MEP March 2021 Report

Colin Church OBE

GENERAL

Mara Elephant Project was sad to announce the passing of conservation giant Colin Church on the 16th of March. Up until his death Colin was the chairman of MEP and a founding member of the organization. Colin was a pillar, mentor, and gentleman who did so much for so many. Colin's passion for wildlife conservation came to the fore in the Aberdare National Park when he led the Rhino Ark with the enormous task of fencing and protecting the Water Tower and the endangered species living there. Colin brought new skills to the conservation space from his business career in public relations. Colin's contributions to conservation, the environment and the community in Kenya, was recognized when Her Majesty the Queen honored him with the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2017. Colin's leadership at MEP championed the next generation of conservationists the rangers who work on the front line. Colin guided our board, mentored management staff, and pride glowed on the faces of MEP rangers when Colin would visit and congratulate them for their work. To work with, be mentored by, and learn from Colin's gentle, decent, and steadfast resolve has been an honor. Alongside being a national treasure Colin was the loving leader of the "Kanisa Clan". From every ranger and staff member at MEP we send our condolences to Nicole, Marcus, Tanya, Julie, Antonia, and his many grandchildren and relatives.

On March 29, the full MEP frontline staff were all able to receive their first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccination against the COVID-19 virus. Our entire complement of rangers and staff worked over this past year without disruption, and we are relieved that we can continue to do so with the added protection of the vaccine. MEP's staff all had their shots in Narok, and everyone is experiencing minimal side effects. We are extremely grateful to the Kenyan government and all of the medical workers and scientists who made this possible.

MEP rangers and core staff receiving their vaccinations.

In March, MEP moved into a new office in Nairobi at Watermark Office Park. MEP's Nairobi office is the main location where CFO Stanley Misoka works, and other MEP senior staff host meetings while in the city. We were able to secure this location for a very fair monthly rate, and Stanley is really enjoying the gorgeous view and lots of natural light. Having a presence in Nairobi is critical to the work our organization does in the Maasai Mara, and we are happy to now have a home at 2nd Floor Spring Court, Watermark Office Park, Ndege Road in Karen.

The new office in Nairobi.

MEP's 501(c)3 in the U.S. the Sidekick Foundation, Inc. announced new Executive Director Trey Fehsenfeld in March. Trey is taking over for Brian Kearney-Grieve who played an intracule part in MEP's growth as an organization and success over the last several years. Brian not only served as a trustee on MEP's Board of Directors, but also worked closely with MEP's senior staff to implement processes and increase the level of professionalism for our organization. It has been a pleasure working alongside Brian, and MEP looks forward to doing the same with Trey who has been a long-time liaison between Sidekick and MEP.

SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

On March 9, the MEP intelligence unit alongside Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) had another successful ivory seizure and arrest in 2021. Two suspects were arrested in the Transmara area in possession of 7 kg of ivory that was brought across the border from Tanzania. This is the third arrest this year in this area and MEP and KWS remain vigilant to ensure more successful operations.

The ivory seizure and arrest.

MEP recently set up camouflage camera traps using RESOLVE and Intel's TrailGuard AI along a popular crossing along the Mara River to catch bushmeat poachers on their way to set snares. Our intelligence gathering has shown that poachers are crossing the Mara River into two different bordering conservancies (Lemek and Olchorro) and setting snares. In March, photos like the ones seen here, are captured by the camera traps then sent to our ranger units stationed nearby. It allows our teams to have a visual image of someone they potentially need to keep an eye on and catch these poachers before the snares are set. MEP is currently in the testing phase using this technology; however, if proven successful at helping us prevent bushmeat poaching before it happens, we'll deploy more in other key areas to increase protection.

Images from TrailGuard taken in March.

The MEP "Alpha" ranger unit was busy inside the Nyakweri Forest in March. On March 26, they uncovered a charcoal making operation and confiscated 90 bags of charcoal and destroyed three kilns. The mobile ranger unit was also kept busy in March responding to conflict and patrolling conservancies looking for any illegal activities that might be taking place inside, most commonly bushmeat poaching using snares. They've been in Lemek Conservancy and Enonkishu Conservancy noting elephant herds and monitoring collared elephants like Ivy from the ground. T

There were four total conflict incidents in March. In total, in March, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested 10 habitat destruction suspects, recovered three chainsaws, six trees cutdown, 31 posts, destroyed 30 kilns and 110 charcoal sacks and removed one snare. In March, MEP rangers covered a distance of 1,687 km on foot, patrolled 9,050 km by car and 2,624 km on motorbike.

