

# GUNNISON FIRE ZONE

The Gunnison Fire Zone contains roughly 2.25 million acres, of which 1,847,542 acres are managed by the BLM and USFS. Combined, the BLM and USFS accomplish an average of 6-8 prescribed burns per year for a total of 5,000-8,000 acres. The majority of these burns are conducted in the spring or the fall when the cooler weather provides optimal low-intensity burning conditions.

**Jerry Chonka, Gunnison Zone Fire Management Officer**

970.642.4411

**Pat Medina, Asst. Gunnison Zone Fire Management Officer**

970.642.4407

**Dan Huisjen, Fire Ecologist**

970.240.5339

# Montrose Interagency Fire Management Program

This program is responsible for all wildland fire activities on BLM and USFS lands in Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray, San Miguel, and portions of Mesa and Saguache counties. The administrative offices are located in the Montrose Interagency Dispatch Center, which provides dispatching for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), and the National Park Service (NPS).

**Steve Ellis, Fire Management Officer**

Montrose Interagency Fire Management Program

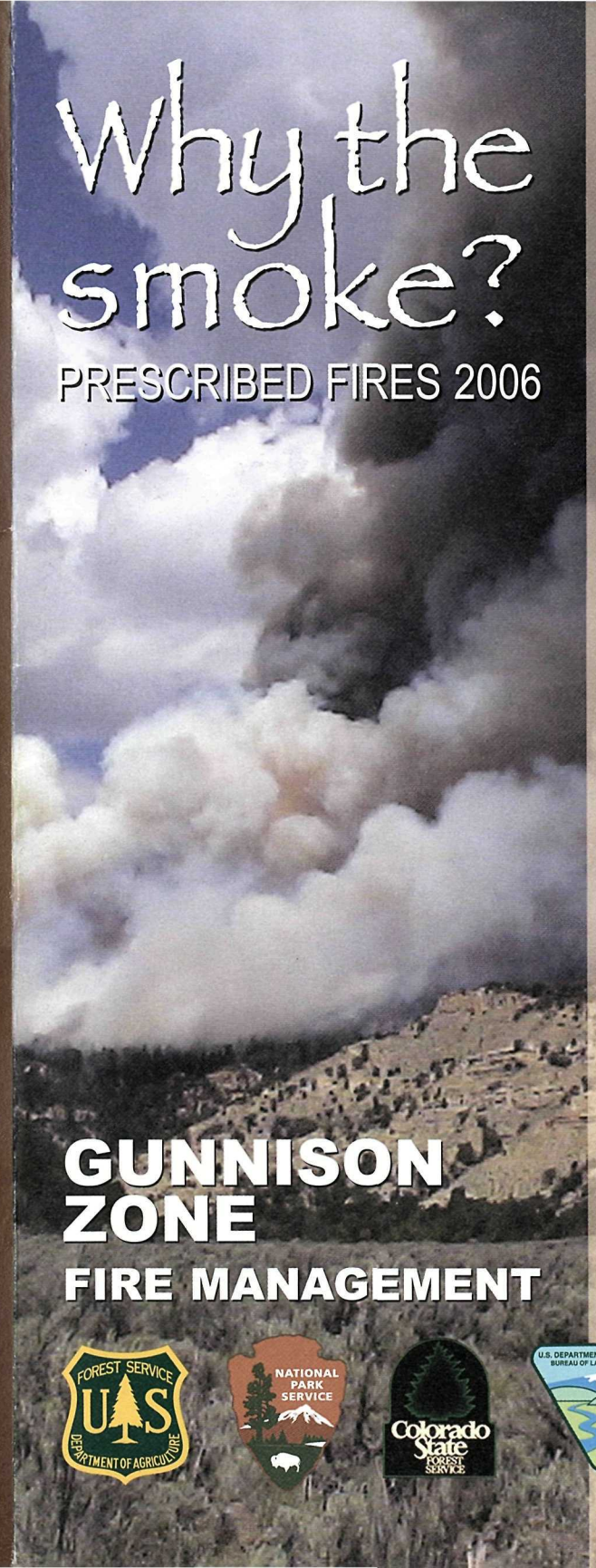
2465 South Townsend Avenue

Montrose, Colorado 81401

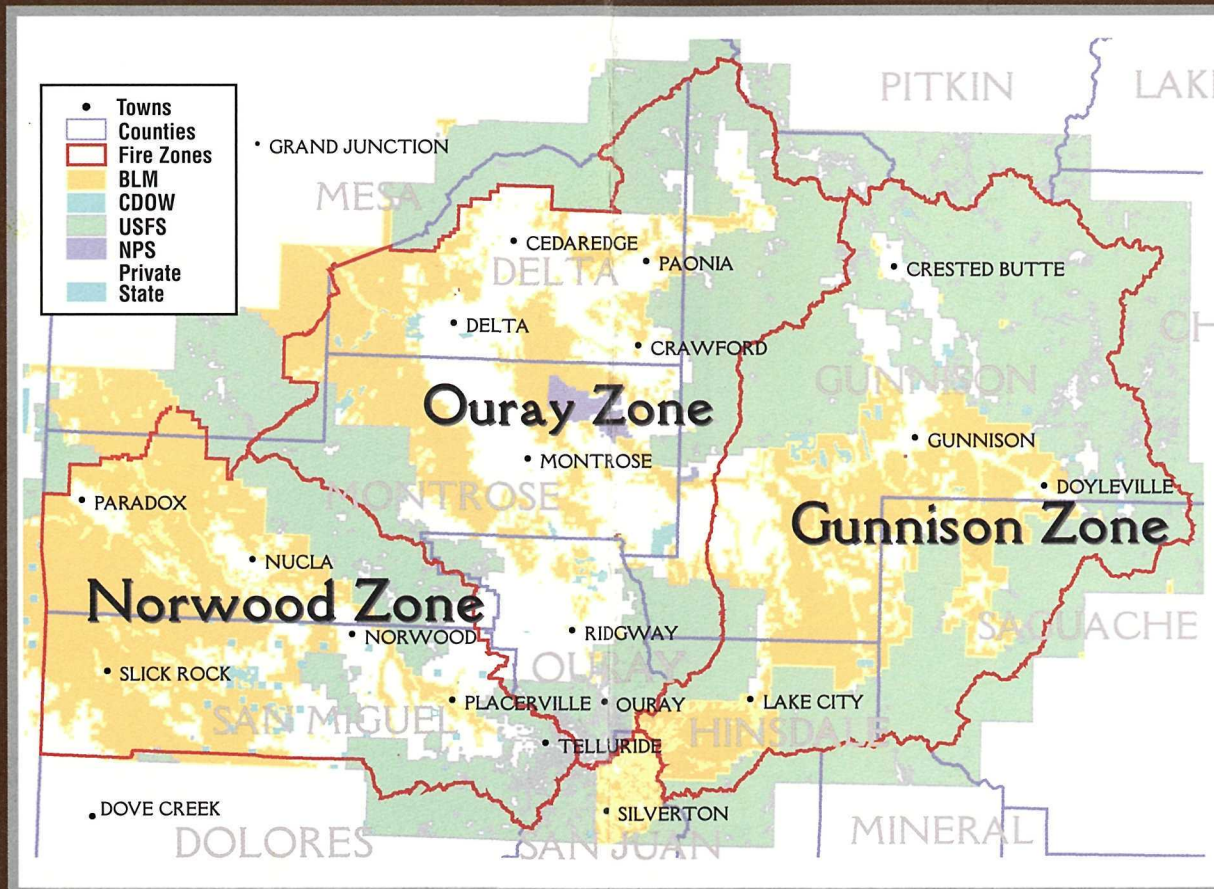
970.240.5350

# Why the smoke?

## PRESCRIBED FIRES 2006



# GUNNISON ZONE FIRE MANAGEMENT

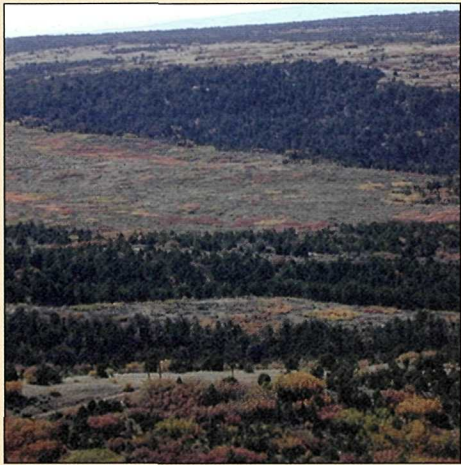




# Why use prescribed fire?

Fire managers use prescribed fires – that is, fires that are intentionally ignited under predetermined conditions by trained fire personnel - to help restore and maintain ecosystem health. Fire managers have greater control over the impact of fire to the ecosystem