



# RANGELAND FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATIONS

Implications for Fire-Adapted  
Communities and  
Agency-Community Relationships

EMILY JANE DAVIS, JESSE ABRAMS, KATHERINE WOLLSTEIN

# WHAT ARE RFPAs?

- Entirely volunteer / voluntary
- Operate where state or rural fire protection lacking
- Programmatic support from states (ODF/IDL)
- Initial attack and beyond
- “Neighbors helping neighbors”



# FIRE AND PEOPLE ON THE RANGE

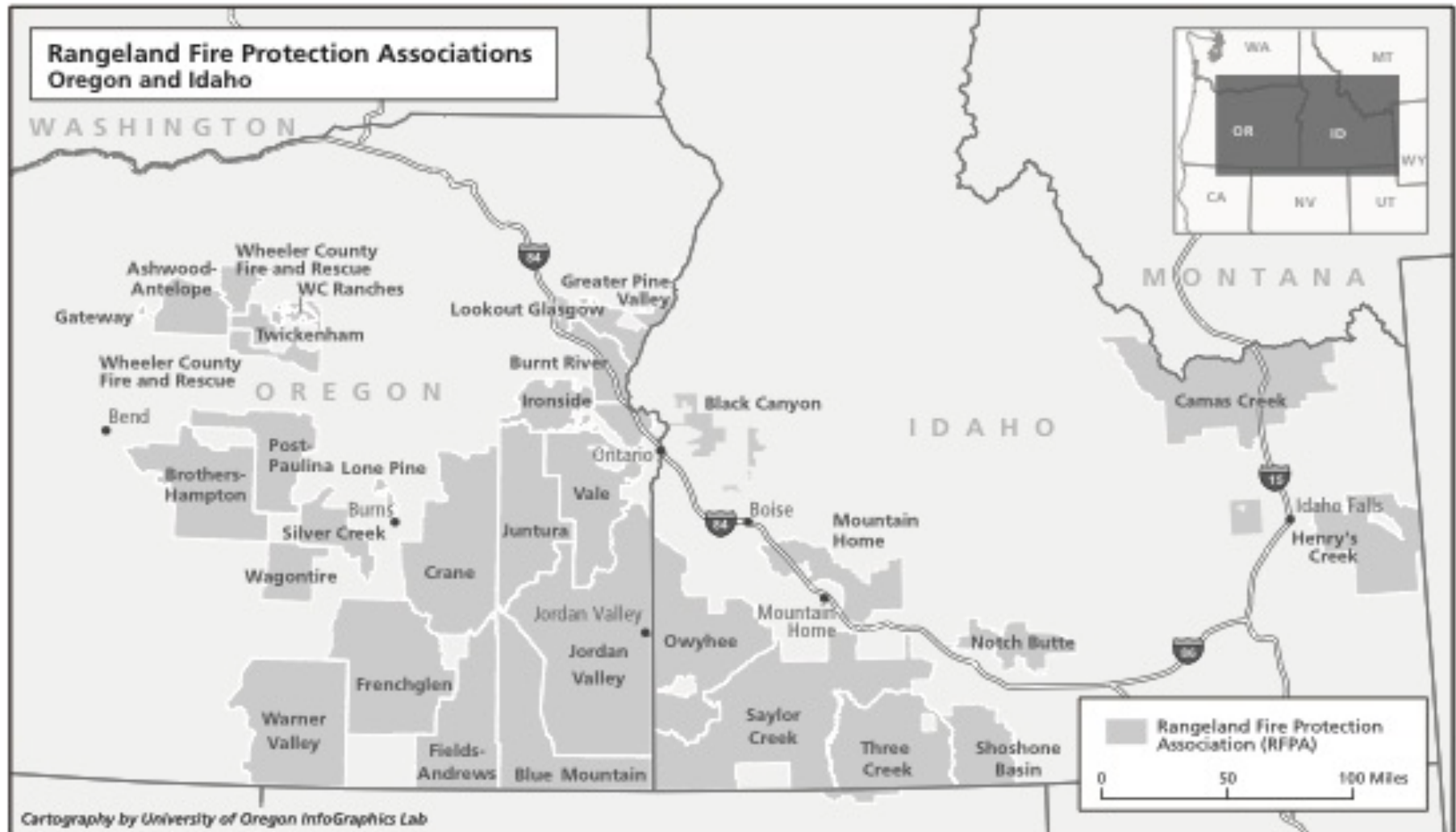
- Affected forage, cattle, properties, other values

