HOW TO

REDUCE VEGETATION RISK BEFORE IT SPARKS TROUBLE

The Essential Guide for Utility Operations and Vegetation Management Leaders

Vegetation management is now

RISK MANAGEMENT

It's not just your utility's biggest budget item.
Vegetation management is also your biggest operational risk.

And in today's environment, **the stakes are high.**

CAN YOU BACK IT UP?

When a wildfire strikes or an outage makes the news, **you need to prove where, when, and how vegetation was managed.** Regulators, the public, and your own executive team expect immediate answers:

If your team can't confidently answer these questions, **this guide is for you.**

01
What work was done?

02
Where was it done?

03
When was it done?

04
Can we **prove it?**

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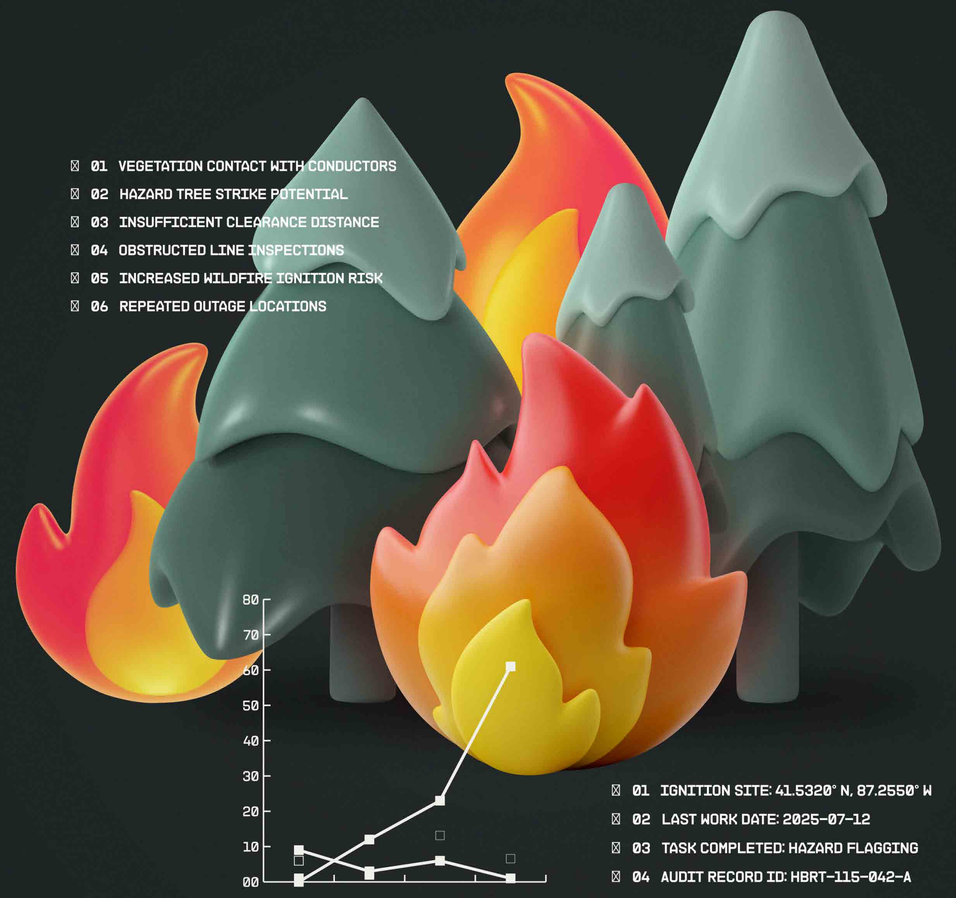
3 WARNING SIGNS YOUR VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM IS A FIRE HAZARD

01 You don’t have internal visibility of the work outside contractors are doing.

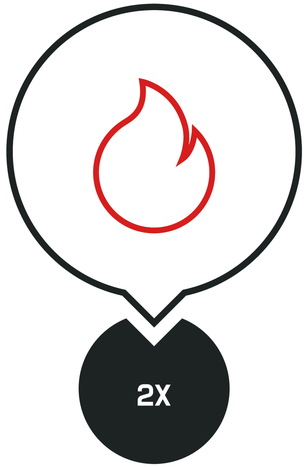
02 You can’t produce geospatial records showing when/where work was done.

