

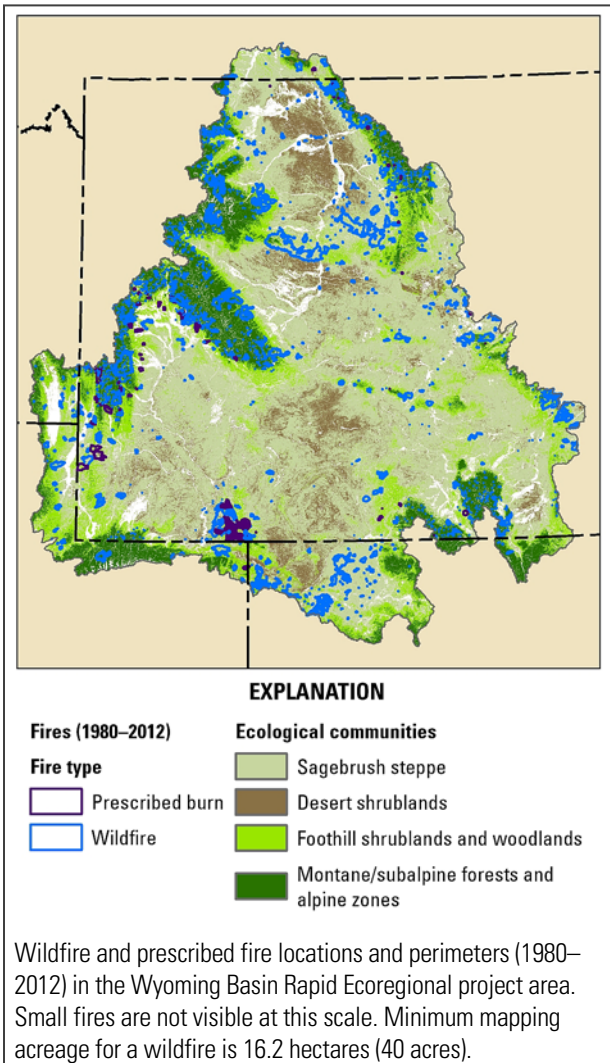
Wildland Fire



Photo credit: Gavin Lovell, Bureau of Land Management.