on prescribed fires than on wildfires because they can time and plan the conditions for burning. As a result, prescribed fires are often used to achieve specific resource objectives, such as habitat improvement, fuels reduction, and overall range and forest restoration.

## Fire's Role on the Landscape



Fire has been a vital force shaping vegetation across the landscape in southwestern Colorado, particularly in the ponderosa pine, pinyon juniper woodland, and mountain shrubland

communities. Much of this ecosystem evolved with fire, so it has become fire dependent – that is, fire is essential to sustaining the function and health of the biotic systems.

Fire creates a dynamic vegetative “mosaic” or mix of successional stages, communities, and stand ages in the various plant communities. This shifting mosaic is essential to the stability of the system as a whole.

Fire is also a critical element in the creation of wildlife habitats. Because fire affects habitat quality and diversity, it regulates the types and numbers of species in the ecosystem.

## Fire Has Been Excluded

Over the last century, fire has been excluded in many areas where it once played a critical role in maintaining ecosystem health. Traditional land management practices, such as grazing, logging, and fire suppression, have changed the structure and composition of many plant communities and greatly affected many species occurring in Western Colorado. The resulting changes include an overall increase in the density of trees, particularly in the ponderosa pine, with relatively more saplings and pole-sized trees and fewer large trees. There has been an increase of ground fuels in the form of litter and fine woody