

FACTivity



Time Needed

Two class periods

Materials

- Graph paper
- Pencil
- Data from the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC)

Background

The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) is made up of nine different agencies, including the Forest Service, that work together to help fight wildfires. NIFC compiles data and maps about wildfires from daily reports by staff at the National Interagency Coordination Center. The tables below provide data from NIFC about the number of acres burned by wildfire as well as the cost of fighting fires.

The question you will answer in this FACTivity is: What does the data from NIFC tell us about wildfires over time?

FACTivity Methods

Look at the two data tables provided. You will create a bar or line graph for each one.

For the graph for wildfire acres burned (**table 1**), create a graph using the even year data. You will start with 1984, then 1986, 1988, etc.

For the wildfire fighting cost data (**table 2**), you will create a graph for the data at 5-year intervals.

FACTivity *continued*

After you create the graphs, answer the following questions based on your observations of the data and the graphs you created.

- 1) Look at the acres burned by wildfire. What do you notice about the graph overall? Are there any trends you can spot? Any outliers?
- 2) Now examine the wildfire fighting cost data. What do you notice over time about the cost of fighting wildfires?
- 3) Compare the two graphs. Do you notice anything when you compare the two graphs?
- 4) As a class, discuss what you learned by looking at the wildfire data. Why is it useful to analyze data? What are some challenges of analyzing data?

Table 1. Total acres burned by wildfire in the United States (1983–2025)

Year	Total area burned (acres)
2025	5,131,474
2024	8,924,884
2023	2,693,910
2022	7,577,183
2021	7,125,643
2020	10,122,336
2019	4,664,364
2018	8,767,492
2017	10,026,086
2016	5,509,995
2015	10,125,149
2014	3,595,613
2013	4,319,546
2012	9,326,238
2011	8,711,367
2010	3,422,724
2009	5,921,786
2008	5,292,468
2007	9,328,045
2006	9,873,745
2005	8,689,389
2004	8,097,880*
2003	3,960,842
2002	7,184,712

Year	Total area burned (acres)
2001	3,570,911
2000	7,393,493
1999	5,626,093
1998	1,329,704
1997	2,856,959
1996	6,065,998
1995	1,840,546
1994	4,073,579
1993	1,797,574
1992	2,069,929
1991	2,953,578
1990	4,621,621
1989	1,827,310
1988	5,009,290
1987	2,447,296
1986	2,719,162
1985	2,896,147
1984	1,148,409
1983	1,323,666

*Wildfire data for 2004 does not include fires on State lands in North Carolina.

Source: National Interagency Fire Center

Table 2. Estimated Federal costs for wildland firefighting in the United States by year

Year	Firefighting costs (dollars)
2020	2,274,000,000
2015	2,130,543,000
2010	809,499,000
2005	818,954,000
2000	1,410,802,000
1995	477,126,000
1990	397,952,000
1985	239,943,000

Source: National Interagency Fire Center