The Hayman Fire: Air, Water & Wildlife Impacts

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Hayman fire of 2002 was the largest wildfire in the State's recorded history.

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The South Platte River drainage, which runs through the heart of the Hayman fire, provides municipal water supplies to more than 1.2 million people in the Denver area.

Heavy sedimentation runoff after a catastrophic wildfire in the South Platte watershed poses a great threat to Denver water supplies -- a threat which can persist for years.

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The 12,000-acre Buffalo Creek Fire of 1996 (just north of the 137,000-acre Hayman burn) dumped 13 years worth of sediment into Strontia Springs reservoir, at a cost of $25 million and counting.

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Early June, 2003 witnessed the beginning of the mudslide impacts to the Upper South Platte River watershed.

State wildlife biologists estimate fish kills may be as high 90% in stretches of the North Fork of the South Platte River where ash and soot from the Hayman have begun washing into the river.

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Colorado Hwy. 67 was recently covered by a mudslide of Hayman fire debris five feet deep.

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Vallecito Reservoir, shown here, is also under the threat of massive sedimentation because of the state's second worst fire ever, the Missionary Ridge burn in southwestern Colorado. Vallecito supplies the city of Durango.

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As the Hayman fire exploded, running 12 miles in half a day, winds blew the smoke directly into Denver city limits, causing unprecedented and dangerous air pollution.

Smoke from the Hayman fire covered the northeast corner of the state and spread well into Nebraska and Wyoming.

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June 8, 2002 -- the day before the Hayman fire exploded -- was a typical clean air quality day in Denver.

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June 9, 2002 witnessed the most severe pollution levels ever recorded in Denver as a result of the Hayman wildfire smoke, according to the Colorado Air Quality Division.

Air pollution again reached dangerous levels a week later as the fire raged on. One fatality was recorded.

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The Pawnee Montane Skipper Butterfly and the Mexican Spotted Owl -- both federally listed under the ESA -- lost important habitat in the Hayman fire. In the case of the Skipper, nearly 50% of its habitat has been burned in the past few years.

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Catastrophic fires put tremendous stress on sensitive populations of wildlife, such as the Canada lynx.

Canada lynx is a listed species with habitat all across the southern Rockies, including the area throughout the Missionary Ridge fire. Colorado has spent upwards of $1 million trying to recover the species.

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Colorado has passed legislation that will direct all state agencies to manage state-owned forested lands to reduce wildfire threats, improve air and water quality, and improve habitat.

The benefit of proactive fuel treatments was never more clear than in the case of the 2002 Bucktail fire in western Colorado, pictured here.

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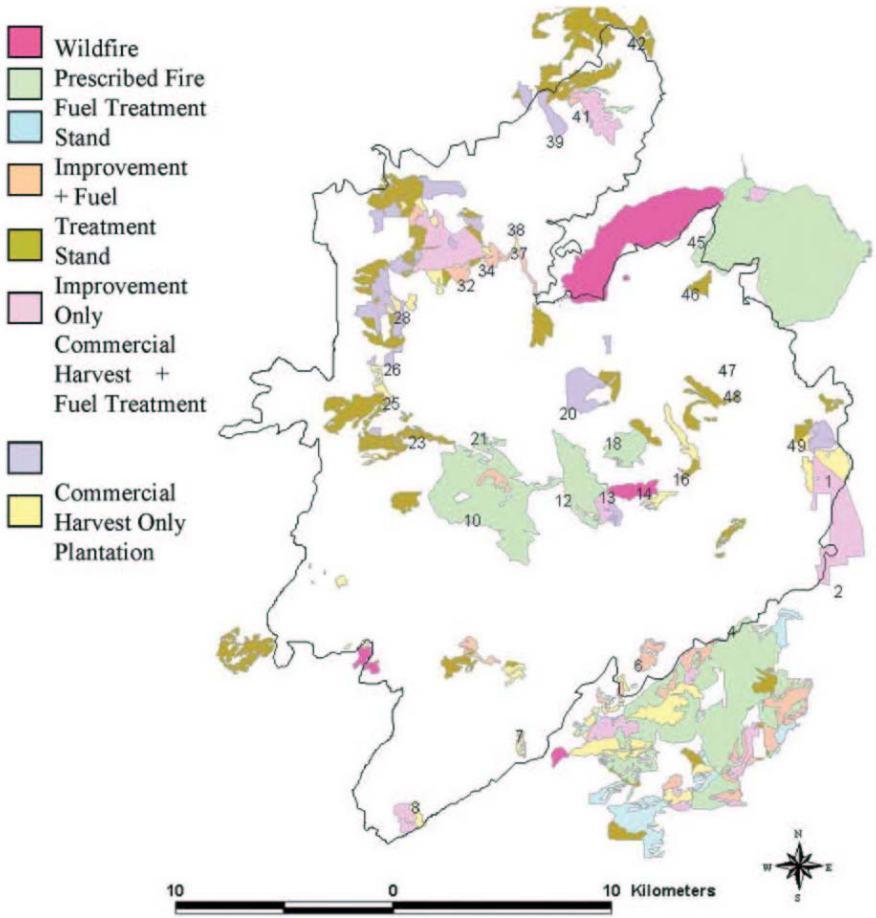

Figure 63—Approximate locations of helicopter photo points near fuel modified areas within the Hayman Fire.

Landscape-scale treatments are, in Colorado's experience, the only way to effectively return forests to a healthy, sustainable condition wherein they can withstand natural disturbances like wildfire.

The scientists gathered to assess the Hayman fire have compiled a draft report, indicating that landscape-scale treatments are indeed the only effective method to reduce the impacts of wildfire on air, water, and wildlife.

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For more information, please contact the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, at (303) 866-3311.

Special thanks to the US Forest Service, the EPA, the Denver Water Department, and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for photos and information.