On March 12, MEP, KWS and Olderkesi rangers successfully arrested three suspects that were in possession of a live (thankfully) pangolin. Pangolins are some of the most trafficked animals in the world. They are very shy creatures, and their skin is made of scales that many people in Asia believe to have healing properties. There are some theories that the COVID-19 strain actually came from pangolin meat in Wuhan's wet markets. We are happy to say that this little guy was still alive and after being taken care of overnight, he was released into the custody of The Pangolin Project and given a ride on MEP's leased helicopter be a live exhibit at the Narok Law Courts. He was then successfully reintroduced into the wild. While this rescue has a happy ending, most do not, and while MEP does focus on elephants, all of Africa's wildlife is precious to us. Taking this pangolin off the market and arresting those responsible helps deter the entire illegal wildlife and ivory market.

The pangolin in the leased MEP helicopter.

HELICOPTER

On March 14, the MEP leased helicopter was used in two successful KWS and MEP collaring operations for two key female elephants in areas where more data collection and protection are needed. The first female, Clara, was part of a herd of over 50 elephants located along the Sand River, which runs between two key MEP and KWS operational areas, the Loita Hills and the Maasai Mara National Reserve. The second female elephant candidate, Josephine, was collared in the Shompole area in a herd of over 100 elephants.

Collared elephant Clara with Marc, Dr. Limo and Griet.

The MEP helicopter helped rangers on the ground with a conflict situation on March 12 in Kerok. They were responding to conflict on the ground that required assistance from the leased MEP helicopter.

The rangers on the ground with the helicopter.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

Kenyan high school student Nina Allen is raising money for Mara Elephant Project in March through a Go Get Funding campaign. Growing up in Kenya, she's seen firsthand what's at stake if wildlife and habitats aren't protected. Artist Anke Fachmann is supporting MEP in March with 10% of proceeds from the sale of her art donated back to our operations. You can find her artwork in Girl-Lee Boutique in California or online at naturesdiversity.com.

MEP celebrated UK Mother's Day and International Day of Forests during March. We highlighted MEP Administrator Aileen Nkoitoi to celebrate Women's History Month. She is a key asset to our support staff, which have all played a crucial role to the well-being of our organization especially during the pandemic. MEP was also delighted to have Trustee Kevin Rodrigues highlight his time on MEP's Campus in a blog featured in March. MEP was featured in Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's 2020 Annual Report and on DJI's blog. MEP's partner Seedballs Kenya was featured multiple times and included MEP rangers distributing the seedballs in many of the articles: Today, The Star and Afrik21. Newly collared elephant Clara's protection for the next three years was generously supported by Griet Van Malderen, a true champion of conservation and Africa. Griet is an accomplished wildlife photographer, and we were delighted to have her join us for Clara's collaring operation to capture some of the close-up shots often overlooked. (*see below*)

Thank you for everyone who supported MEP in the Greatest Maasai Mara photo competition in March, we had 14 amazing entries from Laura Dyer, Riz Jiwa, Clair Nicol, Tracy Miller, Eric Averdung, Oliver Zeid, Edouard Wenseleers, Thorstan Hanewald, Robyn E. Preston, Artur Stankiewicz, Sushil Chauhan, Vishal Vaja, Pablo Montiel and Aman Gandhi.

A March entry by Pablo Montiel.

In March, MEP Trust received a $482.60 donation from Foreningen Forsvara Elefanterna and a $1,400 donation from Asilia Africa, a tourism partner. MEP received a total of $76,948.58 from 191 donors in March through the Sidekick Foundation, Inc. Karen Goss celebrated her birthday with a Facebook fundraiser to MEP that raised $459.65 from 18 donors, thank you Karen. We also received a $10,000 donation from Donald & Carole Tanklage (Marin Community Foundation) and $7,500 from the J.E. Fehsenfeld Family Foundation at the recommendation of a long-time MEP supporter John Dillow. Thank you as well to the Western Colorado Community Foundation from the Lorraine & Jack Walker Fund, John Cederhorm, Gwen Wiener of The EOS Foundation Trust and Jes Lefcourt for supporting MEP in March. Finally, we failed to mention in late January the matching donation from Illinois Tool Works, Inc. of $2,250, which was made to match an original donation from Gail Peek in late 2020. We also had a matching donation of $250 from Sales Force thanks to support from Erica Dillow.

