

Highlights of GAO-03-1114T, a testimony before Representative Joel Hefley and Representative Mark Udall

Why GAO Did This Study

Over the past decade, a series of devastating and deadly wildland fires has burned millions of acres of federal forests, grasslands, and deserts each year, requiring federal land management agencies to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to fight them. GAO was asked to provide an interim update on key segments of an ongoing review of the use of geospatial information technologies in wildland fire management. Specifically, GAO was asked to provide an overview of key geospatial information technologies and their uses in different aspects of wildland fire management and to summarize key challenges to the effective use of these technologies. The final report is expected to be issued in September 2003.

GAO's review focused on the five federal agencies that are primarily responsible for wildland fire management: the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and the Department of the Interior's National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Note: The graphics in this report are in color and are best viewed electronically.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1114T

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

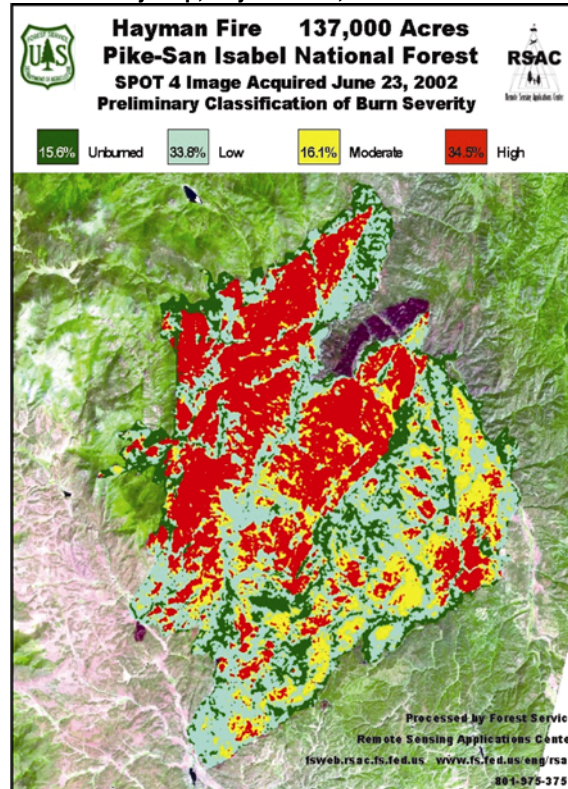
GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION

Technologies Hold Promise for Wildland Fire Management, but Challenges Remain

What GAO Found

Geospatial information technologies—sensors, systems, and software that collect, manage, manipulate, analyze, model, and display information about locations on the earth's surface—can aid in managing wildland fires by providing accurate, detailed, and timely information to federal, state, and local decision makers, fire-fighting personnel, and the public. This information can be used to help reduce the risk that a fire will become uncontrollable, to respond to critical events while a fire is burning, and to aid in recovering from fire disasters. However, there are multiple challenges to effectively using these technologies to manage wildland fires, including challenges with data, systems, infrastructure, staffing, and the effective use of new products. Clearly, effective management of information technology and resources could help address these challenges. In our final report, due to be issued next month, we will further discuss geospatial information technologies, challenges to effectively using these technologies, and opportunities to improve the effective use of geospatial information technologies. We will also make recommendations to address these challenges and to improve the use of geospatial technologies in wildland fire management.

Burn Severity Map, Hayman Fire, June 2002



Source: Forest Service, Remote Sensing Applications Center.