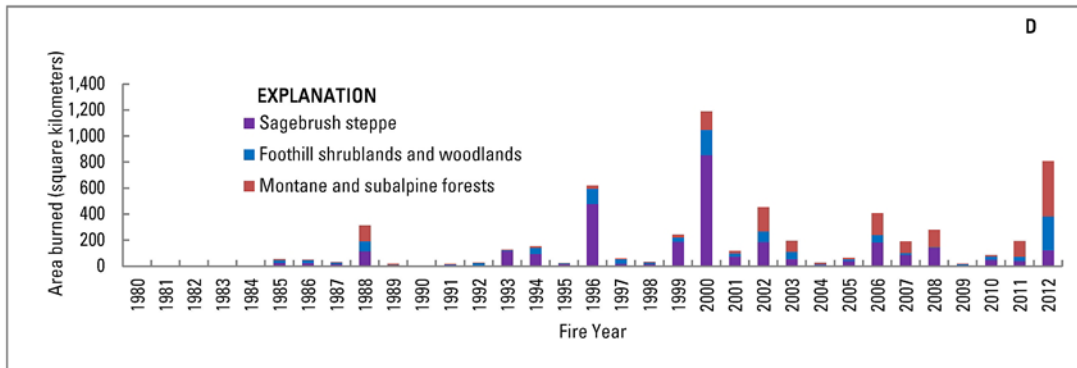
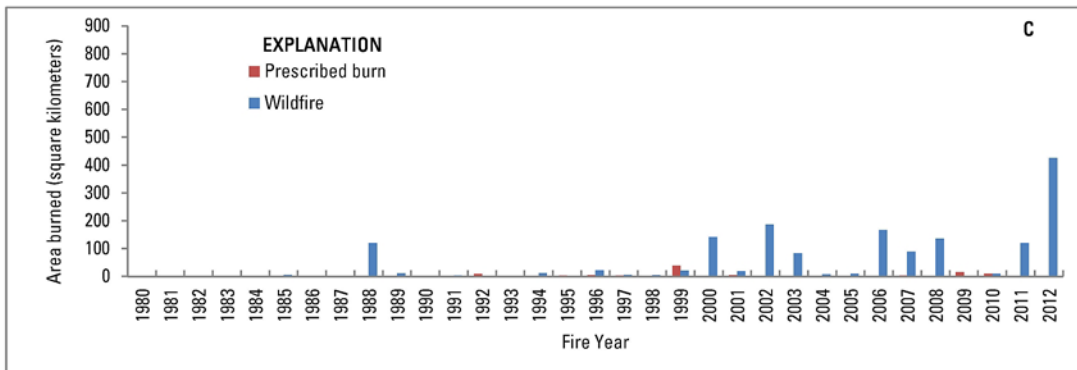
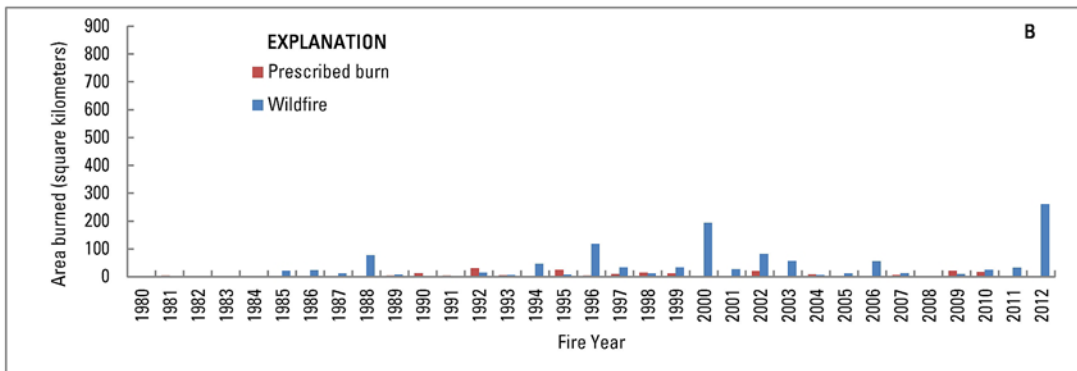
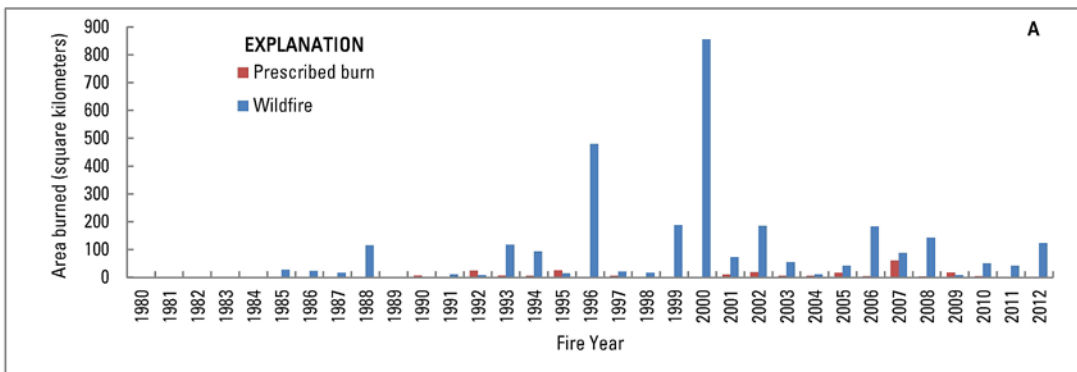
Key Points

- The length of the wildfire season has increased since 1980.
- Fire occurrence in the Wyoming Basin is characterized by extremes. Typically the total acreage burned in a given year is small, and large, severe fires occur infrequently but account for most of the area burned. Annual wildfire area has varied from no fires reported in 1982 to 130,000 hectares (322,000 acres) in 2000.
- The spread of invasive species, especially cheatgrass, has potential to modify the size and intensity of wildfire in grassland and shrubland communities.
- Climatically driven disturbance effects may be less rapid within the Wyoming Basin than in other ecoregions in which fire occurrence appears much more climate sensitive.
- Climatic conditions and shifts in wildfire patterns have the potential to alter ecological communities.
- In the future, high-elevation forests may experience a significant increase in wildfire extent and intensity. The lower-elevation grasslands and shrublands may experience a decrease in wildfire activity.
- Wildfire regimes have varied greatly during the past 13,000 years. As an example, fire rotation intervals have ranged from 90 to 250 years on the Yellowstone Plateau.
- Vegetation also has shown considerable variation over the past 40,000 years, including an expansion of Utah juniper starting 2,800 years ago.
- The average area burned between 1980 and 2012 was 18,674 hectares (46,100 acres).



Area of ecological communities burned between 1980 and 2012 in the Wyoming Basin Rapid Ecoregional Assessment project area.

Ecological communities	Total area burned (hectares)	Percent burned	Average annual area (hectares) burned
Sagebrush steppe	300,491	3.34	9,106
Foothill shrublands and woodlands	120,151	4.21	3,641
Montane and subalpine forests and alpine zones	161,563	6.48	4,896
Other (primarily riparian forests and desert shrublands)	34,058	1.34	1,032
Total all	616,263	3.7	18,674



Wildfire and prescribed fire acres burned, by year, 1980–2012. (A) Annual acres burned in the sagebrush steppe; (B) annual acres burned in the foothill shrublands and woodlands; (C) annual acres burned in the montane/subalpine; and (D) Total annual acres burned in the three major ecological communities.