Fire across boundaries

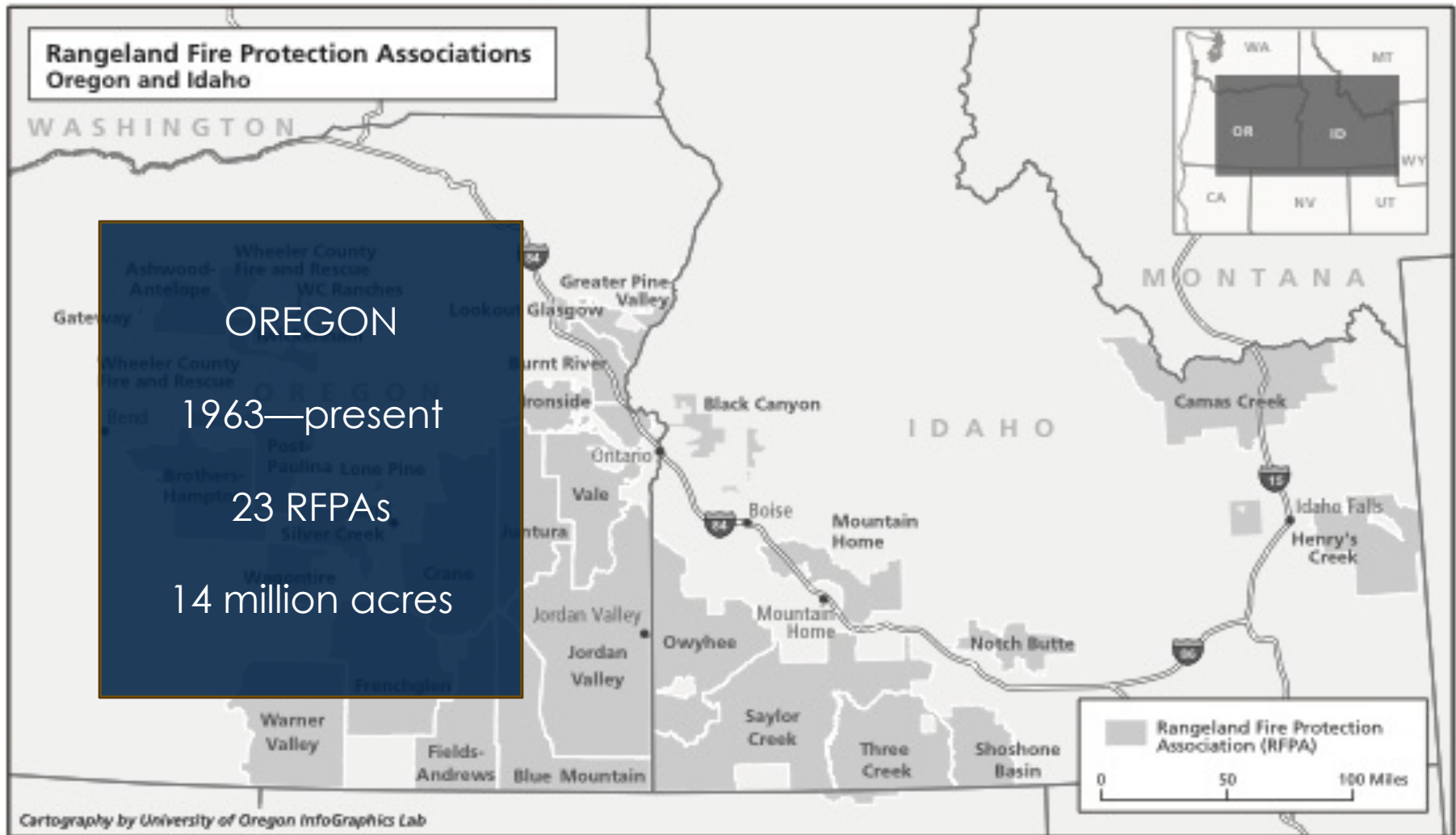
- Desire to participate and historical conflict



