



Catching Wildfire Podcast Reaches Its One-Year Anniversary With a Powerful Conversation on the August 2023 Maui Wildfires, Resilient Communications, and Preparing for the Next Disaster

PSBTA to Bring Lessons From Maui Wildfires to 2026 Vision FirstNet Users Summit

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (August 13, 2026) – The Public Safety Broadband Technology Association (PSBTA) is marking the one-year anniversary of its *Catching Wildfire* podcast with the release of its twelfth episode. The series continues the momentum that has brought together fire-service leaders, public safety experts, and technology innovators to examine the evolving challenges of wildfire response.

As one of the moderators of *Catching Wildfire*, Chief Jeff Johnson, Chief Emeritus at WFCM, has seen the series evolve into an important forum for sharing hard-earned lessons across the fire service. “Over the past year, *Catching Wildfire* has given us the opportunity to hear directly from the people on the front lines of one of the most complex challenges facing public safety today. From Maui to the American West, we’re hearing the same message: wildfire response is changing, and the fire service needs resilient communications, better situational awareness, innovative technology, and stronger partnerships to meet what’s ahead.”

The anniversary episode features Maui County Fire Chief Brad Ventura and Chief Kim Zagaris, Senior Operations Advisor/Wildfire Policy and Technology Advisor for the Western Fire Chiefs Association. Together, they reflect on the catastrophic 2023 Hawaii wildfires and the lessons shaping wildfire preparedness and response. The conversation also previews Ventura’s appearance at the 2026 Vision FirstNet Users Summit, where he will discuss the unique challenges of island firefighting and the efforts to build greater resilience that include: new wildland apparatus, Alert West monitoring cameras, FirstNet cellular backup deployables, upgraded weather stations, and enhanced fire-police coordination. The episode also highlights the importance of safe refuge areas and early self-evacuation. See the full episode here: <https://youtu.be/ZizrpgyWxX4>

Shared Chief Ventura, “When you’re faced with that type of fire and that type of environment, no resources on this island would ever have been enough.”

The *Catching Wildfire* series has generated strong interest across the public-safety and fire-service communities by bringing together operational expertise, emerging technology, and firsthand perspectives on the evolving wildfire threat. Standout episodes have featured Chief Brian Fennessy, now Director of the U.S. Wildland Fire Service (USWFS); Jeff Bratcher of the First Responder Network Authority; Scott Agnew, President of FirstNet®, Built with AT&T; and a discussion on the Earth Fire Alliance and the growing role of satellites in wildfire management.

“Wildfire doesn’t recognize jurisdictional boundaries, and it doesn’t wait for the right resources or perfect conditions,” said Chief Jim Wamsley, Rock Springs, Wyoming. “In the West, our firefighters operate across enormous distances and in environments where reliable communications, situational awareness, and coordination can become matters of life and death. PSBTA’s *Catching Wildfire* series is helping tell that story from the perspective of the people actually doing the work.”

Ken Watkins, Executive Director of Colorado Fire Chiefs, shares, “Wildfire has become one of the defining challenges facing the American fire service. Meeting that challenge requires leadership, collaboration, resilient communications, better technology, and the ability to share information seamlessly across agencies and jurisdictions.”

Chief Fennessy echoed the importance of bringing these conversations to a broader public-safety audience. “The wildfire environment is changing faster than our traditional response models. Today’s firefighters and incident commanders need resilient communications, real-time intelligence, situational awareness, and interoperable technology wherever the fight takes them.”

The next chapter of *Catching Wildfire* will explore the technologies, partnerships and strategies helping fire departments prepare for increasingly complex incidents. Upcoming conversations will examine FireBridge and evacuation alerts, FirstNet satellites, deployables and device maintenance and training, and the role public safety can play in addressing coverage challenges and building communications infrastructure through public-private partnerships.

“If you care about the future of wildfire response, firefighter safety, communications, and technology, pay attention to PSBTA’s *Catching Wildfire*,” said J.R. Fox, Deputy Fire Chief, Campbell County Fire Department, Gillette, Wyoming. “The series is bringing together the people, lessons, and innovations that can help shape how America prepares for and responds to the wildfire threat.”

The anniversary guest, Chief Ventura, will be a featured speaker at the 2026 Vision FirstNet Users Summit, Sept. 14–16 at the South Point Hotel Casino & Spa in Las Vegas. This session will highlight the Maui wildfire response, resilience, and ongoing improvements to public safety communications on the islands. <https://vision.theypsbtta.org/>

To learn more about *Catching Wildfire* and watch the latest episode, visit the PSBTA website and YouTube channel. <https://theypsbtta.org/category/podcasts/catching-wildfire/>

About Catching Wildfire PodCast

“*Catching Wildfire: Emerging Technologies and Operational Innovations in Wildfire*,” is a new Podcast developed in partnership with FirstNet and The Public Safety Broadband Technology Association (PSBTA). The Podcast was created to educate people on the continual innovations and technologies being provided to first responders to make their response to large-scale disasters more efficient and safer. The Podcast will tap into experts from all areas of first response to share real-life stories and events, and how the response has evolved thanks to evolving technologies.

About PSBTA

The Public Safety Broadband Technology Association (PSBTA) is an organization focused exclusively on ensuring the success of the entire FirstNet ecosystem that includes the legal entity created by Congress, the network infrastructure, hardware and software, and the single most important component—the end users.