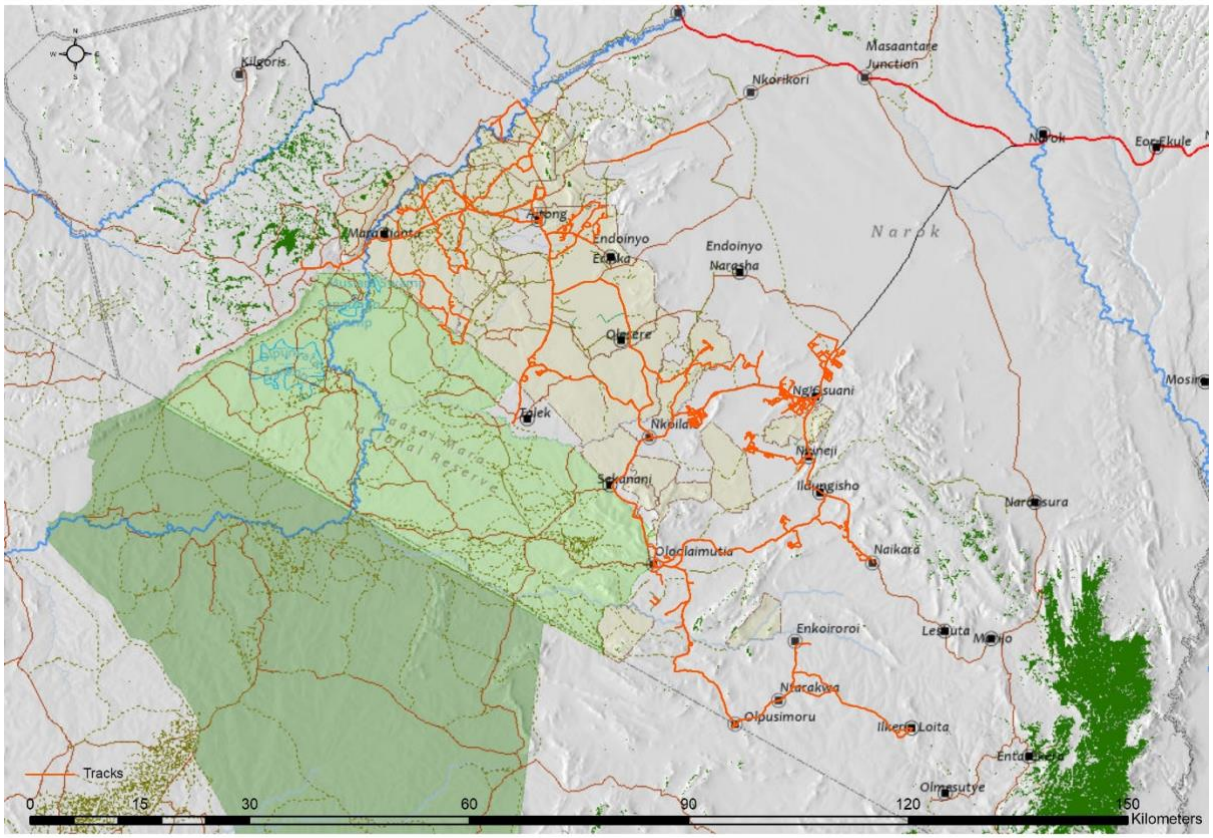
RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Director's Update

