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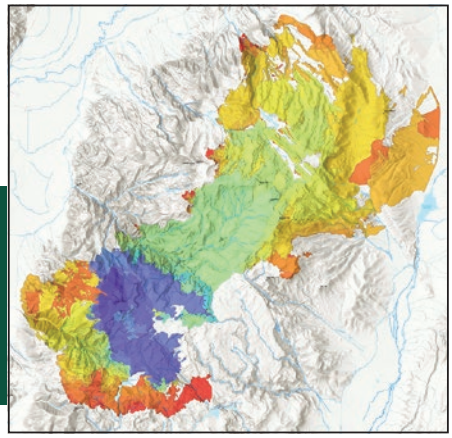

Monroe Canyon Fire
Fishlake National Forest

Proof of Concept:

Fuels Management Impacts on the Monroe Canyon Fire

Initial attack. Photo courtesy Fishlake National Forest.

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DISCLAIMER

The information in this report was gathered through a variety of sources: the National Wildfire Coordinating Group's "InciWEb" incident information system, Incident Status Summary (ICS) 209s, Incident Action Plans, the Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS), media (including social media), as well as several other sources. Also critical to the information gathered to create this report were the various oral interviews conducted with Incident Commanders, initial, strategic, and tactical fire operations personnel, Agency Administrators, local line officers, state fire officials, local elected officials, and others.

This is a contextual narrative of the Monroe Canyon Fire within a history of the fuels treatment program on the Fishlake National Forest. Events on the fire are intended to highlight the role of fuels management prior to the fire. The narrative timeline and history is not intended to capture all actions on the fire, as the rapid development, large number of resources deployed, and spatial extent of the incident makes it impractical to document every action or even every significant event that occurred on the fire.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly two decades ago, Utah state officials and the Fishlake National Forest began one of the nation's most progressive investments in fuels management to improve the ecological health of Central Utah's forests and rangelands and lessen impacts to communities from wildfire. The 2025 Monroe Canyon Fire is proof of concept of these investments.

The Monroe Canyon Fire started on July 13th on a mountain between the communities of

Historic Koosharem Ranger Station. Photo courtesy Fishlake National Forest.

Richfield, Monroe, and Koosharem, Utah. Initial fire activity included extreme surface spread with tree torching, rapid perimeter advancement, and very high heat intensity due to the hot, dry weather patterns, steep slopes, and heavy fuel accumulations.

Initial attack forces immediately requested air support and a Type III Incident Management Team. The Central Utah Type III Incident Management Team took command of the fire the evening of July 13 and Great Basin Complex Incident Management Team 3 took command of the fire on July 16th. An aggressive, full-suppression response to the fire was initiated at the fire's first report.

Over the course of the next 28 days, the fire grew to over 70,000-acres as weather conditions deteriorated. Extreme fire behavior forced evacuations and threatened communities in all directions surrounding the mountain. Convection columns formed pyro cumulous clouds so large they collapsed on two separate occasions. Weather analysts issued an unprecedented 14 consecutive Red Flag Warnings during one period of the fire and Fire Behavior Analysts recorded and confirmed a relative humidity reading of 2 percent at 9,000 feet elevation, which is thought to be among the lowest readings ever recorded in North America. Fire activity and growth substantially decreased by August 10th, but it took four more weeks for Complex Incident Management Teams (CIMTs) to achieve 100 percent containment on September 4th.

Throughout the fire's duration, investments in fuels treatments gave firefighters an advantage as strategically placed treatments guided the fire away from population centers and minimized property loss. Treatments reduced fire intensity, created areas where firefighters could safely engage the fire, slowed or stopped perimeter growth in several areas, and resulted in improved forest and rangeland health in many areas within the fire perimeter. To a large degree, the intensity of the Monroe Canyon fire and the extreme resistance to control is tied to the untreated portions of the mountain and creates a stark contrast with the portions of the mountain which had been treated. Taken together, the Monroe Canyon Fire is a successful outcome of the investment in fuels management.

FISHLAKE NATIONAL FOREST HISTORY

When Congress established the Fishlake National Forest in 1908, it initially encompassed 1.4 million-acres of plateau and mountain land headquartered in Richfield, Utah. The Fishlake covers parts of the Wasatch, Awapa, Sevier, and Fish Lake plateaus as well as the Tushar Mountains, Pahvant and Canyon ranges. Elevations across the forest range from valley towns like Richfield at elevation 5,300 feet, up to Delano Peak that rises to 12,169 feet above. The annual precipitation varies from less than eight inches to forty inches depending on elevation and aspect. About half of the forest is covered in aspen and sub-alpine fir mixed conifer stands at higher elevations. Other vegetation as one descends to the valley floor includes pinyon pine-juniper woodlands, sagebrush grasslands, Gambel oak, and mountain brush.

South of the Fishlake headquarters in Richfield, Monroe Mountain is bounded by the towns of Koosharem to the east and Monroe on the west. The mountain covers approximately 175,705 acres of the National Forest and hosts 11,805-acres


Extreme fire behavior, July 26. Photo courtesy Sevier County Sheriff's Department.

of private inholdings. Researchers estimate that aspen historically covered approximately 66,000-acres of the 175,000-acre mountain landscape, but by the 21st century that coverage receded to just over 16,000-acres. The Richfield Ranger District identified absence of fire and over-grazing/browsing as the primary underlying causes for aspen ecosystems on Monroe Mountain being at risk.

Extensive scientific research across the West has demonstrated repeatedly that the interruption of the natural fire return interval with the arrival of Euro-American settlers has changed western ecosystems, pushing them toward late successional conditions, and making them more vulnerable to extreme fire behavior. Local research on the Fishlake National Forest, including analysis of fire scars from across the landscape, has confirmed these very impacts and consequences. While current generations have become accustomed to smoke-free conditions and see fire as a rare occurrence, that has not always been the case. During his explorations of Utah in the late 1870s John Wesley Powell noted almost constant smoke throughout his time in the territory. While not widely understood at the time, those frequent fires were an essential natural process that kept the forests and rangelands healthy and reduced the size and intensity of typical fires on the landscape.

UTAH STATE SUPPORT FOR FUELS TREATMENT

Utah began reintroducing fire into its forest ecosystems to improve their health with investments made possible by shifts in federal support of wildfire suppression and prevention. Investments began following the joint release of the National Fire Plan by the federal land management agencies in 2000. Beginning that year, the state's Department of Natural Resources began working with private landowners on fuels reduction around their properties. Some of the first projects originated in the Monroe and Manning Meadows communities on Monroe Mountain.

The support dovetailed with the creation of a state initiative to fund ecosystem restoration projects known as the Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI). The WRI organizes partnerships to improve high priority watersheds throughout the state and developed a funding clearing house that could accept grants, donations, and appropriations from private, local, state, and federal entities. Following WRI creation, state fire officials saw fuels treatment acres steadily rise.

The collaborative approach also improved cost efficiency. The results of a state review of the cost difference between fuels treatments, including mechanical, hand-thinning, and prescribed fire, versus wildfire suppression were stunning. The state spent on average approximately $35 to $175 on prescribed fire. State and federal agencies combined spent $1,385 per acre on the Monroe Canyon fire to suppress. The hard work of relationship building to create a collaborative approach paid off in Central Utah as partners joined the state to work together across ownership boundaries across the state. By 2025 the WRI had supported almost 3,000 projects and treated over 2.7 million acres using collaborative funds worth over $435 million. The WRI set the stage for the Forest Service to initiate one of the agency's most ambitious fuels treatment programs in the National Forest System.

