Projected Impacts of Climate Change on Forests of the Dolores Watershed

A Practical Management Strategy

Jim Worrall
Suzanne Marchetti

US Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region
Gunnison, Colorado

Jerry Rehfeldt
Nick Crookston

US Forest Service
Rocky Mtn. Res. Station
Moscow, Idaho

Outline

1. Impacts of turn-of-the-century drought
2. Bioclimate models and projections
3. Strategy for applying projections to forest management

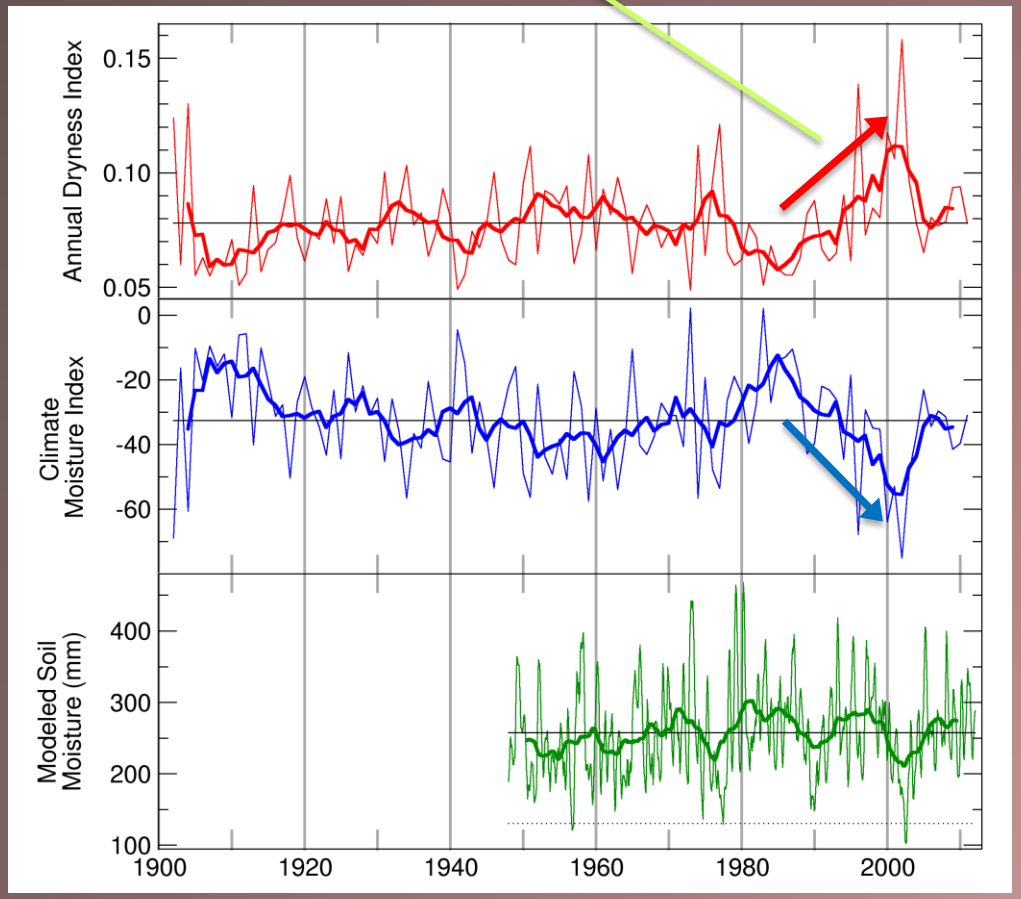
Impacts to Forests

TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY DROUGHT

Southern Rockies

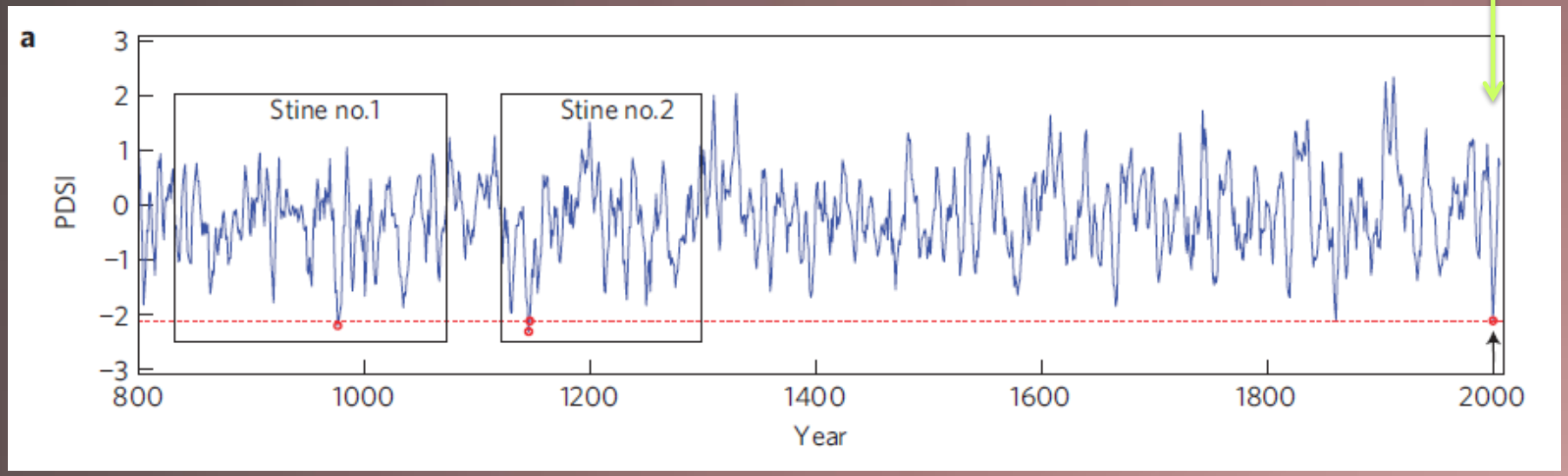
Drying trend
since mid '80s

Record drought
2001-2003



Schwalm et al. 2012
Nature Geosciences

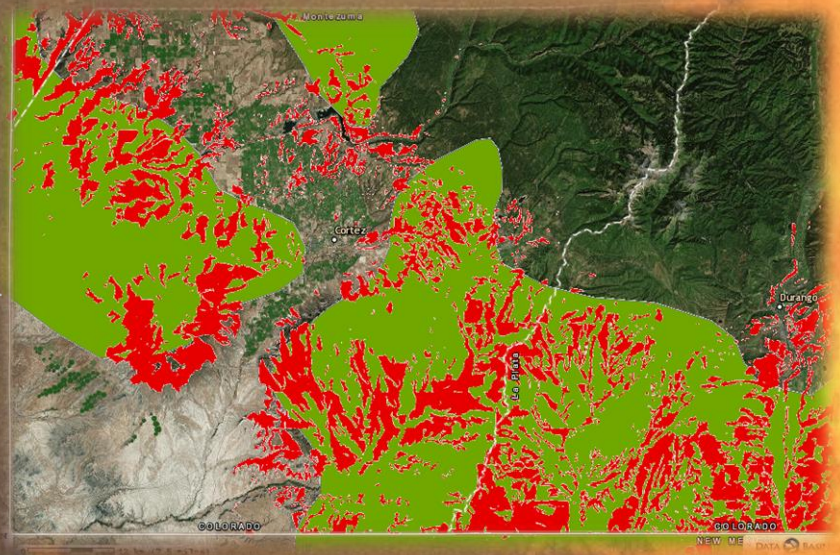
The turn-of-the-century drought in the context of the past



Conclusion:
Most recent drought that severe West-wide occurred >800 yr ago.