03 You lack a unified method for hazard tree identification and crew assignment.



THE PRESSURE'S RISING, AND SO ARE THE STAKES

Routine trimming is no longer *ahem* cutting it. Climate shifts, catastrophic wildfires, and mounting regulatory scrutiny are raising the bar on vegetation management.

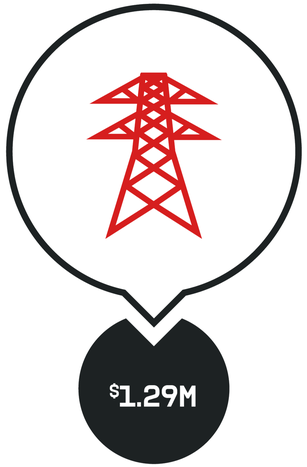


Extreme wildfires have **more than doubled** in frequency and intensity over the past 20 years, driven largely by climate change.

source

Southern California Edison **paid $82.5 million to settle claims** that a poorly maintained tree sparked the Bobcat Fire, one of the largest wildfire-related settlements in U.S. Forest Service history.

source



Transmission owners face fines of up to **$1.29 million per day, *per violation***, under relevant Reliability Standards like FAC-003.

source

It’s not just about getting the work done anymore. It has to be the right work, in the right place, at the right time. **And you have to be able to prove it.**

WHY PROGRESS ISN'T THE SAME AS PROOF

Most utilities are trying to be more proactive, but the systems and processes in place often **can't support what's being asked of them.**

HERE'S WHERE THINGS USUALLY BREAK DOWN

01 Data is scattered. Vegetation, outage, and asset data live in different systems—or worse, in PDFs, emails, or handwritten notes. It's hard to pull together a full picture when it matters most.

02 Work plans don't reflect real risks. If you're prioritizing work based on past experience or static spreadsheets, you could be missing real-time risks, like drought, tree health, and fire potential.

03 Crews are flying blind. When your field teams often don't have access to the latest maps, prescriptions, safety alerts, or priorities, the potential for confusion, delays, and inconsistent work is high.

04 Everyone's working from a different playbook. Contractors, GIS, vegetation teams, and compliance may all have their own tools and workflows, making coordination harder than it should be.

05 Work history is hard to trace. When auditors ask for records, it's a scramble to figure out what work was done, when, by whom, and why it was prioritized.

06 Even if the work is getting done, if you can't prove it—or explain the "why" behind it—you're exposed.

WHAT'S ON THE LINE WHEN YOU CAN'T PROVE THE WORK

When records are scattered, outdated, or unverifiable, you're more exposed to wildfire risk, costly penalties, and public backlash management.

WHAT IT REALLY TAKES TO GO RISK-BASED

Risk-based vegetation management relies on prioritizing work based on the actual threat.

It's an inherently proactive approach that's more strategic and efficient than relying on traditional, time-based cycles of performing work.

But to implement it effectively, your utility needs to make a programmatic shift—one that brings together data, operations, and compliance under a unified strategy.

Scoring trees isn't enough.

A true risk-based program makes your priorities operational, auditable, and defensible.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF A RISK-BASED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Without these core elements in place, **even the best-intentioned risk-based programs can get hung up** by manual workflows, siloed tools, and inconsistent execution.

Consolidated Data Visibility	Bring all vegetation, asset, and outage data into one centralized system that's connected to your GIS and easy to maintain.
Dynamic Risk Modeling	Calculate risk using critical variables like species, growth rate, proximity to assets, terrain, weather, and fire potential.
Data-Driven Work Planning	Prioritize and schedule work based on actual risk—not mileage or time-based cycles.
Integrated Crew Workflows	Equip field teams with digital assignments, mobile mapping, and real-time syncing to streamline execution.
Audit-Ready Reporting	Capture and document every decision and action to support compliance, transparency, and defensibility.
Cross-Team Alignment	Unify vegetation, GIS, operations, and compliance teams around a shared platform and strategy.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF A RISK-BASED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Your risk-based strategy requires more than assigning risk scores. These foundational building blocks work together to turn insight into action.

Up next:
A four-step roadmap to help you build or evolve your risk-based program with confidence.

STEP 01

OWN YOUR DATA

Don’t let contractors control your compliance. Bring all vegetation records (crew logs, hazard flags, field reports) into a system your team owns and can audit.