FISHLAKE NATIONAL FOREST FUELS MANAGEMENT

The fuels treatment program on the Richfield Ranger District is largely the result of District Ranger Jason Kling's drive to improve the district's ecosystem health. Kling arrived from the Humbolt-Toiyabe National Forest in 2010, in his first post as a newly minted ranger. Two experiences shaped his vision for the ecological health of his new district. First, he spent time in the field with Forest Ecologist Bob Campbell and Fire Ecologist Linda Chappell as they introduced him to Monroe Mountain and the value of the historic aspen stands to the ecosystem. They estimated that 70 percent of the aspen ecosystem had been lost on Monroe Mountain due to a lack of natural disturbances such as fire, and due to other factors like overgrazing/browsing that favored less palatable (and more flammable) vegetation such as mixed conifer and pinyon/juniper stands.

Between 2017 and 2018, the Richfield district increased the number of total acres treated annually through prescribed fire and mechanical means from 3,922 acres to 15,573 acres, with over 11,000 of those acres treated with prescribed fire.

The second factor that facilitated Kling's fuels treatment increases was the arrival of a new Forest Supervisor on the Fishlake in 2018. Mike Elson brought

Post fire, looking east from Monroe Mountain. Photo courtesy Jason Kling.

Aerial view during initial attack. Photo courtesy Fishlake National Forest.

Helicopter dipping into reservoir to fill bucket, August 7. Photo courtesy Lincoln Bramwell.

extensive fire and ecological restoration experience from his previous position as Flagstaff District Ranger on the Coconino National Forest headquartered in Arizona. He was comfortable treating hazardous fuels with prescribed fire and managing naturally caused wildfire for ecological benefit.

Elson set an objective of treating at least 40,000 acres annually across the Fishlake National Forest. This was based on local research indicating that under natural fire return intervals 40,000 to 123,000 acres needed to burn annually across the 1.8 million acres of the Fishlake NF to maintain healthy conditions. Elson encouraged Kling to expand his restoration efforts. According to Elson, "we have to treat the right acres, not just the easy ones. Strategic placement of fuels treatments is as important as size."

Equipped with partners, funding, and approval, the Fishlake National Forest was able to further expand fuels reduction work on Monroe Mountain and across the Fishlake National Forest. After approval of a large Forest-wide pinyon/juniper management project, the number of acres Kling's staff treated annually on Monroe Mountain increased dramatically. By 2023 Kling reached his annual goal of treating 30,000-acres across the entire District in a single year. This success, and specifically the work the district put into Monroe Mountain, was critical when a wildfire struck the area in 2025.Strategically placed fuels treatments and fire prevention investments paid enormous dividends in preventing the loss of life and reducing property loss when extreme fire conditions bore down on the area.

MONROE CANYON FIRE

First Report-July 13

Fire dispatch in Richfield, Utah received reports of a smoke column on the west side of Monroe Mountain at 14:22 on July 13, 2025. Richfield Ranger District Fuels Coordinator Kelly Cornwall saw the smoke from the town of Monroe, ten miles south of Richfield and immediately recognized the column sat in a bad spot—right in the middle of a high complexity burn unit he planned to burn that winter. Fuel loads in the unit were high, terrain was steep, and dozens of private residences dotted the mountain. USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Utah State Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, as well as personnel from over a dozen communities engaged in the initial attack of the fire in the late afternoon of July 13th under Incident Commander Type 4 Gage Bell. Weather conditions were sunny, dry and very hot.

Due to the steep, inaccessible terrain and dense fuels, crews could not attack the wildfire directly. Initial fire activity included extreme surface spread with tree torching and continuous potential for short to long-range crown runs with medium range spotting. With winds out of the southwest, initial attack forces tried to prevent the fire from moving northeast and hooking around the south end of Monroe Peak and into the Monkey Flat area where structures lay.

At this early stage the fire was already threatening privately-owned cabins in the Monroe Meadows and Manning Meadows communities. The fire's continued activity frustrated plans to attack the blaze directly. Dispatch ordered the Central Utah Type III incident management team which luckily was

Initial attack. Photo courtesy Fishlake National Forest.

assembled and leaving an incident not far away. That team took command of the fire late in the day on the 13th. The fire already burned 800 acres that afternoon and continued to burn into the evening with steady winds uncharacteristically out of the north moving the fire towards the communities at risk. The fire burned actively on the night of July 13th until approximately 0300.

Richfield Ranger District Fuels Coordinator Cornwall, together with State DNR Fuels Coordinator Matt Christensen, were able to use the prescribed fire treatments the District and State had completed together to their advantage. Cornwall and Christensen knew they had communications towers in the fire's path but they were not worried—the sites were surrounded by rocks and completed prescribed burns and aircraft laid considerable amounts of retardant around the sites. What concerned the pair were the private inholdings with multiple cabins that the prevailing winds were pushing the fire towards. After the Sheriff's department evacuated the communities of Manning Meadows, Monroe Meadows, and Magleby, they worried about having enough time to safely set up some structure protection sprinkler systems. Cornwall and Christensen believed they had just enough time to get into the evacuated area, set up sprinkler systems, and egress before the flame front arrived because they had strategically placed prescribed burns to protect the communities from such an eventuality, but they did not have enough time on the 13th to put their plan in motion.

July 14

The Central Utah Type 3 IMT took command of the fire late on July 13th and Cornwall transitioned into an operations position, leading one group of engines while Matt Christensen led another. After burning actively through the night, the fire grew more active early that next morning. According to the pair, the new team understood the fire was going to burn very actively on the 14th and put them in a defensive posture for safety as they planned for full structure protection of the Monroe Meadows, Manning Meadows and the Magleby areas on Monroe Mountain. By utilizing the fuel treatments they had completed to slow the fire down and therefore buy them critical time, the pair directed crews to set up structure protection equipment in Monroe and Manning Meadows cabin developments. They just had enough time to set up the sprinklers, turn them on then back off to safer ground, saving the vast majority of the structures in these areas on the eastern slopes of Monroe Mountain.

Between 16:00-17:00 on the afternoon of the 14th the fire made three different significant runs toward these locations. Cornwall and Christensen worked as quickly as possible and moved out of the area as the fire's head approached. The prescribed fire treatment areas slowed the fire and gave them enough time to safely complete their work but the fire's activity and intensity forced them to leave the area ahead of the flame front and prompted the Central Utah Team to order a larger Complex Incident Management Team.

By July 14th the Sevier County Sheriff's department evacuated Cove Mountain, Elk Country Cabins, Manning Meadows, Monroe Meadows, and Magleby areas impacting approximately 170 residents from 80 residences and 2 non-residential commercial properties. Resources working the fire at this

Lewis and Clark Interagency Hotshot Crew member, August 7, Division Z. Photo courtesy Great Basin Complex Incident Management Team 5.

time included 1 helicopter, 2 dozers, half a dozen handcrews, and almost a dozen engines. The Type 3 team requested more air and ground assets of all kinds for the next day.

July 15

The Great Basin Complex Incident Management Team 3 Operations Section members started arriving on scene and shadowed the Central Utah Type 3 team on the 15th. The fire remained active across the fire area, continuing with active fire

Extreme fire behavior, July 26. Photo courtesy Sevier County Sheriff Department.

