

THE WILD SIDE by Dave Gibson

Wildfire!

Every mountain homeowner knows about fire mitigation and the real possibility of losing one's home in the event of wildfire. The privilege of living amongst incredible scenery comes with the knowledge that it can be taken away without warning. Colorado already has had several fires break out this year beginning in March. By the time you read this, if we haven't received our usual double dose of 2 ft. heavy wet snow storms, this is shaping up to be our worst fire year since 2002 when the Hayman Fire torched 138,000 acres and 133 homes. Increased risk of wildfire always exists from July through November.

Although fire may disrupt people's lives and scar the vistas for a while, it is not in itself inherently bad



and is part of a natural cycle. One of the best things I can attribute to wildfires is that they kill pine beetles!

Organic matter is converted to useable mineral nutrients in the form of ash which promotes new growth. Wildflowers bloom prolifically after and sometimes even during a fire! With more sunlight available, trees such as aspens and perennial plants with extensive underground root systems thrive, attracting a host of animals and insects. Tree snags provide homes for cavity nesters like woodpeckers.

The endangered Kirtland's warbler only nests in regenerated stands of jack pine. Lodgepole pines are dependent on wildfire. Their cones are sealed with a serotinous resin that melts during a fire, releasing its seeds.

*Dave Gibson is a photographer & writer focusing on the natural world around us.
His imagery can be found on his web site at www.davegibsonimages.com*