- Use software that gives your team, not just your contractors, access to vegetation records.
- Ensure completed work can be mapped, time-stamped, and linked to specific spans.
- Assign ownership to internal foresters or supervisors to validate incoming data.

STEP 02

PRIORITIZE BASED ON ACTUAL RISK

Use real-world data (outages, vegetation density, ROW condition) to focus work where it matters most.

- Overlay outage records, tree density, terrain, and known hazard zones in a GIS environment.
- Flag locations with repeat issues or “danger trees” that fall outside traditional right-of-way corridors.
- Create a plan that targets your highest-risk spans first, especially before fire season.

STEP 03

TRACK, VERIFY AND DOCUMENT EVERY TASK

Close the audit loop with GPS-tagged, time-stamped field data and structured field workflows.

- Use mobile-friendly tools that let crews mark work as completed from the field.
- Require GPS-tagged entries and timestamped photos where appropriate.
- Generate automated reports for auditors, regulators, or internal QA reviews.

STEP 04

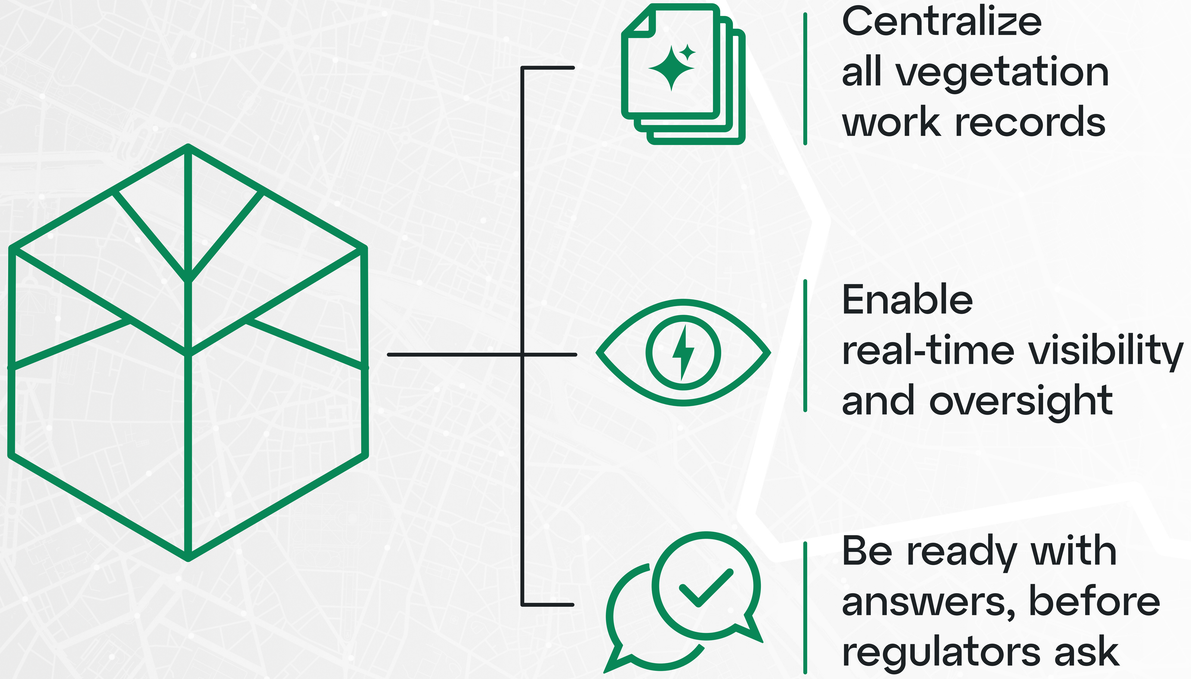
FUTUREPROOF YOUR PROGRAM

Once your vegetation records are centralized and structured, layering in predictive tools like LiDAR, satellite imagery, and fire risk models is the natural next step.