Dozer, Division Z August 7. Photo courtesy Great Basin Complex Incident Management Team 5.

behavior and growth in several areas on the northeast flank due to the southwesterly winds. Wind-aligned slopes and ridges showed increased activity in the afternoon of the 15th. Numerous spot fires provided additional spread across the area. Steady 10-15 mph winds with gusts up to 25 mph pushed the fire's spread. Three structures were lost that day and the fire continued to burn into the night and reached 8,600-acres before light rain moderated its activity.

Nearly 400 fire personnel were on scene fighting the fire by the 15th under the Central Utah team's command. Much of that day was spent transitioning management of the incident from Central Utah to Great Basin Team 3. Kelly Cornwall remained on incident for several shifts advising the Great Basin team's Strategic Operations section about existing fuels treatment locations throughout the Monroe Mountain area.

July 16

Great Basin CIMT 3 formally took command of the fire on July 16th with Brett Waters designated Incident Commander and Taiga Rohrer as Deputy Incident Commander. Jason Porter served as Operations Section Chief during the team's assignment on the fire. His initial impression as he looked at the maps Cornwall provided of the fuels treatments and took an over-flight of the district was, "man, we've got a lot of good stuff out there in front of us to catch this thing." Weather at the time cooperated and helped moderate fire behavior with cloud buildup and a small amount of precipitation. Winds remained out of the southwest which meant the northeast side of the fire continued to spread in steep terrain making short runs back to the ridge tops. Numerous mid-range spot fires continued to develop and increase the fire's spread.

By the time his team began work on the fire, the fire had already spread to both the Monroe Meadows and Manning Meadows areas. Porter acknowledged how successful the initial attack had been in protecting these two developments—"that fact they had only lost three cabins was a testament to the investments the Richfield Ranger District made in fuels treatments." The fire on the north side of the incident at that time did not really want to push out of its current footprint Porter found, it was bounded by fuels treatments and large meadows, this allowed the new team to focus on structure protection in those areas. The team anticipated the fire would move south due to the terrain's characteristics and inaccessibility. A large previous prescribed fire to the east gave the team confidence they could keep the fire away from the towns of Koosharem and Burrville. The team then focused their attention on the west side of the fire and keeping it from coming down into Monroe Canyon itself and threatening the structures in that location. Overall, the team felt it had a large "catcher's mitt" they could contain the fire's growth in if the traditional monsoons rains arrived on schedule in Central Utah in late July early August.

July 16-24

Between July 16th and 18th, localized afternoon monsoon rains fell on the Monroe Canyon Fire area and increased fuel moistures and gave the team an opportunity to set up more structure protection in the Magleby area. After the 18th, the cloud cover and moisture of the monsoon rains vanished and fuels started drying out considerably. The 1,000-hour fuels began a precipitous drop in moisture levels as the weather continued to dry out with increasing temperatures and near record low relative humidity readings.

The team put in dozer line close to the cabins in Magleby and prepared for firing operations to create more defensible space. Following preparation on the 22nd and 23rd, Porter's crews commenced a firing operation midday on the 24th. After lighting the first block of the operation, the fire below Magleby near Oscars Vision peak made a big push upslope toward fuel. The slope offered the fire dense canopy in mixed conifer stands with steep slopes in alignment with the prevailing wind direction. Active fire behavior with torching, group torching, and short crown runs and spotting were observed in the area. The firing operation was successful, and no structures were lost in the Magleby area that day, but Porter's experience told him that the 25th was going to be an extremely active burn day.

July 25

The fires that had been brewing below the Magleby area on the 24th roared to life on the 25th. Everything from dense fuels, steep topography, single-digit relative humidity, and strong winds favorable to the fire's spread spelled challenges for the Great Basin CIMT. When the day began at 0600 morning briefing, a smoke column had already formed and was putting up a good amount of smoke. The Incident Status Summary 209 Report dryly recorded the day's dramatic



Low intensity burns, Division Z, August 8. Photo courtesy Great Basin Complex Incident Management Team 5.

events. The fire made a 10,000-acre run north, right at the Magleby community. In addition to Magleby, Manning, and Monroe Meadows being evacuated, Cove Mountain, Elk Country Cabins, Long Flat, Porters, and Poulson were also evacuated bringing the number of people displaced to 221. The fire now threatened the communities of Koosharem, Greenwich, and Monroe City and sheriffs were preparing to evacuate the communities of Burrville and Annabella. Crews reported extreme fire behavior with torching, crown runs and spotting in mixed conifer fuels and mechanical slash piles left over from an incomplete fuels project the previous winter. The 1,000-hour fuel moistures recorded below 10 percent while the ERC values registered in the 95th percentile. Weather services issued a Red Flag warning over the fire for hot, dry, windy conditions. Two more cabins were lost that day.

Porter remembered the day vividly. There was so much fuel and intensity that a very large pyro cumulous column formed above the fire. Sometime between 19:00 and 20:00 the column collapsed, sending 50+ mile per hour wind gusts in all directions. Very strong sustained winds changed direction, now coming out of the west and northwest. Porter witnessed complete ember wash over the incident and spot fires advancing over a mile in front of the fire's perimeter. The column collapse hooked around his burn out operations and pushed through the Magleby area. The fire forced all firefighters out of the area.

July 25th began an almost unprecedented period of fire behavior in Central Utah. For the next 14 days in a row, meteorologists issued Red Flag Warnings with relative humidity readings reaching their lowest recorded readings. The fire made several more runs of 5,000-10,000-acres a day. In the face of the extreme conditions there was little Great Basin CIMT 3 could do under the circumstances. They did not lack resources; on July 25th the Monroe Canyon Fire had 9 helicopters, 2 fixed-wing aircraft, 28 handcrews, 6 dozers, 66 engines, and 975 total personnel assigned to the incident. For the incident management team managing the fire, weather conditions were about to go from bad to worse and stay that way for a significant period of time.

Yet, when thinking back to the events of July 25th, Jason Porter recalled how much worse it could have been. He credited the large amount of fuels treatment work with protecting the cabins in Magleby, protecting the lives of the firefighters, and giving the team the ability to direct the fire's path away from other populated areas. "The fact that we got in there [Magleby] the next day [26th] and only had three lost is a real testament to the effectiveness of the fuels treatments." He continued, "From an operational side, when you talk safety, you know, it did create a huge element of safety for us out there, being able to at least know several areas [of treatments]. We tried to go direct just because we did have the treatments to anchor off of. We did have safety zones, you know from those kinds of treatments." The fuels treatments were never designed to stop a fire, like a fire break, they were designed to slow fires down and moderate their intensity so that firefighters could utilize them as anchor points or minimize ecological impacts. Speaking to the impacts of the drying conditions, Porter recalled, "It was pretty impressive in a week's time how sagebrush went from no availability to burn to being able to burn pretty aggressively, just as it dried out due to that wind and single digit RHs."

Upon reflection, Great Basin Team 3 consistently referred to the changing weather conditions as the determining factor in their ability to contain the fire's perimeter. Porter continued, "Had we not had 14 days of red flag conditions, I think this footprint would look a lot different and again it's not that it was burning through treatment areas, it was spotting across the treatment areas …if we had not had the winds, the extreme conditions, I think this would look a lot different." Despite the conditions, Porter credits the fuels treatments with protecting the Magleby area during the fire's 10,000-acre run and column collapse on July 25th: "We would have lost over a dozen structures in that Magleby area and that work that had been accomplished there, even though it wasn't 100 percent complete, was favorable to those structures pulling through that [run]."

