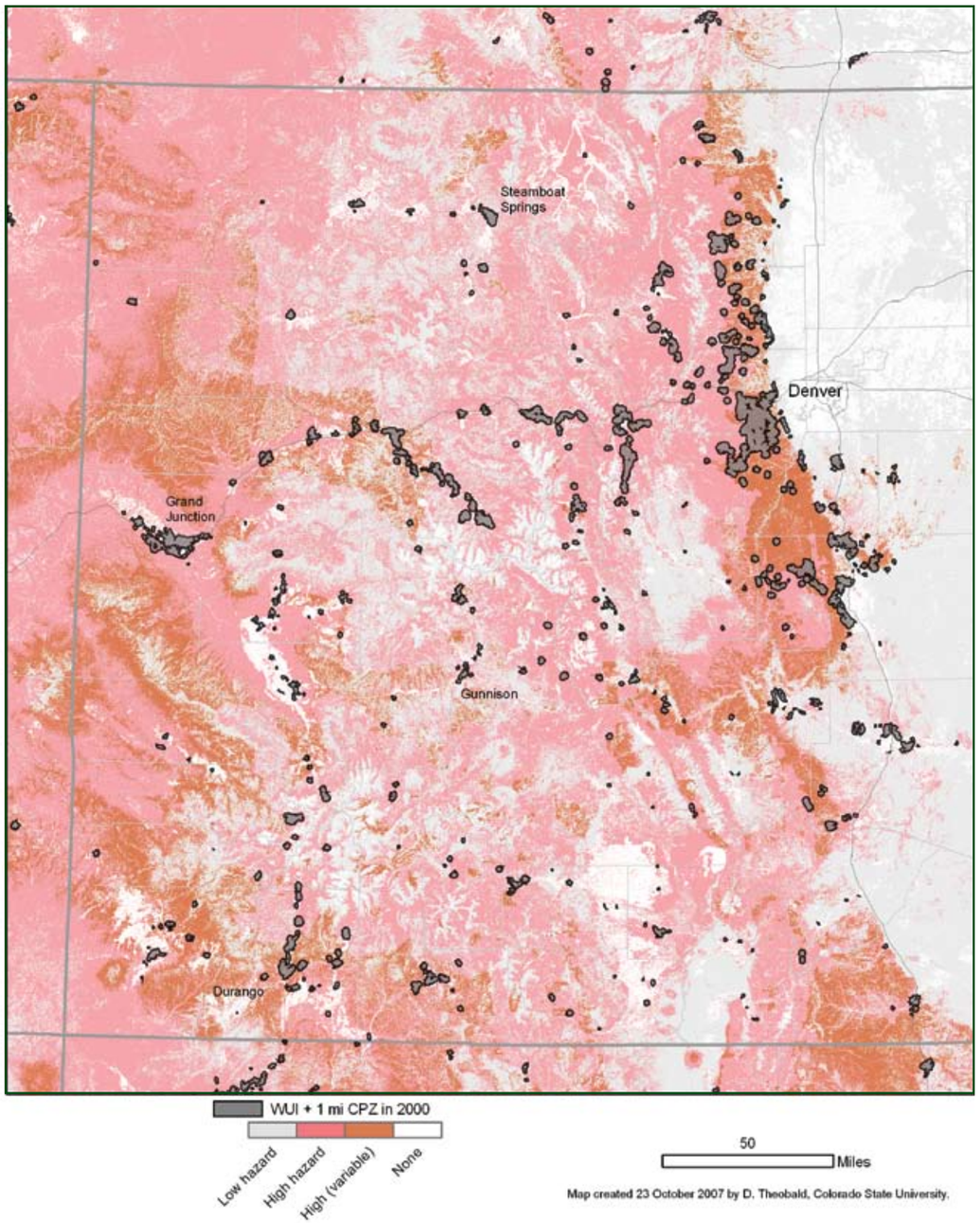
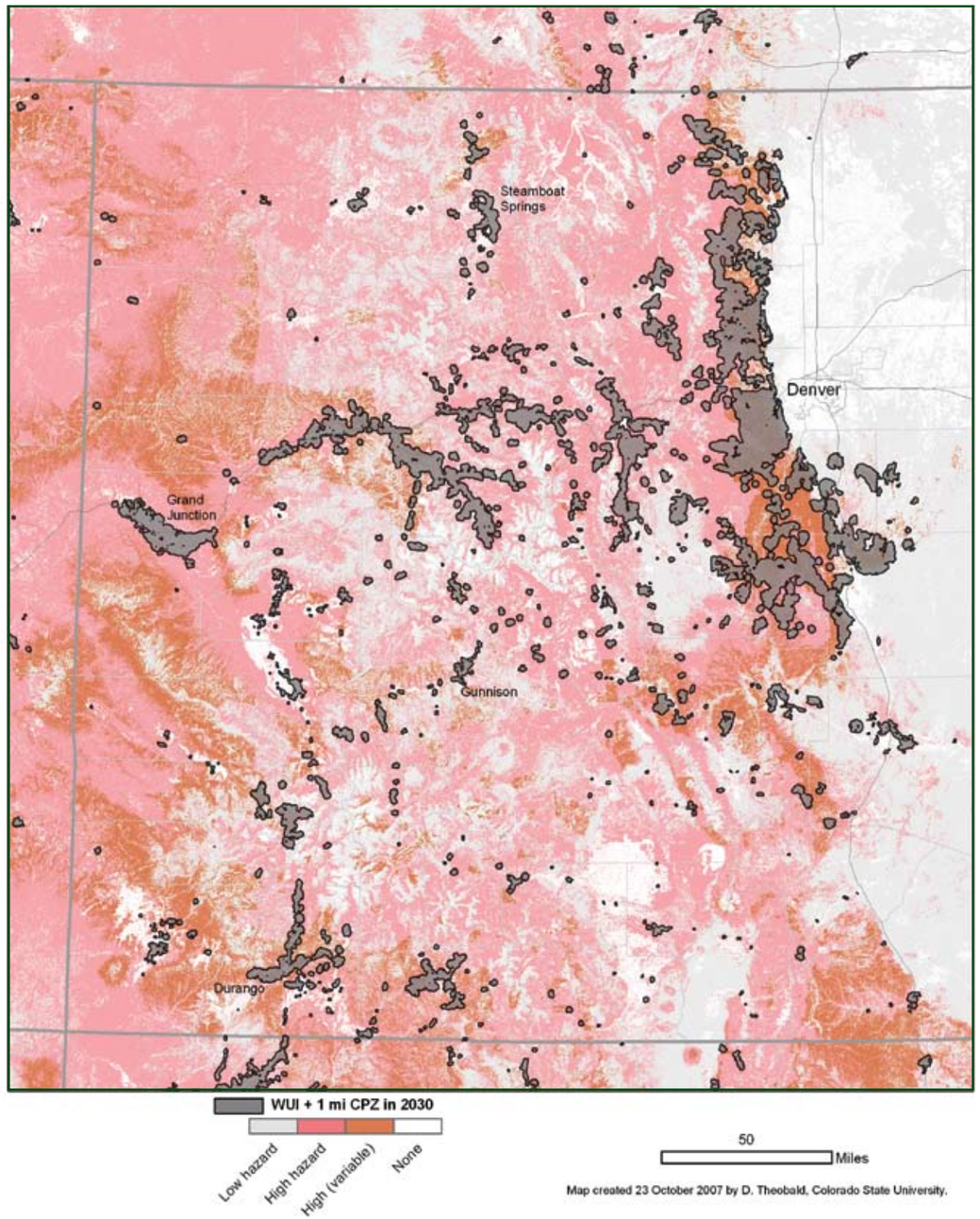
From the *2007 Report on the Health of Colorado's Forests*

