the frame itself selects for the pathology, and no scope rule in a white paper constrains an executive with a pen.

3.2 Vendor capture is an inheritance risk

The USSOCOM framework the summit adapted was built to buy things. Phase 3 of the initiative is a vendor showcase; Phase 4 is purchasing reform (WFCA 2026b). The defense buying system that produced the borrowed method also produced its known pathologies: requirements bent toward what vendors sell, hardware favored over labor and land work, upkeep underpriced against purchase. The wildfire version writes itself — detection networks and aircraft funded while burn crews and fuels work starve. The initiative's own discipline is the partial defense: traceability to mission outcomes, field-set performance floors, co-design before purchase. Whether that discipline survives contact with a vendor showcase is an open empirical question. The Section 5.4 register carries it as monitored, not settled.

3.3 The frame could amplify the bias it should correct

The suppression-spending bias is already priced in this line's work. Six Explanations, One Gap ran competing explanations for the prescribed-fire shortfall against the evidence. The funding structure, not the will of the field, carried the weight. The security frame's kinetic reflex points the same direction — response is defense-shaped, prevention reads as agriculture. The summit leaders saw this coming and said so in rank order. They placed cultural shift and strategic planning above technology, and warned plainly that the conditions for technology to succeed do not yet exist (WFCA 2026a). A security-method

adoption that ignores that ranking would deepen the exact error the enterprise's own leaders just voted to escape. D2.2's demand that mitigation funding be decoupled from the suppression-first structure is the register entry this risk maps to (WFCA 2026a).

3.4 Federalism is not a detail

The majority of national response capacity is not federal. It is state, local, tribal, and volunteer, connected through brokered coordination machinery. Its defining property is durability through accommodation — the property The System Tier identifies as most at risk when the federal core converts from broker to commander. Security logic centralizes by instinct. Applied without the refusal list, it would replace known partners with a command structure those partners experience as risk, and price the smallest of them out first. Any transferred instrument must run through the intergovernmental architecture as built, or it will be resisted by rational actors and deserve to be.

3.5 The workaround can become the substitute

Section 2.3.3 read the migration of requirements work to a nonprofit as a diagnostic. The risk reading is different: workaround institutions relieve the pressure that forces institutional repair. If the association's process becomes the enterprise's permanent requirements function, the vacancy above it is not exposed — it is upholstered. And the initiative's own endpoint concedes the dependency: Phase 4 requires reform of federal procurement, which only the government it routed around can enact (WFCA 2026b). The summit is the demonstration of the missing tier, not its replacement, and the paper must not let admiration for the work blur that line.

3.6 Author-bias declaration

The author is tied to this record on several axes, and the line's credibility runs on naming them. The Western Fire Chiefs Association initiative examined here is chaired and staffed in part by the author's professional network, including colleagues of long standing. The leadership of the agencies analyzed — USWFS and the Forest Service fire organization — includes the same. The author's own operational work includes strategic-assessment method development adjacent to the instruments this paper recommends, which creates an interest in the conclusion that such instruments are needed. These facts are the paper's access advantage and its bias vector in the same breath. The mitigations are structural, not attitudinal. The WFCA treatment is built from the published record only. The local-rationality commitment applies to every actor, including the ones the author knows. And this section exists.

3.7 Premortem: it is 2036 and this went wrong

Assume the recommendation was adopted and the outcome is worse. The plausible paths, in descending likelihood. The net assessment was chartered and captured — staffed by the available rather than the suitable, its findings shaped toward its convenor's budget case, its independence the first casualty of its usefulness. Or the assessment was done well and shelved, joining the 2023 commission's 148 recommendations in the inventory of analysis without a consumer obligated to engage it. Or the label escaped: the paper's careful scope rule traveled nowhere, “wildfire is national security” became a slogan, and the next executive instrument cited it while repeating 2026. Or the instruments transferred and the money followed the hardware, Section 3.3's path, with the assessment supplying better justifications for the same suppression-shaped portfolio. Each path has a named tripwire in the Section 5.4 register. The premortem's honest summary: every failure mode is adoption without the consumer, the protection, or the discipline the defense system wraps around these instruments. That is the paper's own thesis, applied to itself.