July 27-August 9

While the column collapsed and the fire doubled in size on July 25th, lead elements of the Great Basin CIMT 5 arrived on scene and began planning for their transition onto the fire as Team 3 reached the end of their 14-day assignment. Isaac Powning served as Operations Section Chief on Team 5 under the command of ICs Trent Ingram, Gwen Sanchez, and IC trainee Wayne Rushing. The fire made its most significant runs and acreage growth during Team 5's 14-day assignment. Weather conditions stayed hot, dry and windy. As the fire grew and threatened more lives and property, the resource response grew as well. At one point the fire had more aircraft than any other incident in the nation with 19 helicopters and

over 1,500 personnel on scene. Despite the extremely challenging conditions, the team acknowledged the value of the fuels treatments and how they helped keep firefighters safe and the number of structures lost to a minimum.

With the events on July 25th taking place just one day before a transition to another CIMT, the timing could not have been more challenging to maintain operational control and oversight of such an active fire incident. Luckily, Ops Chief Powning's team received notice a few days prior to their assignment that they were going to take over the Monroe Canyon Fire and that it would be "a hot hand-off." This allowed Powning to request more operations personnel to accommodate the anticipated growth in suppression activities. The extra time allowed him to get 95 percent of his operations people on the ground shadowing the previous team on July 26th. "We were lucky on this one to know we were coming into a mess. Instead of getting kinda caught and trying to catch up, calling in some good division ops people, we didn't have…what would have been an extremely painful 48 hours or so [upon arrival]." Having witnessed the column collapse and seeing what the fire was capable of firsthand, Powning's team reoriented resources to the north and south as the fire pushed in those directions instead of east to west like in the previous two weeks; they also re-organized and beefed up night operations due to the fire's increasing daytime intensity and requested more air resources.

Team 5's command staff also arrived early and understood what they faced on the assignment. The IC trainee Rushing remembered, "The very first day the fire set the tone and we knew what kind of trip we would have. We knew that we would have to do everything as leadership in this to make sure that everybody came back safe." Community and firefighter safety immediately took precedence with fire containment a distant second. One of the first actions Powning took was to organize a much stronger night shift operation with its own Branch Chief and several Division Supervisors. Fire behavior during the day shifts proved too extreme for crews to make much progress on containment so the night operations turned into the time when control lines could be put in and firing operations took place. Most hotshot crews assigned to the incident switched over to the more dangerous night shift and direct attack assignments.

IC Rushing remembered the transition from Team 3 and the worsening weather conditions driving the fire activity. "We took a really hot hand off and that had nothing to do with the previous team. It's just the weather." Red Flag Warnings had been posted for 3 days prior to Team 5's arrival and it continued through 14 continuous days. "We have never experienced that many consecutive red flags in my career, and that's been since June of 1994 when I started in the fire business." Powning concurred, "I've never seen that in 32 years before in a campaign fire…we had ERCs sitting at 100, RHs had a couple of 2 percent days at 9,000 feet and fuel moisture for 100 hour fuels down to 3.7."

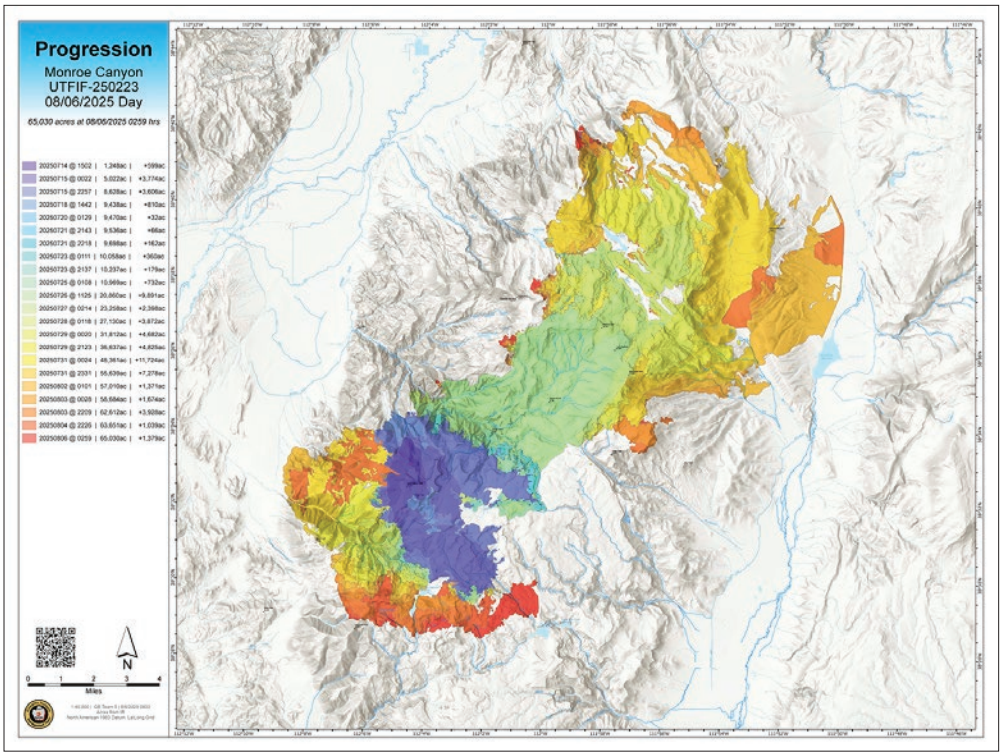
The historic weather conditions created extreme fire behavior and major pushes in all directions. The fire made

Extreme fire behavior, July 26. Photo courtesy Sevier County Sheriff Department.

multiple runs in the very rugged, nearly inaccessible south end of the fire down Dry Creek toward the town of Monroe creating a second column collapse on July 31st. Concurrently the fire pushed northeast towards the town of Glenwood and Highway 24. This was a major contingency line that Operations felt they needed to hold at all costs. North of Highway 24 lay wide-open country with continuous, dense stands of mixed conifers with few natural or man-made breaks that could be used to stop a fire's advance. The team closed the highway and cut power to the transmission lines serving 3,000 homes in order to get heavy equipment into the area to try and stop the fire's advance. Fortunately, Highway 24 held with just a few slop overs that the team caught with crews, aircraft, and dozers.

By the end of Team 5's assignment, weather conditions remained near historic dry, hot, windy levels. The fire grew from roughly 20,000 acres when they took control on July 27th to almost 70,000-acres and miraculously only 6 more structures were lost before they handed the incident off to the Great Basin CIMT 2 on August 10th. "I'm exhausted, the whole team, everybody from top to bottom is exhausted," reflected IC Rushing on transition day. With conditions so in favor of the fire and not the firefighters, Rushing said "you just do what you can and you can't get in front of it and it just beats you down mentally and physically. It beat the guys up all down the line…I mean when we see column collapses, how many times do you ever see a column collapse in your career?"