Colorado's Wildland-Urban Interface, Current and Projected

Development of natural areas, as is occurring in Colorado, increases demand for and costs of wildfire protection. A Colorado State University analysis (D. Theobald and W. Romme, 2007) projects that the state's wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas will increase from 715,500 acres in 2000 to 2,161,400 acres in 2030, a 300-percent increase. These maps depict Colorado's WUI in 2000 (left) and the likely expansion of WUI in 2030 based on housing development forecasts (right).





Definitions

WUI is the wildland-urban interface. It is the area where homes and urban sprawl press against the wildland, and includes both interface and intermix communities.

CPZ is the community protection zone surrounding the WUI. The analysis shows that there were more than 300,000 homes in the CPZ in 2000, and more than 720,000 homes are projected for 2030.

Low hazard means that most fires burn at relatively low intensity through surface fuels, with little potential for spread into tree or shrub crowns, and would be relatively easy to contain or suppress.

High hazard means that many or most fires burn at high intensity, often through crowns, and would be difficult to contain or suppress.

High (variable) applies to vegetation types in which fires historically were of low or variable intensity, but recently have often burned at high intensity due to a century of fire exclusion, e.g., southwestern ponderosa pine forests.

Firebreak Helps Firefighters Save YMCA Camp and Subdivision

On June 25, 2007, a human-caused fire broke out at the YMCA Snow Mountain Ranch near Winter Park. Although burning conditions were only moderate, the fire grew and spread rapidly, partly due to the dry beetle-killed trees. Recent tree cutting to reduce forest fuels at the ranch and a fast, coordinated response by firefighters kept people and buildings safe.

The Colorado State Forest Service advised ranch managers to protect their cabins from wildfire, and ranch managers did just that. A month prior to the Y Fire, they established a 150- to 200-foot firebreak around several buildings that previously were nestled in a thicket of timber.

"When the fire hit the firebreak, it literally dropped to the ground, and between the weather, a logger who was putting in dozer line, and the rest of our efforts, we were able to get a handle on it," said Ron Cousineau, Colorado State Forest Service firefighter and Granby District forester. "The firebreak did exactly what we wanted it to."