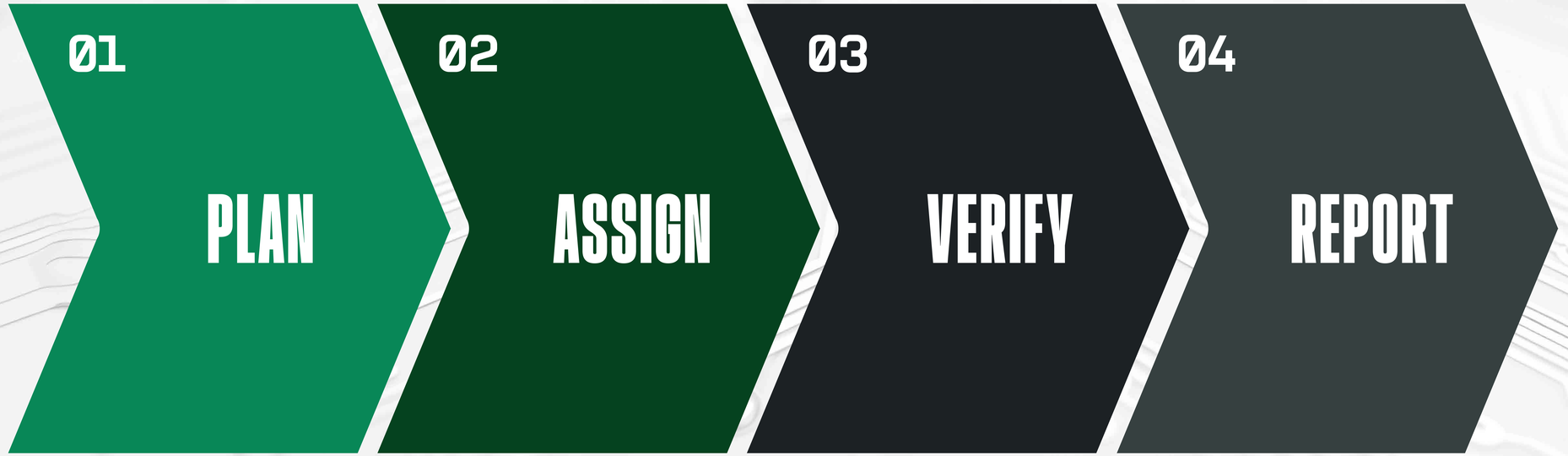
By taking ownership of your data and digitizing your workflows, you're no longer stuck in reactive mode. You're laying the groundwork for a program that anticipates risk and is ready for whatever comes next.

CLEARION: YOUR OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

You can't build a proactive program on spreadsheets, emails, and siloed contractor reports. **Clearion gives you the digital infrastructure you need.**



DEFENSIBLE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT



HOW

SOUTHSIDE ELECTRIC

IS REDUCING RISK, ONE SPAN AT A TIME

With high tree density—nearly double the national average—and challenging terrain that ranges from mountains to swamps, Southside Electric Cooperative (SEC) needed a better way to manage vegetation across its rural service area.

By implementing Clearion, SEC created a centralized system to plan, assign, and track vegetation work in-house. Crews now have clear visibility into upcoming work and a consistent method for documenting completed tasks, laying the foundation for future tools like drones and satellite imagery.

> We felt having a centralized system in place was important before we did anything else. When inundated with information, a good program to store the data is a must."

Matt Hall
Vegetation Management Supervisor
Southside Electric Cooperative

Read the case study

DON'T WAIT FOR TROUBLE TO SPARK.

Start Building Your Risk-Based Strategy Today.

A risk-based strategy doesn't require overhauling your entire program. It starts with owning your data and using it to make smarter, auditable decisions.

With the right operational foundation in place, your team can stop reacting to vegetation threats and start predicting them.

By laying that foundation, your utility can shift away from inefficient routines and reactive remediation to a vegetation program that's proactive, predictive, and prepared for whatever comes next.

CLEARION

BUILT FOR RISK-BASED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Clearion helps electric utilities like yours:

- Regain control of vegetation records
- Prioritize high-risk spans with data
- Prove compliance quickly and confidently
- Unify contractor and internal workflows
- Spot gaps before they become liabilities
- Build a foundation for predictive tools

The result? Greater visibility, reduced risk, and more value from every vegetation dollar.

READY TO GO DEEPER?

You've seen what it takes to build a defensible, risk-based vegetation program.

In this episode of the **Trees & Lines videocast**, you'll get an insider perspective on how one utility is scaling a smarter vegetation management strategy by centralizing data, streamlining contractor workflows, and laying the groundwork for future-ready tools.

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To learn more, visit arcos-inc.com