4 · Dissenting Alternative

Three cases against the paper's position, in ascending strength. The first two are answered. The third is answered in part and conceded in part, and the concession is adopted into the recommendation.

4.1 The causation objection

The case: security implies an adversary; wildfire mostly has none; calling it security debases the term and invites category errors — one does not deter a fuel bed. The answer: the working definition in Section 2.1 does not require an adversary, and the actorless-threat term exists precisely because consequence and capacity can reach security scale without an enemy (Council on Strategic Risks 2025). The concession inside the answer: the adversary dimension is a minority of the problem and is sized as one in Section 2.4.3. A version of this paper that inflated pyroterrorism to carry the thesis would deserve to lose the argument. This version does not lean on it.

4.2 Resilience already covers this

The case: everything the paper wants — long horizons, counted capacity, steady investment — already fits inside the national-resilience and critical-infrastructure frames, without securitization's baggage. And the strongest evidence for the case is this paper's own anchor: the summit is the civil track moving method, voluntarily and competently, under no security banner at all. The answer runs through the same record. The resilience frame has held the field for a decade; the Cohesive Strategy is its expression (WFLC 2014). What it has not done is produce the strategy tier: no ratified plan, no reserve

doctrine, no standing assessment. The summit's own data prices the frame's traction — its leaders affirm the direction and doubt the delivery by thirty-plus points, and its process runs on foundation money and volunteer capacity outside government (WFCA 2026a). The dissent survives as a constraint the paper accepts: whatever the transferred instruments mobilize must route to the preventive end of the problem, or the transfer fails on the resilience frame's own test.

4.3 The label is uncontrollable

The case, and it is the strongest: frames escape their authors. A paper can write scope rules; discourse does not read them. Once “wildfire is a national security problem” circulates with this line's evidence behind it, it is available to every actor with an emergency instrument and a reason. The 2025–26 record shows exactly how that goes. Advocating the frame while disclaiming its reflexes is advocating the reflexes, one abstraction removed. The answer, as far as it goes: the instruments and the label are separable in practice — a chartered net assessment requires no securitization to perform, and reserve doctrine is arithmetic before it is politics. But the dissent is right that the paper cannot control its own reception. The concession is adopted into Section 5 as decision architecture. The recommendation is the instruments. The label is treated as a finding about discourse — accurate in two dimensions, hazardous as a campaign — and the paper declines to campaign for it. If this paper is remembered as “the case for calling wildfire national security,” it will have failed by its own standard.

5 · Recommended Course of Action

5.1 The claim, restated for use

Wildland fire is a national security problem in what it does and what it demands, not in where it comes from. The right response is to import security method and refuse security reflexes. Adopt net assessment, strategic reserve doctrine, threat-informed planning, and industrial-base treatment of the workforce. Bar emergency politics, centralized command over the brokered system, and hardware-heavy spending. The claim travels as one sentence and should not travel shorter. One implication belongs beside it: the missing tiers are not an alternative to the two experiments already underway — they are what those experiments need above them to succeed.

5.2 The first move: a chartered national net assessment

The recommended first move is bounded, low-regret, and modeled on this line's chartering precedent. It is a chartered net assessment of the national wildfire problem: threat trajectory against arrayed capacity, at a defined horizon, with published assumptions. The charter matters more than the ambition. It specifies the question, the

horizon, the independence protections, and above all the consumer: a named body obligated to receive, engage, and respond on the record. Section 3.7's most likely failure is analysis without a consumer. Three convenor options, with the trade each carries. The intergovernmental track — the Cohesive Strategy's governance — carries legitimacy across every level and the least independence risk, at the cost of consensus pace. The congressional track — direction attached to appropriations — carries the strongest consumer obligation, at the cost of political weather. The association-adjacent track — the summit's Phase 4 machinery — carries speed and field trust, at the cost of Section 3.5's substitution risk, and should be a bridge if used at all. The author's recommendation is the intergovernmental charter with a congressional reporting requirement: legitimacy where the capacity lives, obligation where the money lives.