A firebreak at YMCA Snow Mountain Ranch not only protected the YMCA cabins, it also kept the fire from spreading into the neighboring Fairways at Pole Creek subdivision, which has about 100 homes.

Grand County Sheriff and Emergency Medical Services, every fire department in the county, the Colorado State Forest Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and Summit County fire departments all helped with the firefighting efforts.

Deborah Carr

Forest thinning work reduced fire behavior in other parts of the fire.

Paul Mintier

Firefighters attribute the fire's unusual intensity for the early time of year and moderate weather to beetle-infested trees.

Colorado State Forest Service

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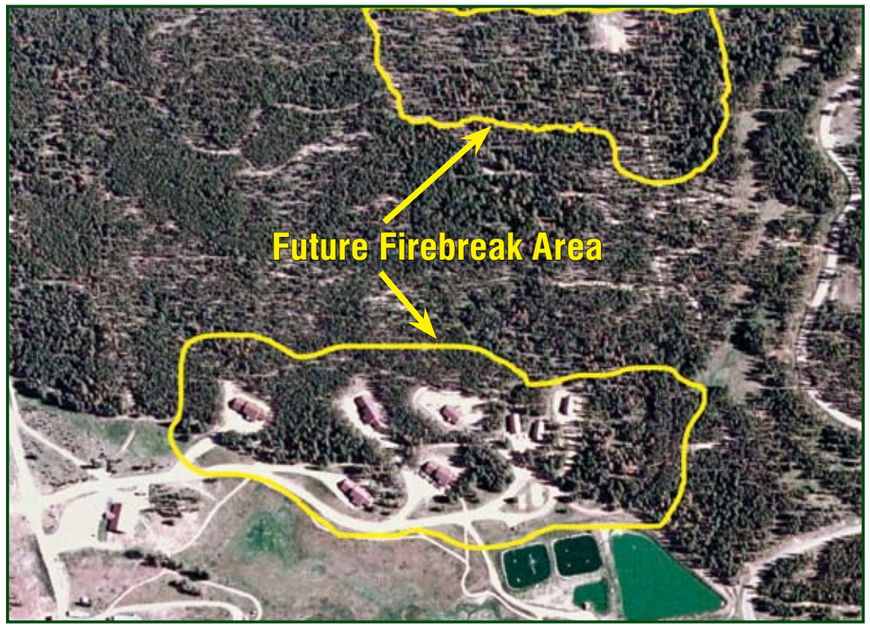
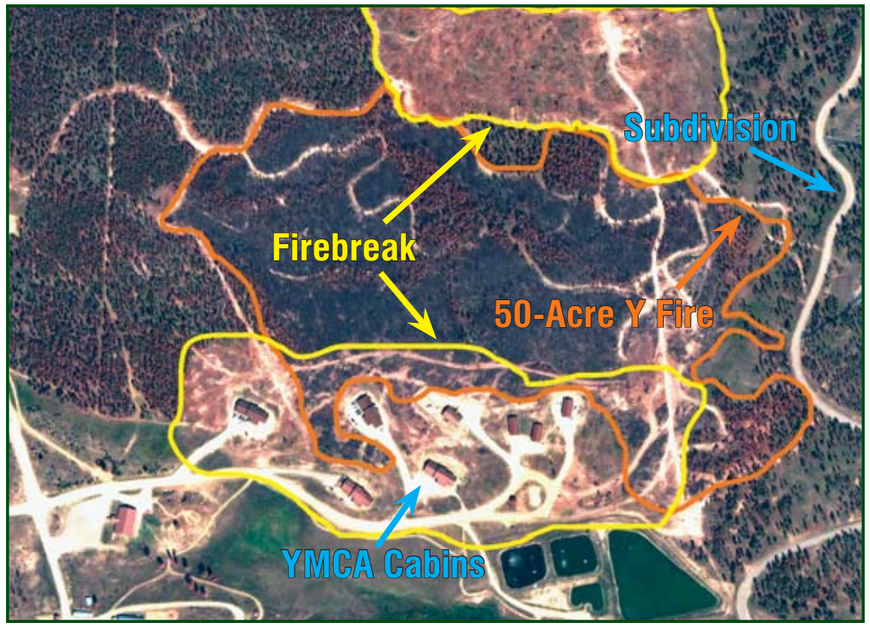
Aerial imagery of the YMCA camp shows the firebreak location (outlined in yellow) and the extent of the Y Fire (outlined in orange). A firebreak is an area where trees and shrubs are removed so that a wildfire drops to the ground, allowing firefighters a better chance to extinguish the fire. Firebreaks can involve a significant amount of work and hazardous fuel removal, but, as seen in the lower image, can be successful in protecting homes from wildfire.



Before the Firebreak and the Y Fire, 2005



After the Firebreak and the Y Fire, 2007