debris. Trees such as pinyon pine and juniper have also invaded formerly shrub or grass dominated areas. Many of the remaining shrub-grassland areas are dominated by older age plants, and these areas have fewer native bunchgrasses and forbs. Non-native species, such as cheatgrass and knapweed have out-competed native grasses in many areas.

Prescribed fire - in combination with chemical and mechanical treatments, such as roller-chopping or chaining – give fire managers the greatest control in helping restore fire to the landscape.

# WHAT ABOUT THE SMOKE?

The smoke from any wildland fire can be a significant source of air pollution because fire is a natural combustion process that releases air pollutant emissions. The amount and size of emissions depends on the size and intensity of the wildfire.

Prescribed fires give managers the greatest control over the size and intensity of the fire because they can time and plan the burning conditions under which they ignite, and they can use ignition techniques that reduce emissions. Therefore, prescribed fires provide the greatest management flexibility in controlling smoke production and impacts in smoke-sensitive and high visibility areas.

Fire managers must consider the potential impacts to air in developing prescribed burn plans. They have to acquire a smoke permit from the state, and their burns can only be conducted if the established federal and state standards for air quality can be met or mitigated in an acceptable manner.

Prescribed fires are conducted under favorable burning conditions, when smoke dispersal is good, and the amount of emissions and the direction of the smoke dispersal are monitored throughout the burn.