The main update in March from the research department was the establishment of a 'long-term monitoring' team and the purchase of a dedicated Toyota Landcruiser for use by the team. The MEP LTM team, made up of two women and men, will work on two objectives: 1) individual based sightings and re-identification of elephants across the Mara, and 2) regular, ground based census of elephants along fixed routes within the conservancies and protected areas. Objective 1 will help us grow a database of known elephant individuals that will help us better understand population demography including total numbers of elephants (using techniques such as spatial mark-recapture), the number of calves, and the age structure of the Mara population. It will also help us determine which elephants are coming into conflict with humans by monitoring injuries and other signs of conflict. Individual re-identification records can also help in behavioural studies and in a variety of other ecological monitoring approaches. Objective 2 will help us understand relative density and distribution of elephants in relation to season, livestock and other factors affecting the spatial spread of elephants across the ecosystem. Although collar data provides very granular and detailed observation of a small number of individual elephants, regular elephant census will provide a more general overview of what the population is doing as a whole. We are therefore very excited to welcome Vincent, Sarafina, Fintan, and John to our growing research team who will primarily be focused on the re-identification work. They spent 2 weeks doing basic training alongside the spatial mapping team (Amos, David, Clevers and Francis). Together they learned about the various data systems in use by MEP such as EarthRanger, Cybertracker, ER Track, Njia and ElephantBook. They also undertook first-aid training and the use of GPS and radio work to be able to operate alongside MEP's Ranger teams when needed.

The new MEP LTM team.

Year	Month	Electric	Other	Wire	De-fenced	Total (kms)
2019	November	48.27	-	18.35		66.62
2019	December	81	-	59		140
2020	January	111.16	4.64	124.71		240.51
2020	February	101.62	1.17	33.99		136.78
2020	March	48.59	0.14	59.76		108.49
2020	April	19.78	0	10.38		30.16
2020	May	24.75	1.88	41.18		67.81
2020	June	15.19	1.48	107.88		124.55
2020	July	37	-	52.76		89.76
2020	August	60.12	7.52	40.08		107.72
2020	September	126.95	7.15	221.44	15.18	370.72
2020	October	109.05	10.57	218.99	1.78	340.39
2020	November	101.2	24.52	153.12	13.88	292.72
2020	December	62.99	9	190		261.99
2021	January	87.9	19.4	121.09	5.2	233.59
2021	February	79.2	22.9	175	-	277.1
2021	March	20.3	7.4	147.92	8.6	184.22
	Total (kms)	**1135.07**	**117.77**	**1775.65**	**44.64**	3073.13



Movements (orange tracks) of MEP's three field assistants during March. All of our field assistants are working on mapping fences, roads and landcover ground-truthing points using motorbikes and our Njia app. They recorded 184 km of fences and 143 LCC points in March.

Tracking Manager's Update

Ivy didn't crop raid the entire month of March, which was notable as she is a habitual crop raider. Fred's collar relayed several low-speed alerts during the month and upon checking, our ground teams found him in no distress. Kegol's movements were nearly symmetrical to Fred's and was often close to him. In mid-March, he streaked further south to the reserve boundary but retreated along Mara River to join Fred. Shorty remained inside the Serengeti National Park the entire of March, foraging around the source of Sarara River. In late March, there was burning of grass in the area, and he fled the fire streaking some 10km further south towards Grumeti River.

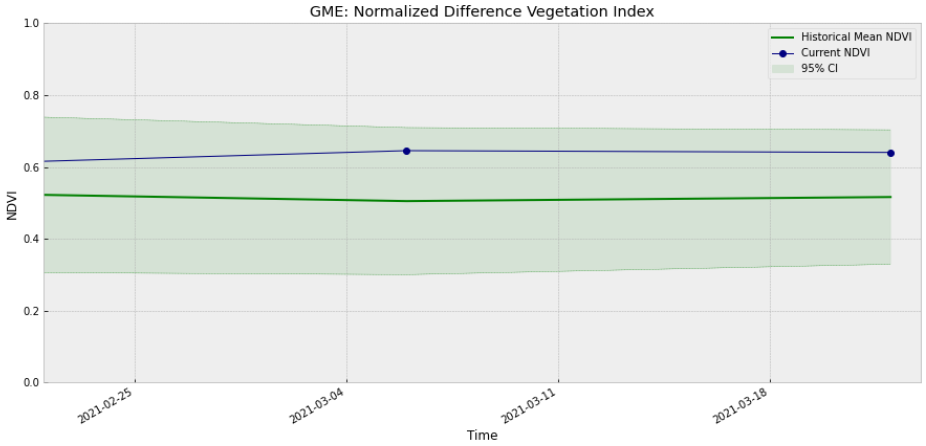
As mentioned previously, Clara was collared in mid-March at Ilkerin-Loita and a few days after her collaring, she crossed the Sand River and streaked towards the Kenya-Tanzania border. Josephine is the other new KWS and MEP collared elephant. She was collared on the 14th of March around Shompole and afterwards immediately headed north along Ewuaso Ngiro South River to a wetland near Magadi. Lempiris received vet treatment in late February for a sprained ankle and his speed was low in early March but improved progressively over time. Fitz with the herd of 60 continued raiding crops around the Nyakweri Forest, spending daytime in the forest and raiding farms along the forest at night.