Despite the obvious exhaustion, both Rushing and Ops Chief Powning extolled the value of the fuels treatments on Monroe Mountain and their benefits to their work. "Those treatments played a huge part in controlling this fire," declared Powning, "If you take these fuel treatments out of this footprint and it's a hell of a lot bigger than what it is now." It's important to understand the purpose and value of fuel treatments. They were not designed as fuel breaks; they were designed to restore fire adapted ecosystems back to health so that they could survive somewhat intact during a fire of this magnitude. On multiple occasions



Fire progression map, August 12. Courtesy Great Basin Complex Incident Management Team 2.

the Monroe Canyon Fire intensity moderated due to fuels treatments. The reduced intensity allowed firefighters to make many tactical decisions because they had extra time, could use treatments as anchor points, or it helped halt the advance of a high-intensity wildfire during the worst imaginable weather conditions. "Those treatments played a huge part in controlling this fire…they slowed this fire down tremendously in several points," concluded Rushing. The treatments "allowed us time to move our resources into a more strategic area where there was more values at risk and it would buy us time until we can move resources back. So those aspen groves, that's a rare commodity we're able to put them here and gain some bite to keep it from being even worse when the fire was trying to cross Highway 24 and push toward Glenwood or Annabella, and we were able to move [those resources] because the treatments are slowing it down, so the treatments played a huge part." Powning agreed with the strategic value of the treatments. "Their treatments are strategic, based off what I've seen on maps, they're in pretty good shape…We were able to take advantage. [The fire would] moderate when they hit some of these treatments, especially the more recent treatments…there would probably be two incident management teams on this, just the amount of energy this thing had."

August 10-September 4

Rushing and Powning's Great Basin CIMT 5 transitioned command of the fire to the Great Basin CIMT 2 under Incident Commanders Tony DeMaster, Tyler Hecht, and IC trainee Brett Ostler on August 10th. They inherited the incident at 71,856 acres and 36% containment. The fire continued to burn significant pockets of unburned fuels within the fire perimeter, but the fire activity started to decrease and allowed the team to connect and clean up control lines and start the long process of mopping up the heat pockets within the fire's interior. Over the team's assignment, the fire grew an additional 2,000-acres while the team increased containment to 90 percent, indicating the good work the team performed to rob the fire of heat while holding a very large fire perimeter. On August 22nd the team transitioned command to the Great Basin CIMT 3 that returned to the incident and took command again on August 23rd. Team 3 continued to right size resources as containment increased and fewer assets were needed on scene. On September 4th, Team 3 declared the Monroe Canyon Fire 100 percent contained at 73,721 acres.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 Monroe Canyon Fire tested the resolve of everyone in Central Utah's communities—residents, land managers, political leaders, and especially fire personnel. The fire stayed active for 54 consecutive days. That is a long time to have emergency personnel and equipment in a location and it's a long time to have smoke in the air and the anxiety of wildfire on the communities' doorstep. It tried the resolve of the Fishlake National Forest employees, especially those that live in and are part of the communities at risk. It tried forest leadership as questions about strategy and tactics naturally arose just like in any wildfire situation. It also tested the concept of actively managing the fuels on Monroe Mountain and the decade worth of investment the community, state and federal partners had all made prior to the fire. Viewed within context of the fuels treatment and active forest management performed on the Fishlake National Forest, the Monroe Canyon Fire is proof of concept of the return on investments in actively improving the ecosystem health on the National Forest System and its surrounding forest landscapes.

U.S. Senator Curtis with Fishlake National Forest Supervisor Mike Elson. Photo courtesy Fishlake National Forest.

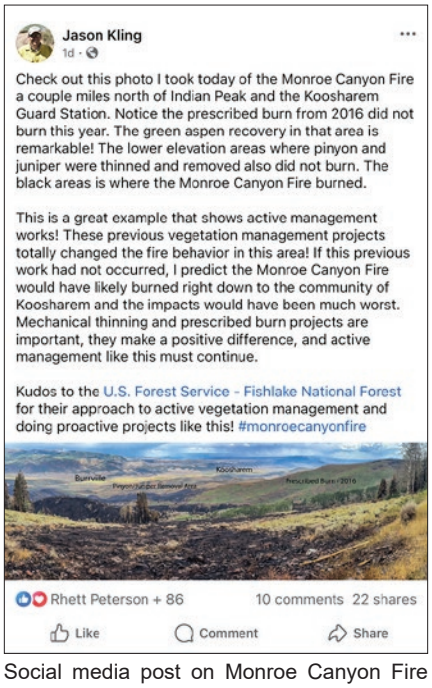
Throughout the course of the incident, fire management leaders and operations personnel continually remarked how the fuels treatments bought firefighters valuable time to set up structure protection for private residences in the fire's path, provided tactical advantages they could anchor or connect containment lines onto, and moderated fire behavior that kept the percentage of acres severely damaged very low. Richfield Ranger District Fuels Coordinator Kelly Cornwall knew fuel treatments would buy him time to set up structure protection during initial attack. Jason Porter, Operations Section Chief on the first CIMT on the incident that witnessed a column collapse on July 25th reflected, "If the work hadn't been accomplished where it had been, we would probably be talking about the entire mountain range impacted versus 70,000-acres." Ops Chief Powning, who managed the fire through its worst weather period and most of its growth concluded, "My opinion is if those treatments weren't in place the way they were, this fire would be probably twice the size it is. We would have lost a hell of a lot more structures up in those…estates that are up there." To everyone associated with the fire, it was clear that without the many fuels treatments across Monroe Mountain, the severity of the fire and the loss of structures would have been exponentially higher.

Another measure of the fuels treatment program's impact on forest health on Monroe Mountain, is reflected the post-fire soil burn severity analysis. Following large wildfires on National Forest System lands, the Forest Service deploys a Burned Area Emergency Response team to assess the fire's impact on soils and their ability to retain moisture when precipitation arrives. A BAER team arrived in Richfield on August 15th and evaluated the entire Monroe Canyon Fire area from its ignition point and spread southwest toward the western edge of Monroe Mountain and northeast across Monroe Mountain and off the east side to State Highway 24, stretching approximately 19 miles in a northeast to southwest direction.

The BAER teams measure fire impacts in terms of Soil Burn Severity (SBS). High burn severity is characterized by a complete consumption of organic material on the surface layers of the soil resulting in a change to single-grain structure that often have a loose, dusty appearance, and no longer have any cohesion or soil strength. Generally, there will be less destruction of soil organic matter, roots, and structure in an area mapped as moderate compared to high. In areas mapped as moderate SBS, soil structure, roots, and litter layer may remain intact beneath a thin ash layer. Low soil burn severity results in very little alteration of soil organic matter and little or no change in soil structural stability.

