

End destructive wildfires.

WSU students: propose early wildfire response with Lockheed Martin Skunk Works and the College of Innovation and Design. Apply by October 23, build November 6 to 8, and present to Lockheed Martin engineers.

Why now

01

Wildfires burned 5.1 million acres across the U.S. in 2025. Extreme fires are about 3% of all wildfires but cause roughly 80% of the damage, and Kansas knows the pattern: the 2017 Starbuck fire burned 626,000 acres, the largest in state history, one year after the previous record. Most of these fires are detected by a 911 call, minutes to hours after ignition. The cheapest time to stop a fire is in those first minutes. Firefighting aircraft show up once a fire is already big. The open problem is everything before that.

Time	Detection still depends on someone noticing. By the time a crew rolls, the window to stop a fire cheaply has closed.
False alarms	Dust, controlled burns, and haze look like smoke. A system that cries wolf gets switched off.
Cost at rural scale	Rural fire districts cover thousands of acres on volunteer budgets. Anything that needs a fiber line or a full-time operator won't get deployed.

What we're asking for

02

Propose a system, not a sensor. Cover the full chain and show how the pieces talk to each other.

Detect →

Sensors, cameras, satellites, community reports, or something we haven't thought of.

Confirm →

A drone or another low-cost way to verify a fire without sending a person.

Respond

Suppression, containment, or alerting that slows the fire before the first engine arrives.

Write it for a real customer: a Kansas rural fire district or a state wildfire agency. Tell them roughly what it costs, how long it takes to stand up, and what it does when it fails.

Ground rules. Civil and commercial use only • Public data sources • No assumptions of unlimited power or connectivity in the field • Something a small team can build or simulate over one weekend

Your application

03

Apply at wsuinnovationworks.com by **midnight Central, at the end of Friday, October 23**. Teams: use the prompts below. Individuals: pitch an idea in about 150 words.

01 Your team

Team name, project lead, and each member with major and year. Teams of 2 to 6 may apply; the target is 4 to 6.

02 Roles

Who does what, and one line on why they fit. Non-engineers are essential: dispatch workflow, community reporting, cost modeling, and the business case are half the problem.

03 Your customer and their need

Who you're building for and what "early response" has to mean for them, in your words.

04 Your starting approach

How you detect, confirm, and respond, and how the pieces connect. Rough cost, timeline, and possible failures. Early ideas and open questions are welcome; a finished solution is not required.

What we're looking for

Whole-system thinking across all three steps • A plan grounded in a real customer's budget • A team whose makeup fits the problem • A scope you can finish in a weekend

The challenge weekend, Nov 6 to 8

Friday 5 pm Kickoff at the John Bardo Center, Skunk Works welcome, brief walk-through, first work session.

Saturday 9 to 6 Build day. Mentor check-ins, and a midpoint design review with Lockheed Martin engineers.

Sunday Pitches at noon to Lockheed Martin judges, then awards by 2:30 pm.

Fri Oct 9

RFP released

Responses open on the site. Questions welcome.

Fri Oct 23, 2026

Applications due

Midnight Central, at the end of Friday.

After closing

Next steps

Decisions and next steps will arrive by email after applications close.

Nov 6–8

Challenge weekend

John Bardo Center. Build with Skunk Works mentors, pitch to Lockheed Martin engineers.

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