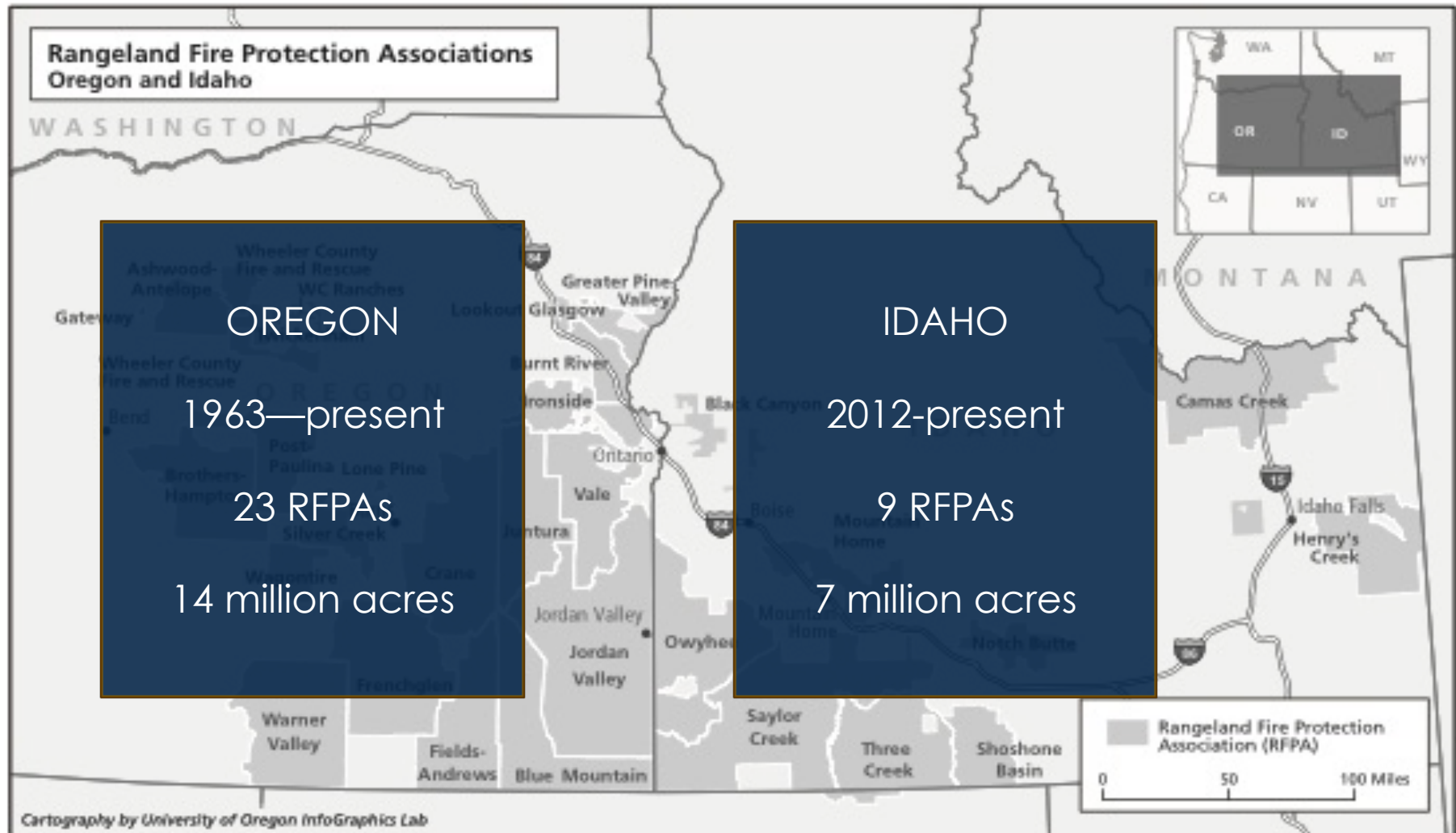
# CURRENT STATUS



# CURRENT STATUS



# CURRENT STATUS

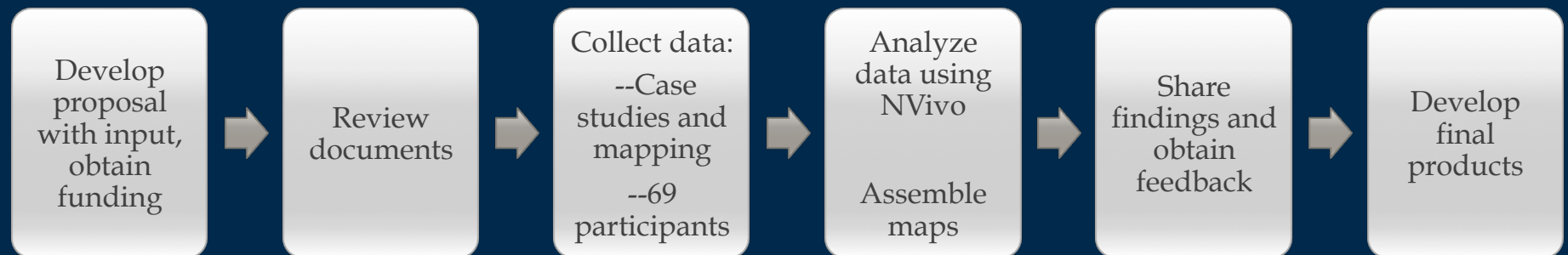




# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES



1. Analyze and compare RFPA model in Oregon and Idaho
2. Understand the successes and challenges of this model
3. Identify larger implications and lessons for community-based wildfire response