The team mapped SBS for the Monroe Canyon Fire burned area as High (10%), Moderate (38%), Low (31%), and Very Low/Unburned (21%). Soil burn severity within the Monroe Canyon burn scar was driven by vegetation types found in the area. The mixed conifer and aspen stands experienced moderate and high intensity due to fuel and weather conditions. Areas within the fine fuel dominated shrub and grasslands burned quickly resulting in predominately very low and low SBS. These findings track the observations of District Ranger Kling as he made his way through the burned area. On August 15th, Kling travelled into the fire's perimeter on Monroe Mountain, watching mule deer graze, already finding plenty of green leafy material to browse before the fire was even contained. He memorialized the drive with a photo he posted to social media with the following caption:

"Check out this photo I took today of the Monroe Canyon Fire a couple miles north of Indian



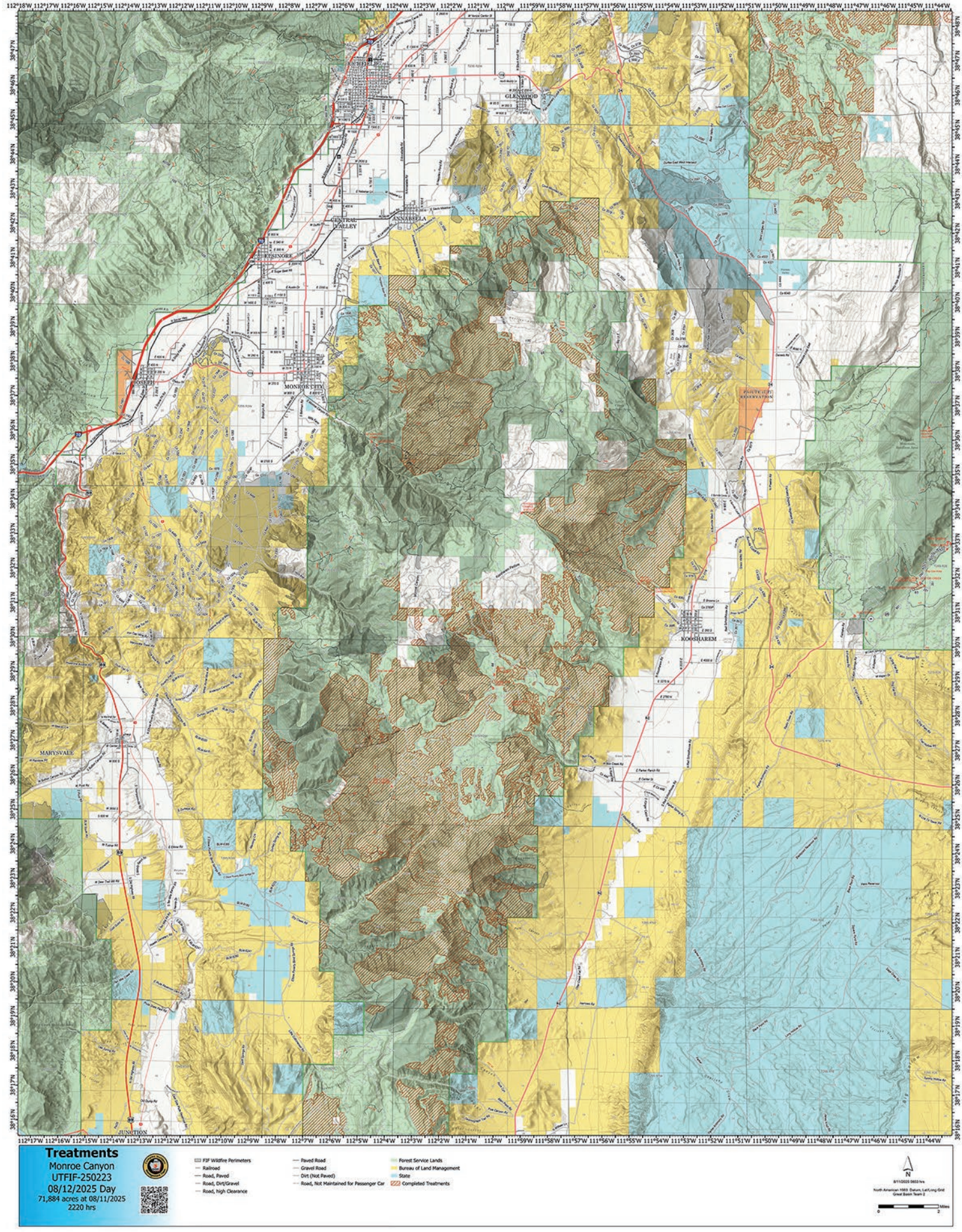
Social media post on Monroe Canyon Fire and fuels management treatments. Courtesy Jason Kling.

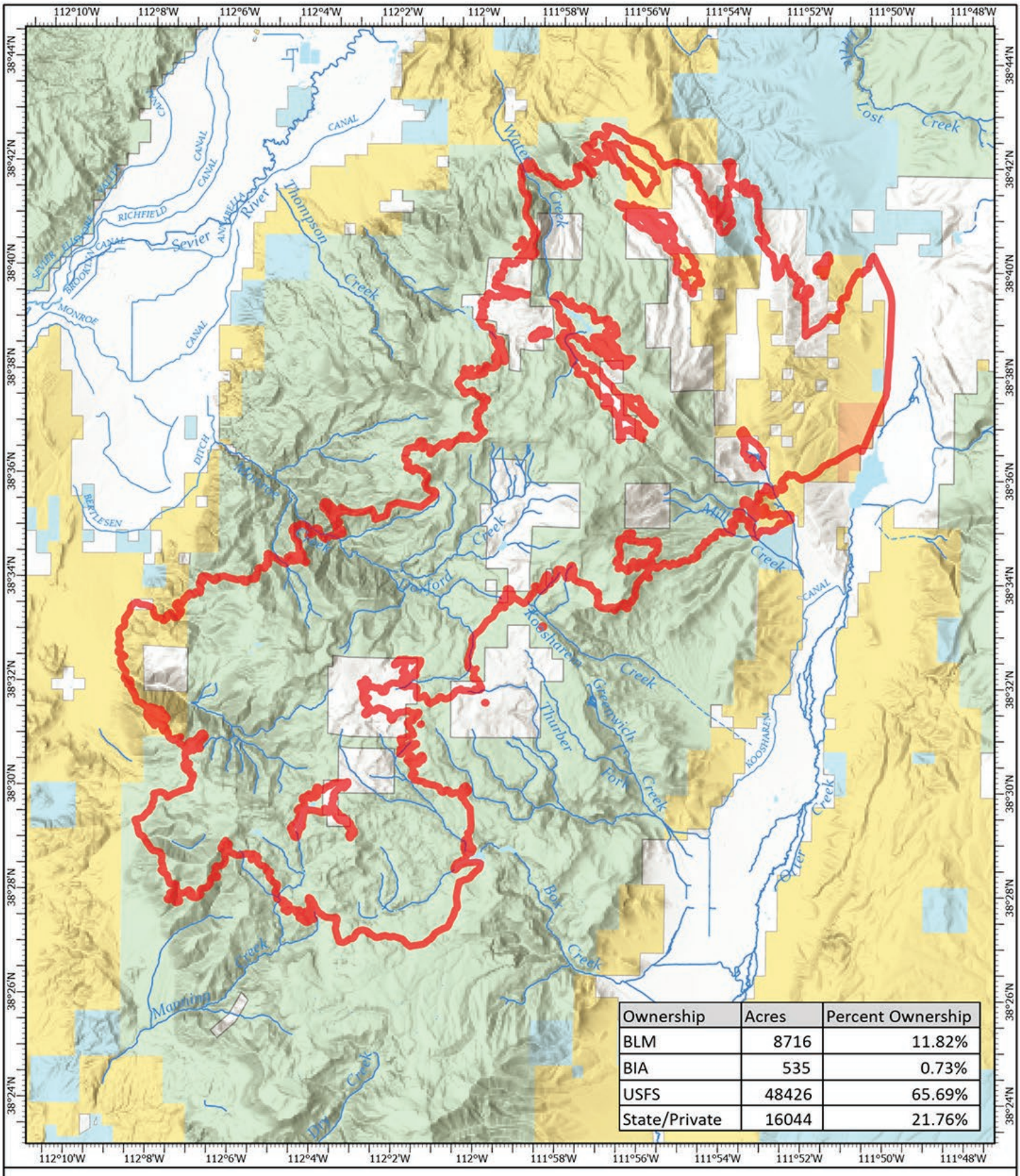
Peak and the Koosharem Guard Station. Notice the prescribed burn from 2016 did not burn this year. The green aspen recovery in that area is remarkable! The lower elevation areas where pinyon and juniper were thinned and removed also did not burn. The black areas is where the Monroe Canyon fire burned. This is a great example that shows active management works! These previous vegetation management projects totally changed the fire behavior in this area! If this previous work had not occurred, I predict the Monroe Canyon Fire would have likely burned right down to the community of Koosharem and the impacts would have been much worst [sic]. Mechanical thinning and prescribed burn projects are important, they make a positive difference, and active management like this must continue. Kudos to the U.S. Forest Service—Fishlake National Forest for their approach to active vegetation management and doing proactive projects like this!"

