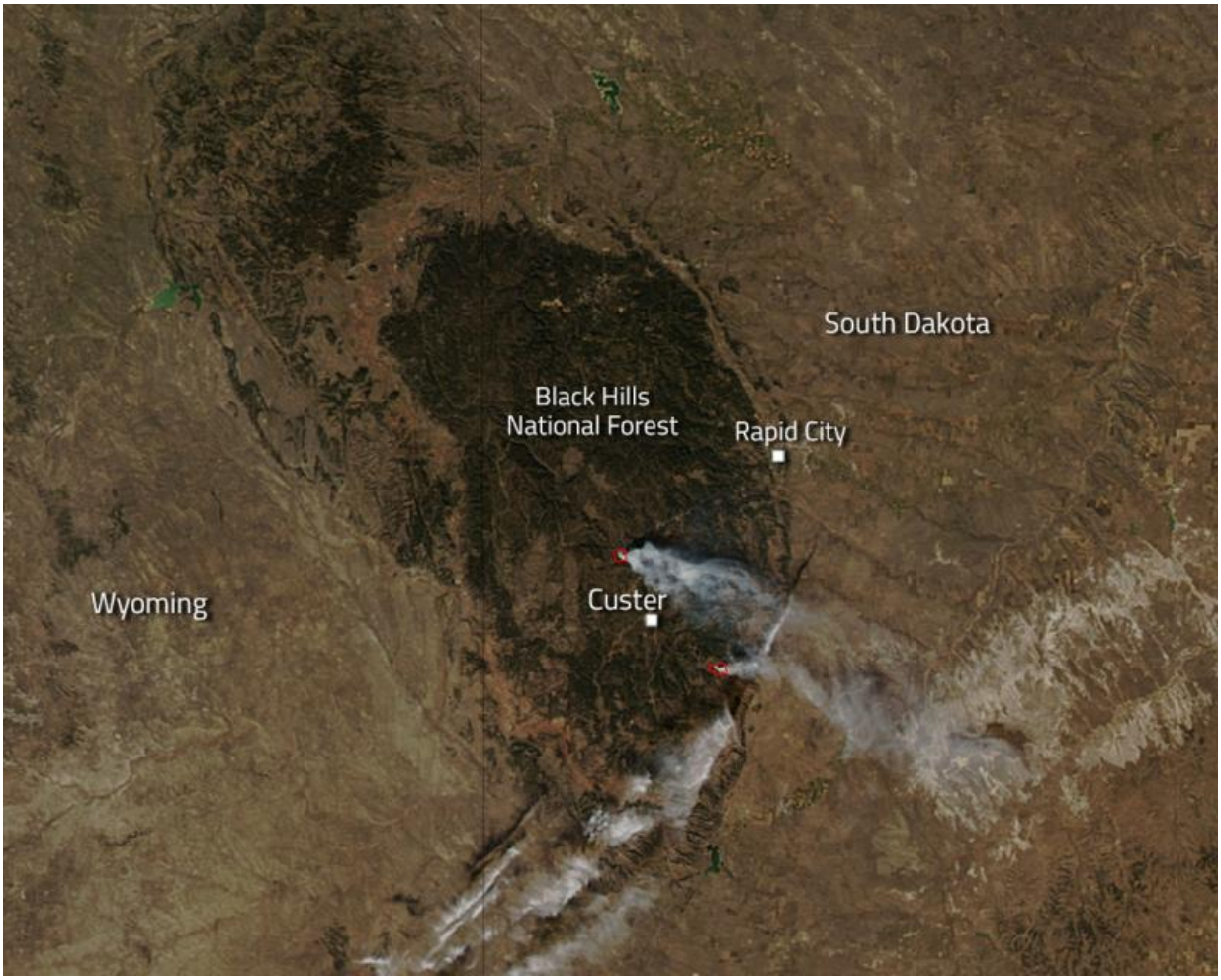
Image: Prescribed fires light up Black Hills in South Dakota

November 4 2016



Credit: NASA

NASA's Aqua satellite captured this image of two prescribed fires named Long Draw and Apple Tree which were set in the Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota. Prescribed burns are used by local fire officials for many reasons. After many years of fire exclusion, an ecosystem that needs periodic fire becomes unhealthy. Trees are stressed by overcrowding; fire-dependent species disappear; and flammable fuels build up and become hazardous. The right fire at the right place at the right time:

- Reduces hazardous fuels, protecting human communities from extreme fires;
- Minimizes the spread of pest insects and disease;
- Removes unwanted species that threaten species native to an ecosystem;
- Provides forage for game;
- Improves habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- Recycles nutrients back to the soil; and
- Promotes the growth of trees, wildflowers, and other plants;

The Forest Service manages prescribed fires and even some wildfires to benefit natural resources and reduce the risk of unwanted wildfires in the future. The agency also uses hand tools and machines to thin overgrown sites in preparation for the eventual return of fire.

This natural-color satellite image was collected by the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) aboard the Aqua satellite on November 02, 2016. Actively burning areas, detected by MODIS's thermal bands, are outlined in red. NASA image courtesy Jeff Schmaltz, MODIS Rapid Response Team. Caption: NASA/Goddard, Lynn Jenner

Provided by NASA

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