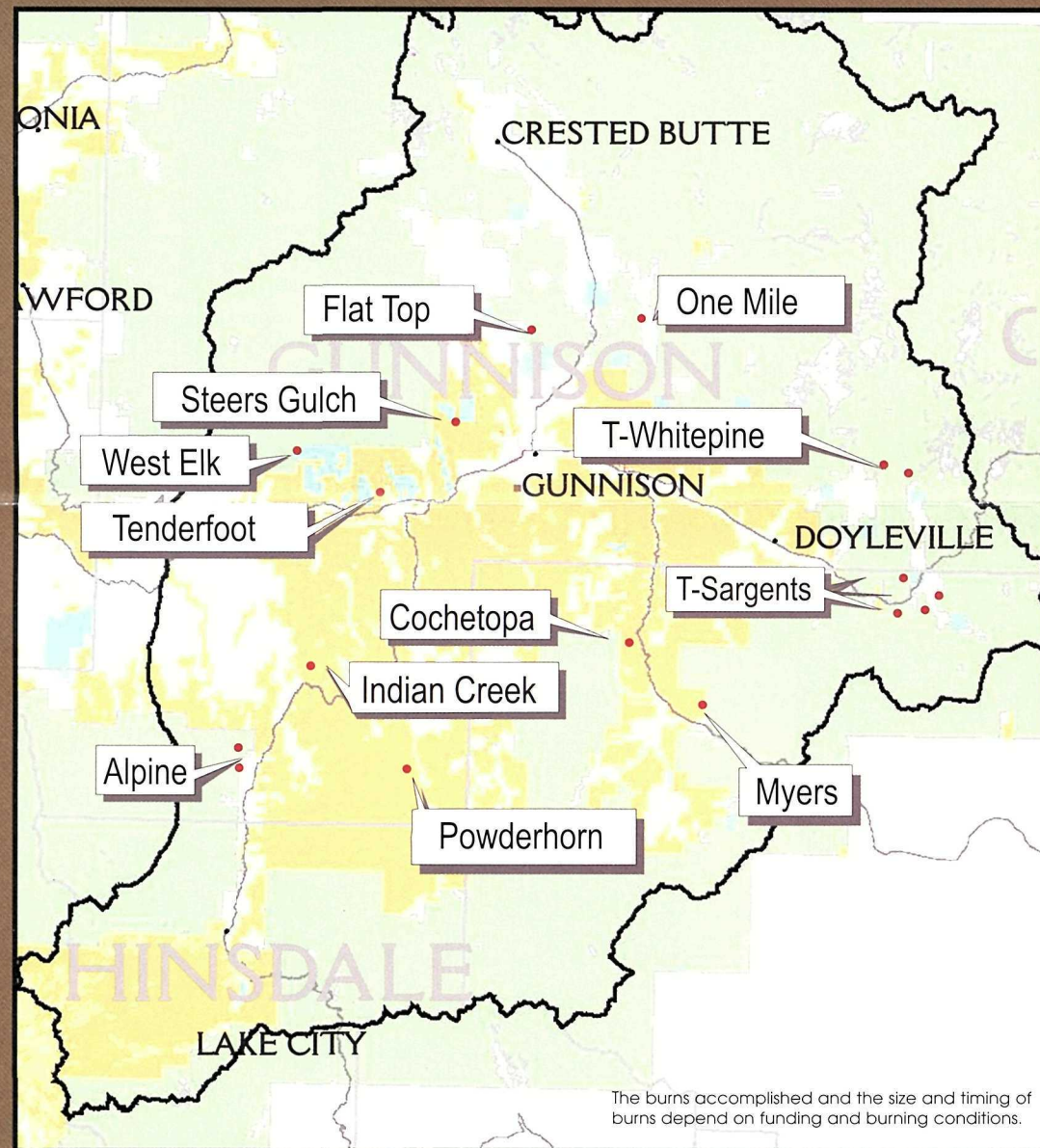
It is important to note that while prescribed fires do impact air quality in the short-term, they help reduce the risk of more long-term impacts from larger, more intense wildfires that can burn for longer periods. These uncontrolled wildfires typically cause greater air pollutant emission levels and occur under unfavorable smoke dispersion conditions, which ultimately result in more extreme and widespread air quality impacts.





# GUNNISON ZONE

## Prescribed Burn Treatments



### Alpine

The Alpine project area is 8 miles north of Lake City. Ponderosa pine dominates the east and south slopes with Douglas-fir on north aspects. Both ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir stand are very dense and insect activity is increasing. The proposed treatment is to protect structures and power lines by thinning 60 acres and prescribe burning 200 acres to reduce fuels and restore ecosystem function.