One final test on the impact of these fuels treatments investments is how political relationships fared throughout the crisis. Forest Supervisor Mike Elson hosted the royal flush of political visitors: Utah's Lieutenant Governor Henderson, Governor Cox, U.S. Representative Maloy, Paiute Tribal Leadership, U.S. Senator Lee's office, and U.S. Senator Curtis visited the fire in succession before it reached containment. Elson briefed each one on the current fire situation and the performance of the fuels treatments the state had invested in together with the forest. After each visit Elson received praise for the team's efforts, and renewed support for the forest's active forest management and fuels treatment work across local, state, tribal and federal boundaries.

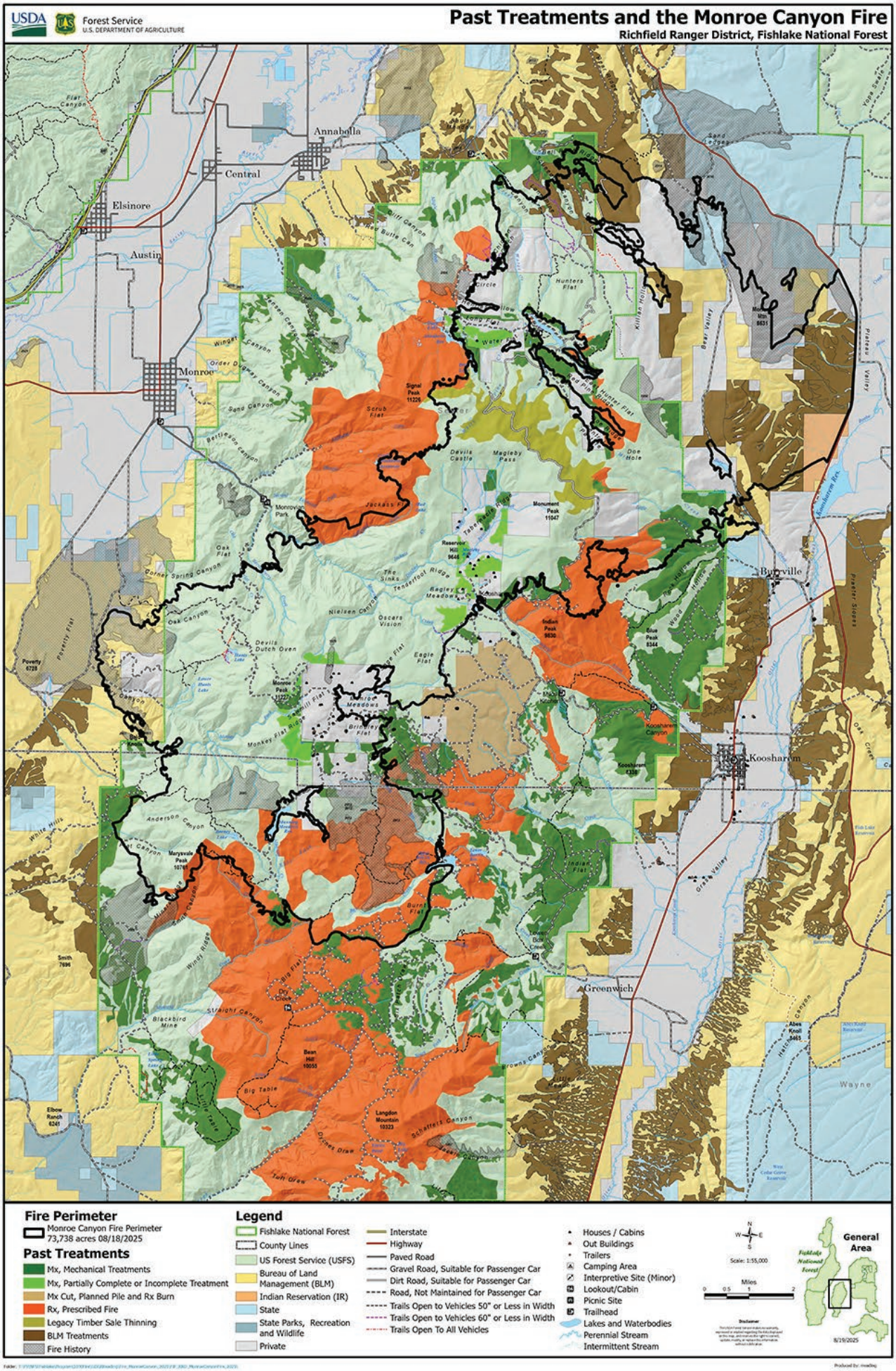
Though federal and state support for efforts are vital to the ecosystem improvement projects, ultimately the local community must support the efforts. One of these important relationships is with Sevier Country Commissioner Greg Jensen. A multi-generational resident of the area, Jensen's grandfather homesteaded on Monroe Mountain over a century earlier and the extended family still owns several thousand acres on the mountain. His family lost their grandfather's cabin in Monroe Meadows on the first day of the fire. An aunt lost a second family cabin days later. Yet when Commissioner Jensen sat down to talk in mid-August, he had nothing but praise for all the fire personnel and the local, state and federal land managers he had worked with for years. "We're on our third [Incident Management] team and these men and women are just incredible. You know what they have done and I'm thankful for those relationships that I've had with all of these people." He referenced his personal relationship with Supervisor Elson and his team's fuels management, "We have some wonderful people that have done all kinds of management whether it's burns or mechanical treatments and there's no way that Monroe Meadows would have a cabin standing if those things wouldn't have happened." Jensen was reflective despite his family's loss of property and memories; "I'll never see it the same, but you know, some people hated to see their forest burn or their forest change…but it is part of the cycle that we need to continue to do…I'll never look at it [Monroe Mountain] the same. It'll look different, but every generation should probably see something different, because that's the natural way that these forests should be dealt with…it should be different because that's how we're gonna have a healthy forest." A truer statement could not have been expressed by anyone connected to fire—it changed how Monroe Mountain looks today but that change is part of a dynamic healthy forest ecosystem.

Helicopter collecting water from Big Lake, August 5. Photo courtesy Jason Kling.


