

New Mexico Wildfire Activity in 2002
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This presentation takes a retrospective look at New Mexico's wildfire activity during 2002. It includes data quantifying the extent of wildfire and methods of wildfire prediction and detection, such as satellite images, indices, fire danger rating systems, etc. During the 2002 fire season New Mexico endured 1,694 wildfires covering 307,948 acres, and most were started by lightning strikes. The reasons for high fire activity are evaluated and the likely suspects are climate conditions, past fire suppression, and subsequent biomass accumulation. Precipitation has been far below average since the beginning of the water year, resulting in low snowpack and streamflow. Although August is traditionally the rainiest month and the height of the summer monsoon, drought conditions remained severe throughout most of the state.

Most wildland fire must be suppressed to meet natural resource and social objectives. Resources used to suppress wildfire include Hot Shot crews, smoke jumpers, Type I Teams, helicopters, and air tankers. The Forest Service response to wildfire is discussed, including techniques of Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER), the costs of wildfire suppression, and how impacts to air quality are evaluated. BAER techniques are illustrated, including aerial seeding, mulching, constructing erosion barriers, and raking hydrophobic soil layers. Proactive measures, including prescribed fire and "wildland fire use for resource benefit," are explained in the context of the natural role of fire in ecosystem health.