On March 15, they spotted Ivy and her herd that included some very young baby elephants.

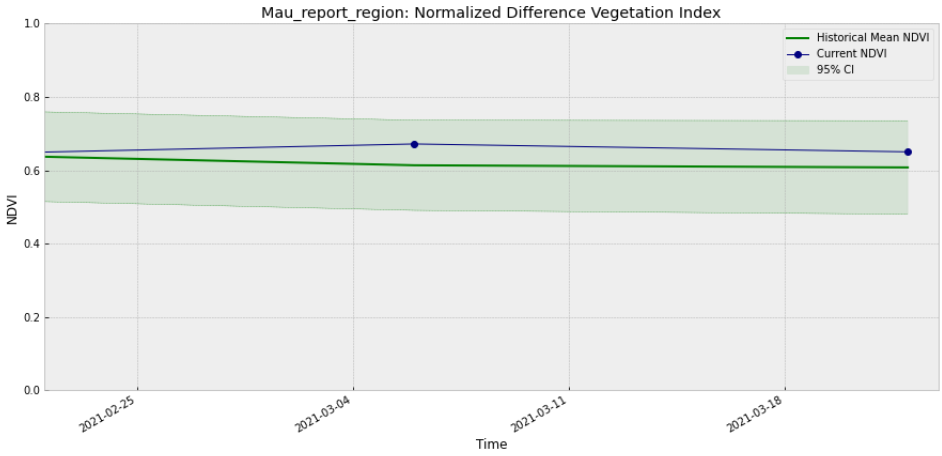
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is a measure of plant photosynthetic activity. Higher NDVI indicates the plant is greener. The blue trendline shows the current value while the green area shows the 95% distribution of values centered around the green trendline from values measured back to February 2000.

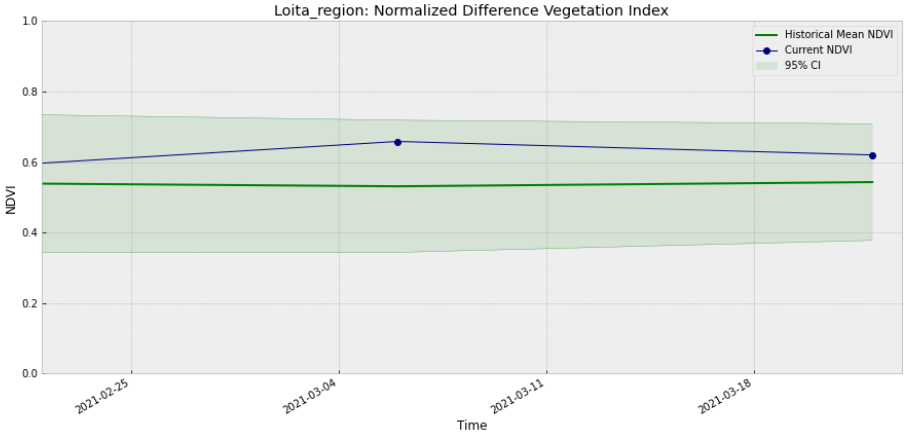
Greater Mara Ecosystem (GME)



