

While protecting Colorado communities is always a top priority, scientists recognize the integral role wildfire plays in the functioning of healthy forests. Fire is a necessary component in the creation of critical habitat for wildlife in standing dead trees; it increases nutrients in the soil; and it improves conditions for surviving trees. The diverse landscape mosaic created by fire also increases biodiversity and helps control parasite and insect outbreaks.



Fire is a natural part of the Bennet Peak Roadless Area in the Rio Grande National Forest.

Photo courtesy of TWS Archives

The Forest Service has the ability to take any fire mitigation measures necessary to ensure a community's safety, even in roadless areas (which overlap only very rarely with the wildland-urban interface).

Managing remote fires for their resource benefits promotes healthy forest ecosystems without placing lives or property in jeopardy. In most cases, roadless areas aren't anywhere near communities.

- Only one tenth of one percent of inventoried roadless areas are within a half-mile of at-risk communities.<sup>1</sup>
- Additionally, as the Forest Service itself notes: *...little to no human infrastructure is located within most inventoried roadless areas. On a national scale, 86.7% of the land within one mile of National Forest System inventoried roadless area boundaries has fewer than three people per square mile.*<sup>2</sup>
- Fires that occur in roadless areas are provide rare opportunities to utilize fire as a management tool to naturally thin trees, reduce underbrush, and regenerate vegetation. This is not only a more efficient and natural way to ensure the healthy functioning forest ecosystems, but also significantly less expensive than aggressive fire suppression.

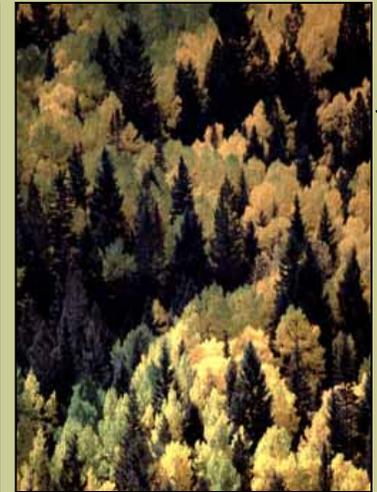


Photo courtesy of Colorado Environmental Coalition

Autumn foliage lights up the Grand Mesa-Uncopahgre-Gunnison National Forest.

**Heavily roaded areas are generally at higher risk of more frequent and more severe wildfire than roadless areas.**

While roads can assist in the fighting of threatening wildfires, threading roads through pristine landscapes dramatically increases the risk that fires will start in the first place. Over 90% of fires on federal lands are caused – either intentionally or accidentally – by humans, and over half of those fires started within a stone's throw of a road.<sup>3</sup>

Heavily roaded areas are generally at higher risk of more frequent and more severe wildfire than roadless areas, in part because:

- They are generally located in lower altitudes and in warmer, drier ecosystems;
- They see more people, and thus are at greater risk from human-caused fires; and
- Areas that have seen heavy logging or more intense fire suppression efforts tend to be dense and overgrown with young trees, providing a rich source of readily ignitable fuel.

1 "National Forest Roadless Areas Pose No Threat To Communities at Risk from Wildfire." The Wilderness Society *Science and Policy Brief*. July 2003, Number 11

2 Final Environmental Impact Statement of Forest Service Roadless Areas Conservation, 2001. Volume 2, p. 21.

3 [http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/kla/pubs/fires\\_summary.pdf](http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/kla/pubs/fires_summary.pdf)

For more information, visit [www.roadless.net](http://www.roadless.net) or contact:

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