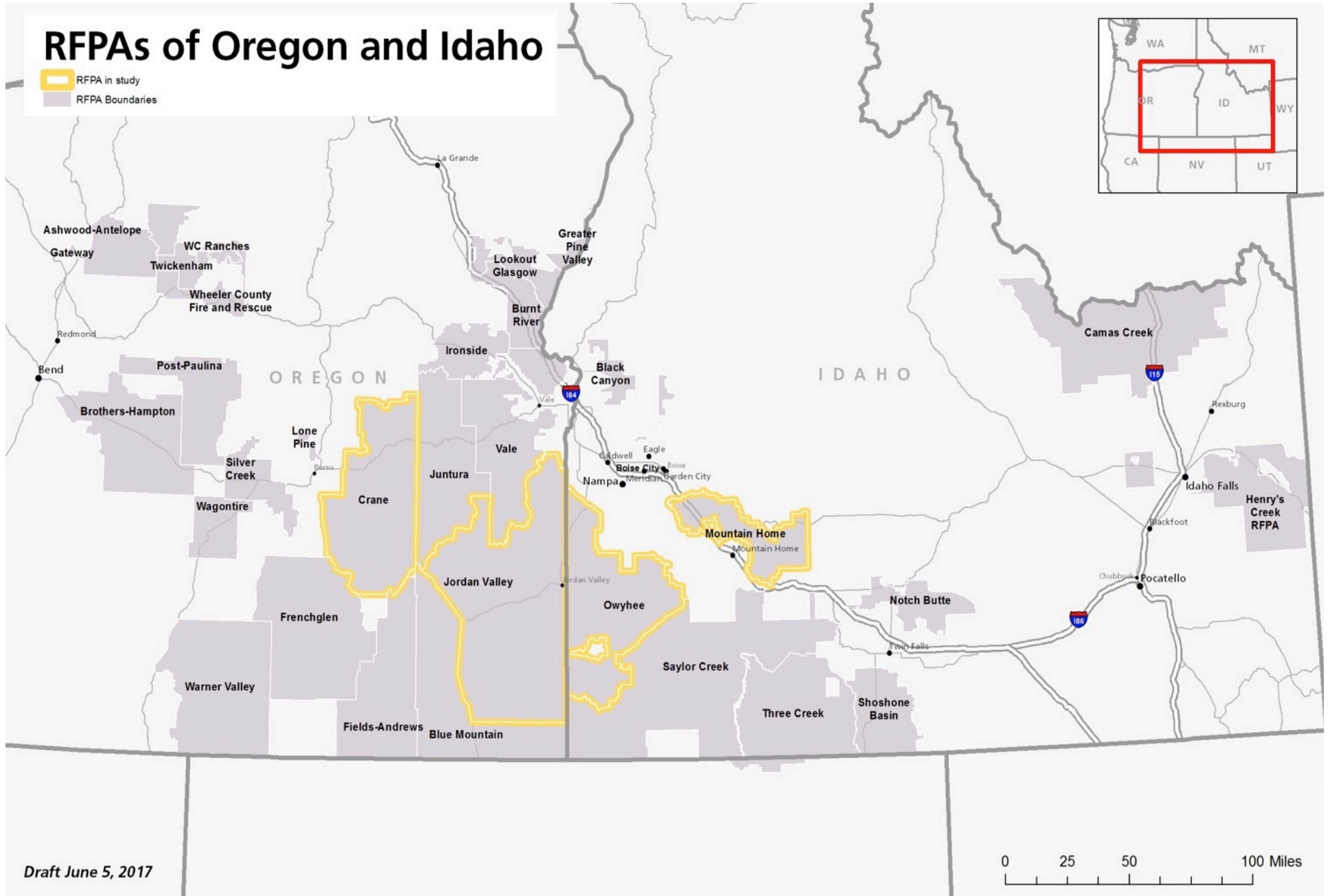
# RESEARCH PROCESS





# RFPAs of Oregon and Idaho

-  RFPAs in study
-  RFPAs Boundaries



Draft June 5, 2017

Map: Infographics Lab, University of Oregon  
Data: ODF and IDL

# STATE ROLES

Authorized by  
ORS 477  
Idaho Statutes  
Title 38

Voluntary  
formation as  
nonprofits

Ability to protect  
private and state  
lands

Rights and  
responsibilities of  
RFPAs

# STATE ROLES

States provide:

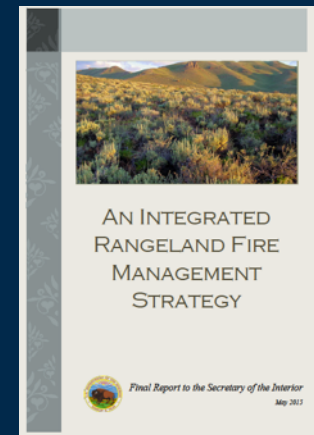
- Logistics and distribution of federal surplus equipment
- Training (Oregon)
- PPE
- Some federal pass-through (sage grouse-related)



# FEDERAL ROLES

Cooperative Agreements and MOUs to respond on federal lands

- Fire response protocol
- Communications
- Minimum standards
  
- BLM provides training, some equipment
  
- Increasingly recognized in federal policy (SO 3366 / Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy)



# IN KIND

## RFPA members contribute:

- Dues to organization
- Their own equipment
- Water sources
- A lot of time and energy

→ Response capacity found in “working landscapes”





# KEY FINDINGS

# Ranchers' advantages for fire response

- Distribution across the landscape
  - Local knowledge
  - Strong motivation to respond to fires
  - Institutional creativity
- This potential is leveraged through RFPA organization



*“They're right there. They've spent their lives, probably, in that local area. They know every road, every two-track, every gate, every water source, every creek, every everything. Where our people just don't.”*