5.3 The supporting moves

Three moves follow the assessment and need not wait for it. Reserve doctrine: charter the counted national workforce and surge requirement D2.1 already demands, sized against simultaneity, with the non-simultaneity finding as the starting point (WFCA 2026a). Threat-informed planning: add the incendiary and information-warfare vectors to national preparedness analysis at their honest weight, with intelligence-community support — a planning input, not a headline. Industrial-base treatment: turn the workforce and aviation findings already in print into multi-year requirement statements with protected pipelines, on the pattern D2.2's funding-decoupling demand opens (WFCA 2026a). Each move is severable. None requires the label.

5.4 The assumption register

Per the discipline this line runs, the recommendation's load-bearing assumptions are broken out and paired with observable indicators and pre-decided responses. Assumption one: a chartered assessment can hold independence from its convenor. Indicators: staffing drawn beyond the available; findings that cost the convenor something surviving to publication. Response if broken: the reporting requirement transfers to the congressional track. Assumption two: the instruments can operate without triggering the emergency-politics reflex. Indicators: no new executive instrument citing the assessment to bypass approval; funding-bill language engaging rather than shutting the door. Response: the paper's principals say so publicly, on the record, at the first violation. Assumption three: transferred investment routes to the preventive end. Indicators: the mitigation-to-suppression funding ratio; fuels-workforce line items; the good-fire metrics the leaders proposed as national indicators (WFCA 2026a). Response: the suppression-bias finding is re-run against the new portfolio and published. Assumption four: the summit's discipline survives its vendor phase. Indicators: traceability holding at Phase 3; requirements unchanged by demonstration marketing. Response: the displacement observation of Section 2.3.3 is republished as a warning rather than a diagnostic.

5.5 Evaluation criteria and falsification

Pre-registered, per the line's standard. The design is working if three conditions hold within two annual cycles of a charter. The assessment exists, was received by the consumer the charter binds, and produced at least one resourced decision traceable to it. The national surge-capacity requirement exists in quantified form. The mitigation-to-suppression investment ratio has moved toward the preventive end. The design is falsified by any of three events. The assessment is chartered and shelved without an on-the-record response. An adopted instrument is cited in an emergency order. The investment ratio moves toward suppression while citing security framing. The falsification conditions are not decoration. The 2025–26 record shows every one of them occurring in the wild, and a recommendation that cannot name its own failure evidence has not earned adoption.

5.6 Timing

The window is specific. Phase 3 of the national initiative convenes in October 2026; Phase 4's procurement-reform work runs beside it (WFCA 2026b). The strategy-tier argument lands differently before a vendor showcase than after one — before, it shapes what the demonstrations are measured against; after, it critiques a record already closed. The paper publishes ahead of Phase 3 or accepts a different, weaker role.

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“Whether the nation calls wildfire a security problem matters less than whether it finally analyzes wildfire the way it analyzes the problems it takes seriously.”

When a problem outgrows routine means, there are two things to borrow from the security world: its structure and its method. In 2025 and 2026, the American fire enterprise ran both experiments at once. An agency stood up by executive action — unified command, half a billion acres — without the analysis that precedes structure in the defense system. A national summit imported defense requirements discipline, applied it well, and certified from inside that the tier above it was empty: 89 percent agreement on the priorities, barely half believing the system can deliver them.

One experiment imported structure without method. The other imported method without strategy. Both point at the same empty space above them.

Two Experiments, One Vacancy defends a narrow claim: wildfire qualifies as a national security problem in what it does and what it demands — consequence and capacity — and not in where it comes from. It suspends judgment on both experiments; every actor is treated as locally rational, and the case for the missing tiers is, in large part, the case for letting both investments succeed. The paper names the four security instruments that transfer — net assessment, strategic reserve doctrine, threat-informed planning, and industrial-base treatment of the workforce — and argues just as hard that the frame’s reflexes must be refused: emergency politics, centralized command, hardware-heavy spending. The recommended first move is a chartered national net assessment, bounded and low-regret, with a named consumer obligated to respond on the record — carried with pre-registered evaluation criteria, stated falsification conditions, and a premortem run against its own recommendation. The recommendation is the instruments, not the label.

Part of the Cogplexiti Systems & Decision Analysis line. The System Tier carries the as-built strains record this paper reads; the vacancy above the enterprise is the national-scale sibling of the one Nobody’s Job finds above the incident — capability the system depends on, with no tier or chair ever built to hold it.

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