### Cochetopa

The Cochetopa project area is 15 miles southeast of Gunnison. The total project area is 14,000 acres. The dominate vegetation is sagebrush with a strong shrub component. The treatment will entail burning 100 acres per year to support a herd of 150 bighorn sheep. The treatment will improve habitat and open up corridors for migration.

### Flat Top

The Flat Top project area is 10 miles north of Gunnison. Burning will be conducted above 9,200 feet to improve big game habitat, livestock distribution, and for fuels reduction. About 800 acres are planned for burning.

### Indian Creek

The Indian Creek project area is 21 miles southwest of Gunnison. The project area encompasses a total of 60,650 acres. Within that area, the proposal is to treat about 1,000 acres per year for the next 10 years using a variety of treatments. Approximately 2,000 acres have already been treated with prescribed fire. The treatment areas this year include:

**Indian Creek:** The treatment will entail burning 250 acres to improve wildlife and domestic livestock forage and sustain the ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and aspen communities in the area.

**Powderhorn:** The treatment will entail burning 250 acres to reduce hazardous fuel loadings in some areas and to improve overall forest health.

### Myers

The Myers project is 25 miles southeast of Gunnison in the Cochetopa Park area. Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir dominate the site. The proposed treatment is to burn 500 acres for ecosystem restoration and fuels reduction.

### Tomichi – Sargents

The Tomichi-Sargents project area is 25 miles east of Gunnison. Ponderosa pine dominates much of the site, with some Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, and lodgepole pine mixed. There are pockets of mountain pine beetle and isolated blowdown areas. Most of the lodgepole has moderate to high mistletoe infestations. The proposal is to burn about 1,000 acres, thin another 600 acres, and construct fuel breaks. The primary purpose of this treatment is to reduce the threat of wildfire to the structures and 115 KV WAPA transmission lines along U.S. 50 and to do ecosystem restoration.

### Tomichi – White Pine

The Tomichi-White Pine project area is 30 miles east of Gunnison. In 1997, blow down affected 20,000 acres in the area, with 2,500-3,500 acres experiencing blow down of 70% or more of the standing trees. The south and east-facing slopes have ponderosa pine and Douglas fir, while west and north-facing slopes have lodgepole pine with dwarf mistletoe infestations. The proposed treatment is to construct fuel breaks in several locations for a total of 20 acres to reduce the impacts of wildfire to the community of Whitepine, and burn 100 acres along a 230 KV WAPA transmission line.

### West Antelope Creek

The West Antelope Creek project area is 5 miles west of Gunnison. The project area encompasses a total of 47,000 acres of adjoining BLM and CDOW lands. Within that area, the proposal is to treat 1,500 – 2,000 acres a year for the next 10 years. The project will primarily involve prescribed fire, although small areas will be treated mechanically to establish control lines. The treatment area this year includes:

**Tenderfoot Hill:** The treatment will entail burning 200 acres to improve forest and rangeland health and increase forage for deer, elk, and bighorn sheep.

**Steers Gulch:** This treatment will entail prescribed burning about 200 acres in partnership with the CDOW to improve forest and rangeland health as well as increase forage for the big game animals. There are no bighorn sheep in the Steers Gulch area.

### West Elk

The West Elk project area is 5 miles north of Blue Mesa Reservoir between Red Creek and the Rainbow Lake road. The purpose of this project is to reduce fuels and improve wildlife habitat on sunny aspects (south and west). Most of burning will be done in the spring when there is still snow on the shaded aspect (north and east). The total burn area encompasses 4,400 acres. The plan for this year is to burn 700 acres. A helicopter will be used, since access is poor.

### One Mile

The One Mile project area is 7 miles northeast of Almont between One Mile campground and Beaver Creek on the southeast side of Taylor Canyon. The purpose of this project is to reduce fuels adjacent to private land with structures, improve range condition and wildlife habitat, and accomplish ecosystem restoration. Burning will be done in the spring when there is still snow on the shaded aspect (north and east) and the fall using established and created control lines. The total burn area encompasses 35,000 acres. The plan for this year is to burn 1,000 acres. A helicopter will be used in areas where access is poor.