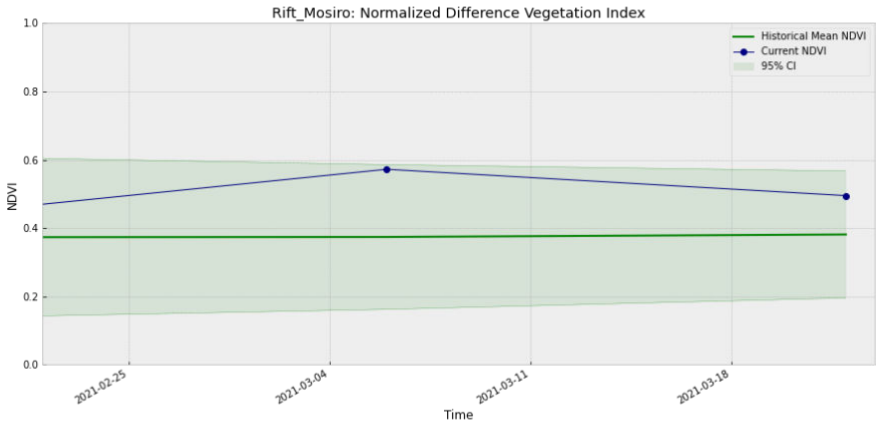
Mau Forest



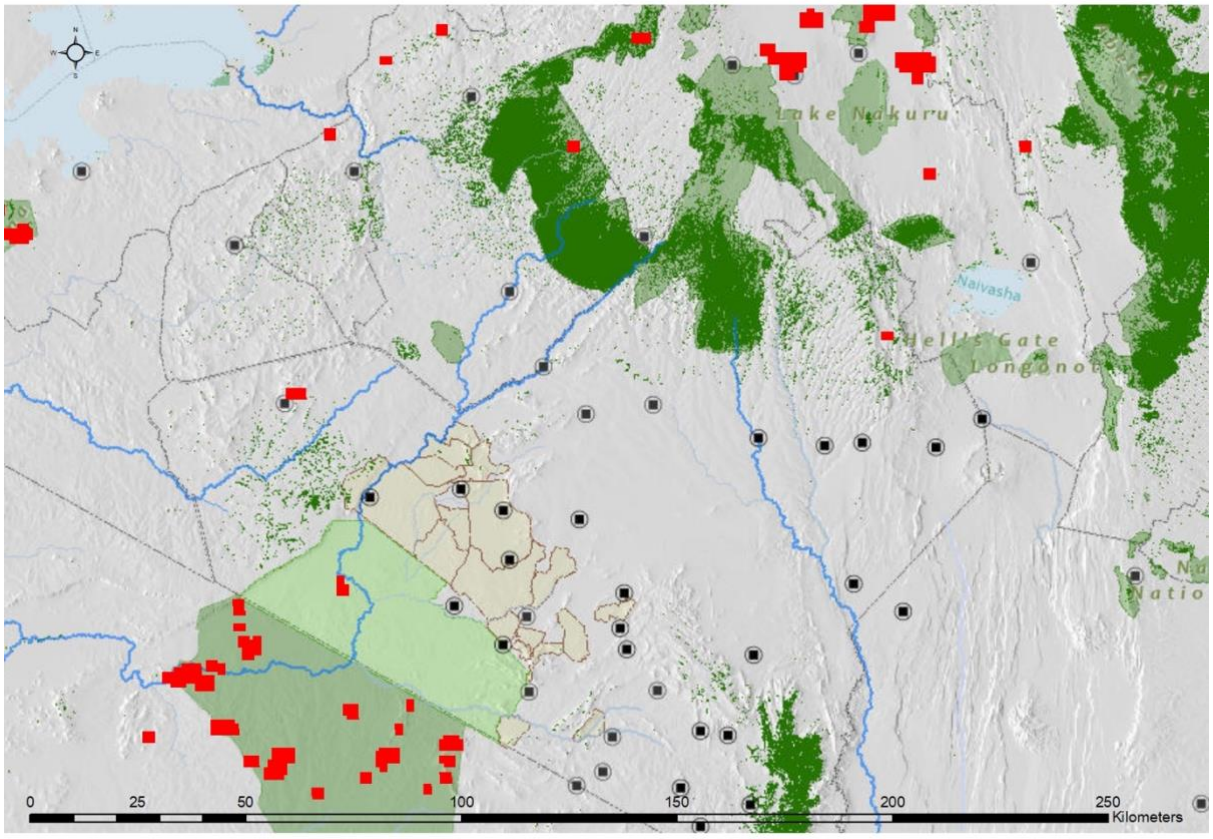
Loita



Rift Valley



ENVIRONMENT: Burn/Fire Areas



Red blocks indicate burn areas as measured by NASA's FIRMS dataset during the period March 1, 2021 – April 1, 2021. Accessed through Google Earth Engine.