# Establishment of RFPAs has changed rancher-federal fire manager relationships

- Growing recognition/respect among BLM fire managers for value of RFPAs
- Strengthened interpersonal relationships between individuals
- Greater understanding among RFPA members of rationale for some BLM tactics and strategies

# Distinctions between Idaho and Oregon models create differences

- Organic and gradual --- formal program
- Statutory basis
- State agency roles

A sepia-toned landscape photograph showing a wide valley with a winding river or road in the distance. The foreground is filled with dense, scrubby vegetation. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains, some with patches of snow. A white rectangular box with a dark blue border is centered over the image, containing the text "KEY CHALLENGES" in a black, sans-serif font.

# KEY CHALLENGES

# Integration of Two Distinct Models of Practice

- Formal (agency) versus informal (community)
- More pronounced in Oregon
- Experience and adaptation hold potential to resolve tensions

## Transitions to Type I / II Teams

- Working relationships with local district generally good
- National teams may not understand RFPAs
- Instances of RFPAs losing radio contact / being left out of communication



*“Typically they’re new to the area and they don’t have the personal relationships that we have working in this atmosphere that’s so important to our success with this program... Teams don’t understand exactly what RFPAs can bring to the table.”*

A sepia-toned landscape photograph showing a wide valley with a winding river or road in the distance. The foreground is filled with dense, scrubby vegetation. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains, some with snow-capped peaks. A white rectangular box with a dark blue border is centered over the image, containing the word "Implications" in a dark, sans-serif font.

# Implications

## For RFFPA-BLM Collaboration:



- Trainings, ride-alongs
- Informal experiences
- District BLM liaising with national teams



## For Program Design:

- Rights-based versus privilege-based
- State as support or as regulator
- Level of state financial support
- Access to surplus equipment, radios, etc.





# Residents and organizations may be motivated to play substantive roles in wildfire governance.

- Current model: prepare and flee/ collaborate
- Interest in expanded role higher in “working lands” communities



# Reconciling local knowledge with formal systems

- Assets for fire preparation and response
- Challenging fit with formal federal organizations
- Program design and shared experience
- Interpersonal relationships



# THANK YOU:



- Joint Fire Science Program #14-2-01-29
  - RFPA interviewees
  - BLM interviewees
  - Oregon Department of Forestry
  - Idaho Department of Lands
- University of Oregon Infographics Lab
- Photos by Davis, Wollstein, and Abrams



**FIRESCIENCE**.GOV  
*Research Supporting Sound Decisions*



FOR MORE  
INFORMATION

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://uo-online.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=95411f8de94f42...>. The page title is "Adapting to Fire on the Range" and it features a navigation menu with items like "What are RFPAs?", "Responding to Fires", "Rancher-BLM Relationships", "Policy", "Sage-grouse", "Promoting Fire Adaptation", and "About this Project". A map of the Pacific Northwest and Great Basin regions is displayed, with various areas highlighted in purple and pink, including the Greater Elko Valley, Snake Garryon, and Shoshone Basin. A small inset image shows a wildfire with the caption "(Long Draw Fire, Photo by Kevin Abel, Oregon BLM)".

The cover of the working paper features a green header with the title "Rangeland Fire Protection Associations: An Alternative Model for Wildfire Response". Below the title, the authors are listed: EMILY JANE DAVIS, JESSE ABRAMS, KATHIE ONE WOLLSTEIN, AUSTIN STEINGOSSEL, and JAMES E. MEACHAM, dated FALL 2017. The cover image shows a person's hands holding a map. At the bottom, it is identified as "ECOSYSTEM WORKFORCE PROGRAM WORKING PAPER NUMBER 66" and includes logos for the Ecosystem Workforce Program, University of Oregon, and Oregon State University.

[www.nwfirescience.org/  
RangelandFireProtectionAssociations](http://www.nwfirescience.org/RangelandFireProtectionAssociations)

[EmilyJane.Davis@Oregonstate.edu](mailto:EmilyJane.Davis@Oregonstate.edu)