

January 1–June 15, 2002—Serious snow or rain clouds wanted. The area known as the Four Corners (bordering Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah) was in the midst of a severe record-breaking drought.

June 8–August 8, 2002—The peak tourist season for the towns of Durango and Silverton, Colorado.

Sunday, June 9, 2002, Day One—A spark ignited dry timber north of Durango and the soon to be “Missionary Ridge Fire” began burning out of control, consuming over 6,000 acres in less than six hours.

Saturday, June 15, 2002, Day Six—the fire has consumed almost 20,000 acres.

Tuesday, June 18, 2002, Day Nine—A spark from the D&SNG started a fire just north of Durango. The fire burned about an acre of land before being put out by two water-carrying helicopters pulled away from the Missionary Ridge fire. This fire was controlled within a couple of hours (Schober, 2002), but the main fire races ahead uncontrolled for four miles, reaching a size of over 50,000 acres by the end of the day.

Wednesday, June 19, 2002, Day Ten—The Second Annual Adventure Xstream scheduled on the Animas River paralleling the D&SNG for Saturday, June 22, was cancelled due to the wildfires raging north of Durango.

Thursday, June 20, 2002, Day Eleven—President Bush declared a major disaster for Colorado, thereby making funds available to help homeowners, renters, business owners, and employees affected by the Missionary Ridge fire (Greenhill, 2002).

Friday, June 21, 2002, Day Twelve—Summer officially arrives. The Missionary Ridge fire near Durango continued to rage out of control, burning almost 60,000 acres.

1. Structures burned: 33 residences and 26 other structures
2. Evacuations: 1,760 homes
3. Percent contained: 25
4. Firefighters: 1,263
5. Firefighting costs: \$8.01 million (*The Denver Post*, 2002)

## FIGURE 1

Timeline of Events.

Yet business owners who feared lost revenues if the trains were idled urged management to keep the trains running. At the same time, managers of the San Juan National Forest were considering closing some or all of the 2,107,554-acre forest.

Harper had spent several hours talking with Silverton business owners who were dependent on train passengers for tourist dollars. They urged him to keep the train running. In addition, business owners from hotels and restaurants to jeep tour companies, fly fishing outfitters, and others in Durango also attempted to persuade him to keep the trains running. Yet, many residents who had no apparent interest in tourism and local officials urged him to close operations.

Earlier in the day, Harper and senior vice president Jeff Jackson rode a pop car (a small two-person rail vehicle) behind the morning train to Silverton to observe first-hand the railroad's expanded fire prevention measures. On that trip, Harper had seen four small fires that were ignited by smokestack cinders and personally stomped one out himself. By noon, the mountain valley close to the railroad's main line between Durango and Silverton was filled with smoke from the advancing Missionary Ridge fire (Schober, 2002). Harper, who had flown in from his office in Florida when the fire started, returned to his hotel room and weighed his options.

He knew he had to make a decision and announce it soon. Should he listen to local businesses, stay fully staffed and keep the trains running? Should he listen to concerned citizens and fire fighting officials and temporarily cease all operations and lay