Treatments
Monroe Canyon
UTFIF-250223
08/12/2025 Day
71,884 acres at 08/11/2025
2220 hrs
FIF Wildfire Perimeters
Railroad
Road, Paved
Road, Dirt/Gravel
Road, high Clearance
Paved Road
Gravel Road
Dirt (Not Paved)
Road, Not Maintained for Passenger Car
Forest Service Lands
Bureau of Land Management
State
Completed Treatments
N
Miles
0
2



Ownership	Acres	Percent Ownership
BLM	8716	11.82%
BIA	535	0.73%
USFS	48426	65.69%
State/Private	16044	21.76%


USDA
Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Past Treatments and the Monroe Canyon Fire
Richfield Ranger District, Fishlake National Forest
Annabella
Central
Elsinore
Austin
Monroe
Burrville
Koosharem
Greenwich
Wayne
Fire Perimeter
Monroe Canyon Fire Perimeter
73,738 acres 08/18/2025
Past Treatments
Mx, Mechanical Treatments
Mx, Partially Complete or Incomplete Treatment
Mx Cut, Planned Pile and Rx Burn
Rx, Prescribed Fire
Legacy Timber Sale Thinning
BLM Treatments
Fire History
Legend
Fishlake National Forest
County Lines
US Forest Service (USFS)
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Indian Reservation (IR)
State
State Parks, Recreation and Wildlife
Private
Interstate
Highway
Paved Road
Gravel Road, Suitable for Passenger Car
Dirt Road, Suitable for Passenger Car
Road, Not Maintained for Passenger Car
Trails Open to Vehicles 50" or Less in Width
Trails Open to Vehicles 60" or Less in Width
Trails Open To All Vehicles
Houses / Cabins
Out Buildings
Trailers
Camping Area
Interpretive Site (Minor)
Lookout/Cabin
Picnic Site
Trailhead
Lakes and Waterbodies
Perennial Stream
Intermittent Stream
Scale: 1:55,000
Miles
Disclaimer
General Area
Fishlake National Forest
8/19/2025

USDA Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) | August 2025

Monroe Canyon BAER

Fishlake National Forest

Soil Burn Severity

Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER)

Miles
0 1 2 4
N

Soil Burn Severity

Soil Burn Severity is a measure of the fire's effects on the ground surface and soil condition. This map identifies the fire-induced changes in soil and ground surface properties that may affect infiltration, runoff, and erosion potential. The BAER Team uses this map to identify areas of unacceptable risk to a critical value and where mitigating treatments may be most effective. This product is appropriate for wildland landscapes and does not represent fire effects in developed areas.

Severity Indicators

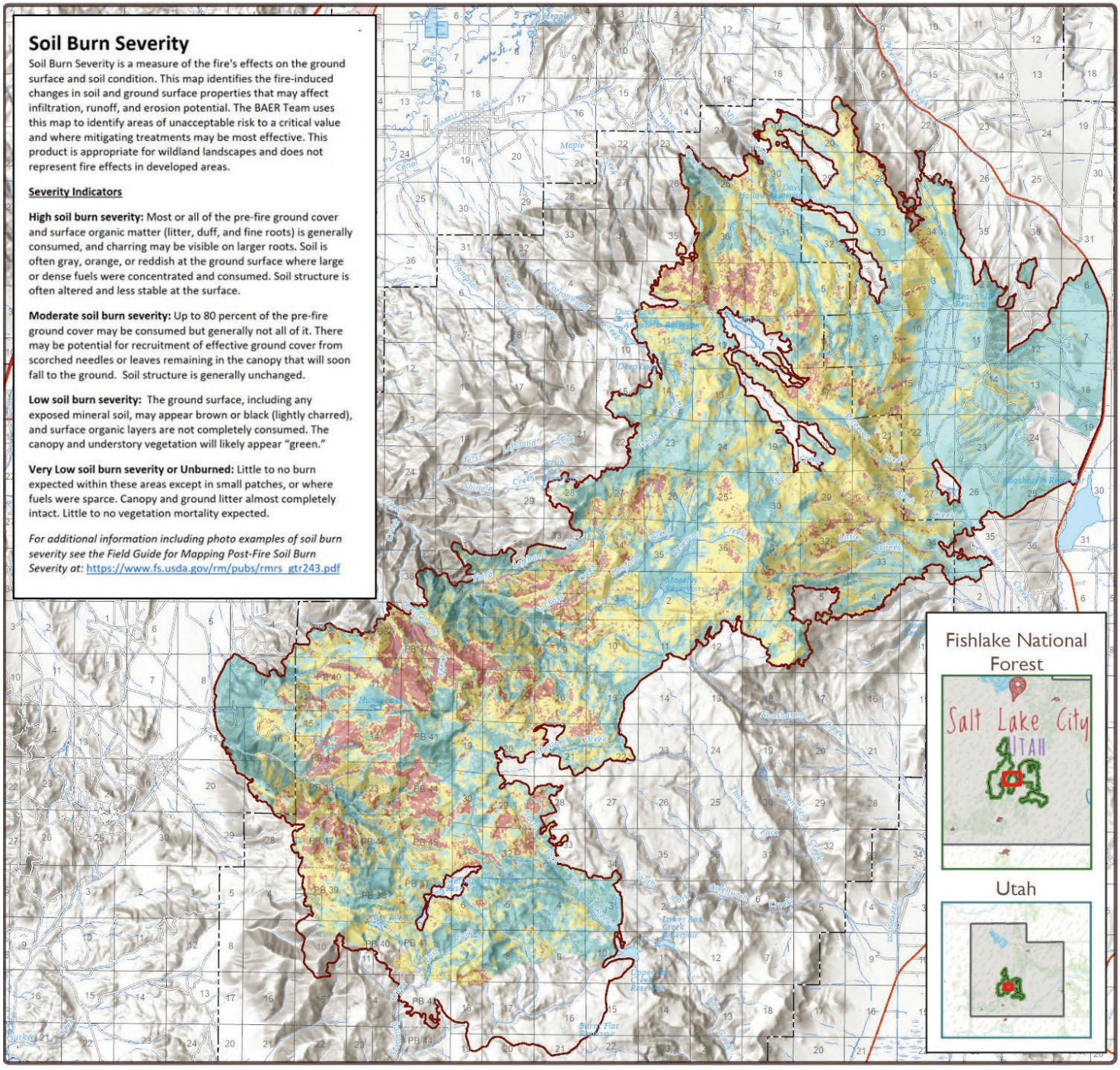
High soil burn severity: Most or all of the pre-fire ground cover and surface organic matter (litter, duff, and fine roots) is generally consumed, and charring may be visible on larger roots. Soil is often gray, orange, or reddish at the ground surface where large or dense fuels were concentrated and consumed. Soil structure is often altered and less stable at the surface.

Moderate soil burn severity: Up to 80 percent of the pre-fire ground cover may be consumed but generally not all of it. There may be potential for recruitment of effective ground cover from scorched needles or leaves remaining in the canopy that will soon fall to the ground. Soil structure is generally unchanged.

Low soil burn severity: The ground surface, including any exposed mineral soil, may appear brown or black (lightly charred), and surface organic layers are not completely consumed. The canopy and understory vegetation will likely appear "green."

Very Low soil burn severity or Unburned: Little to no burn expected within these areas except in small patches, or where fuels were sparce. Canopy and ground litter almost completely intact. Little to no vegetation mortality expected.

For additional information including photo examples of soil burn severity see the Field Guide for Mapping Post-Fire Soil Burn Severity at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/rm/pubs/rmrs_gtr243.pdf



Soil Burn Severity	Acres	% Burned
High	6,847	10%
Moderate	26,373	38%
Low	21,139	31%
Very Low or Unburned	14,157	21%
Developed	8	<1%
Assessment Area	68,524 acres	
Burn Boundary 8/9/2025		

Data Creation Date: 8/9/2025