Piñon mortality SW CO

Dominique Bachelet, Data Basin



2.5 million acres in 4-corner states

Mountain pine beetle

3.4 million acres in Colorado

2002
927,000 acres burned
in Colorado

SAD

1.2 million acres in Colorado

Spruce beetle

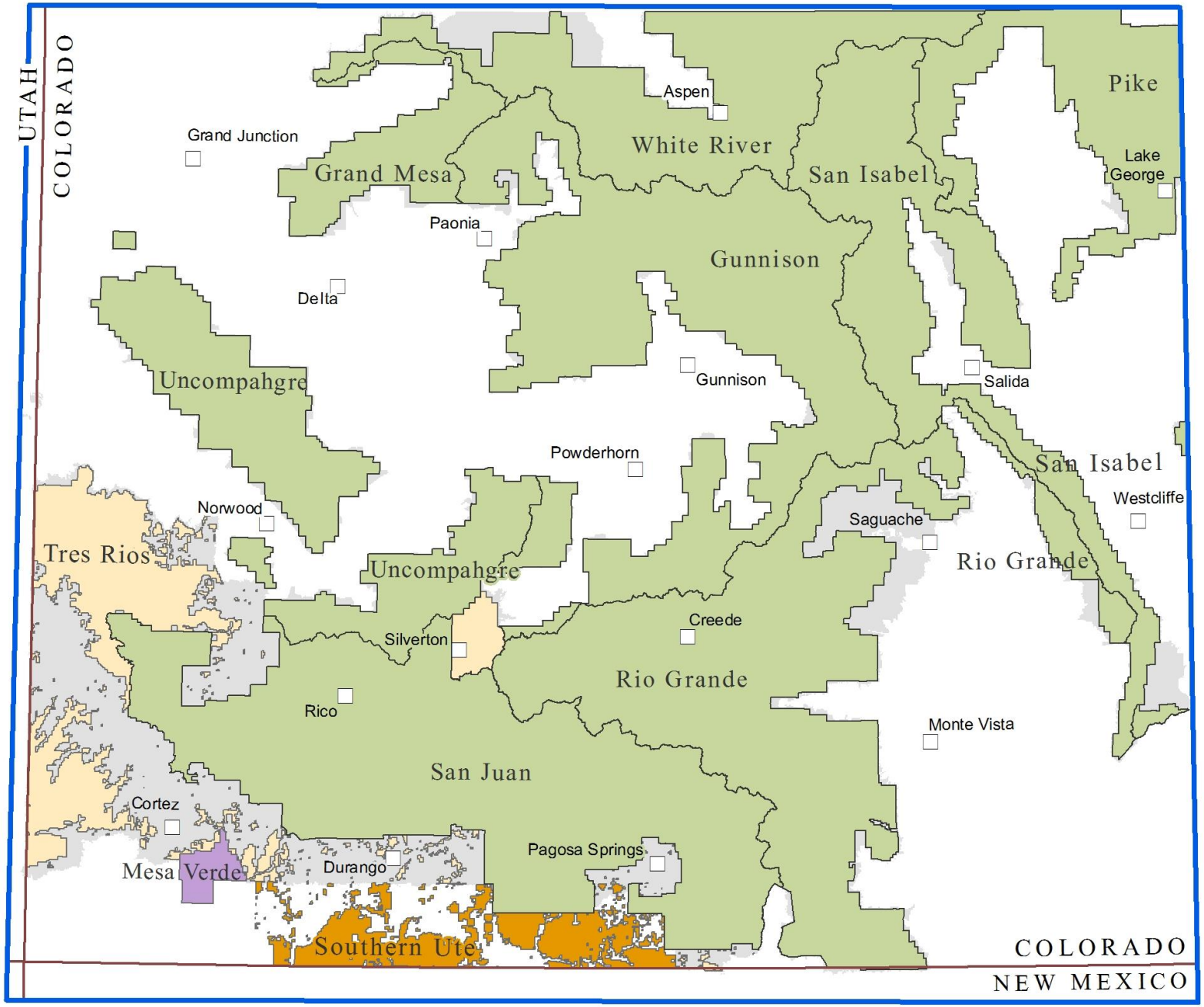
1.7 million acres in Colorado

Future Droughts

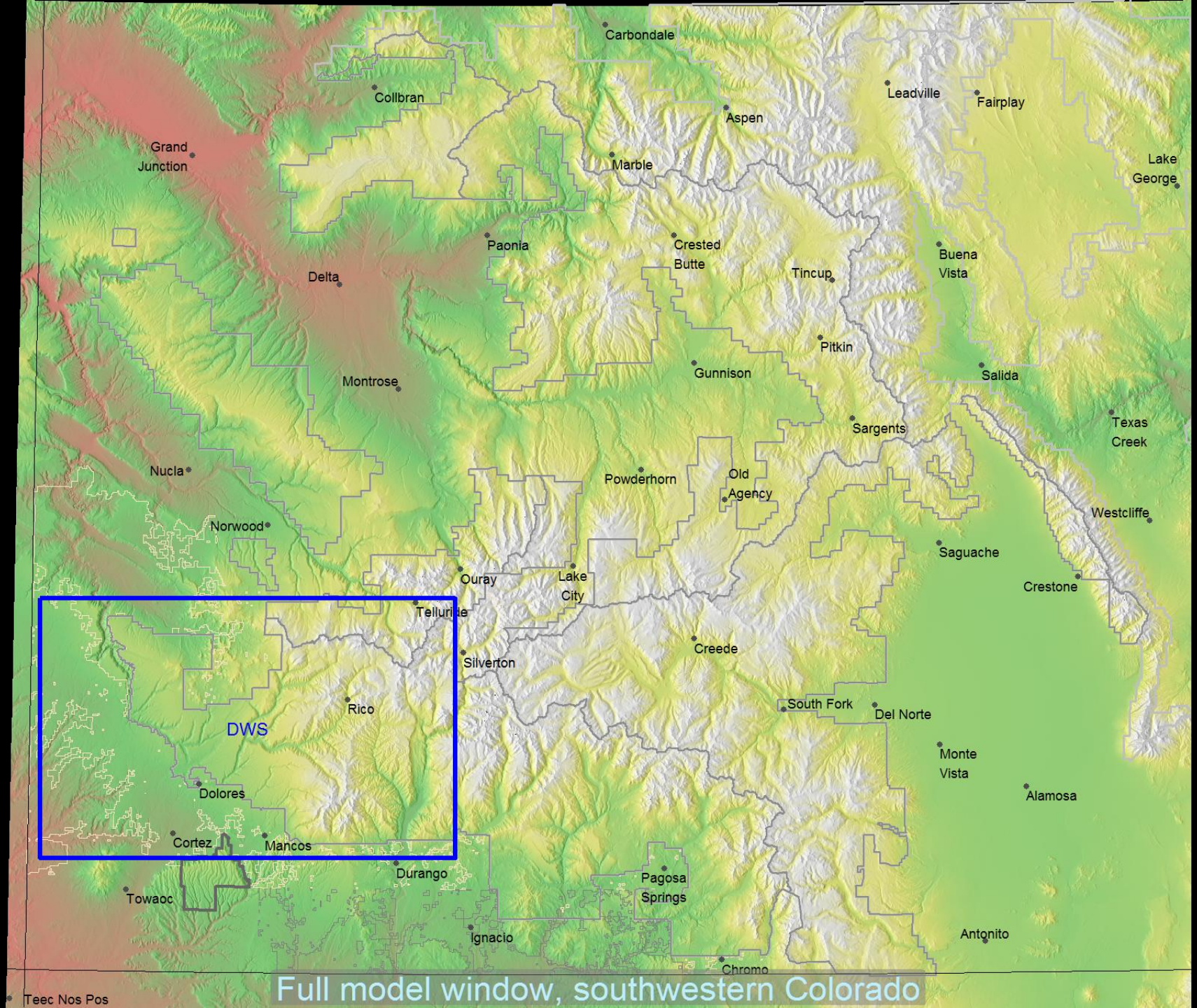
- By the 2030's, moisture conditions during the turn-of-the-century drought ". . . will become the new norm in western North America." (Schwalm et al. 2012, Nature Geosciences)
- Later in the century, conditions may be worse than during TOC.
- How can we anticipate forest impacts so that we can manage appropriately?

Characterize climate suitable for a species

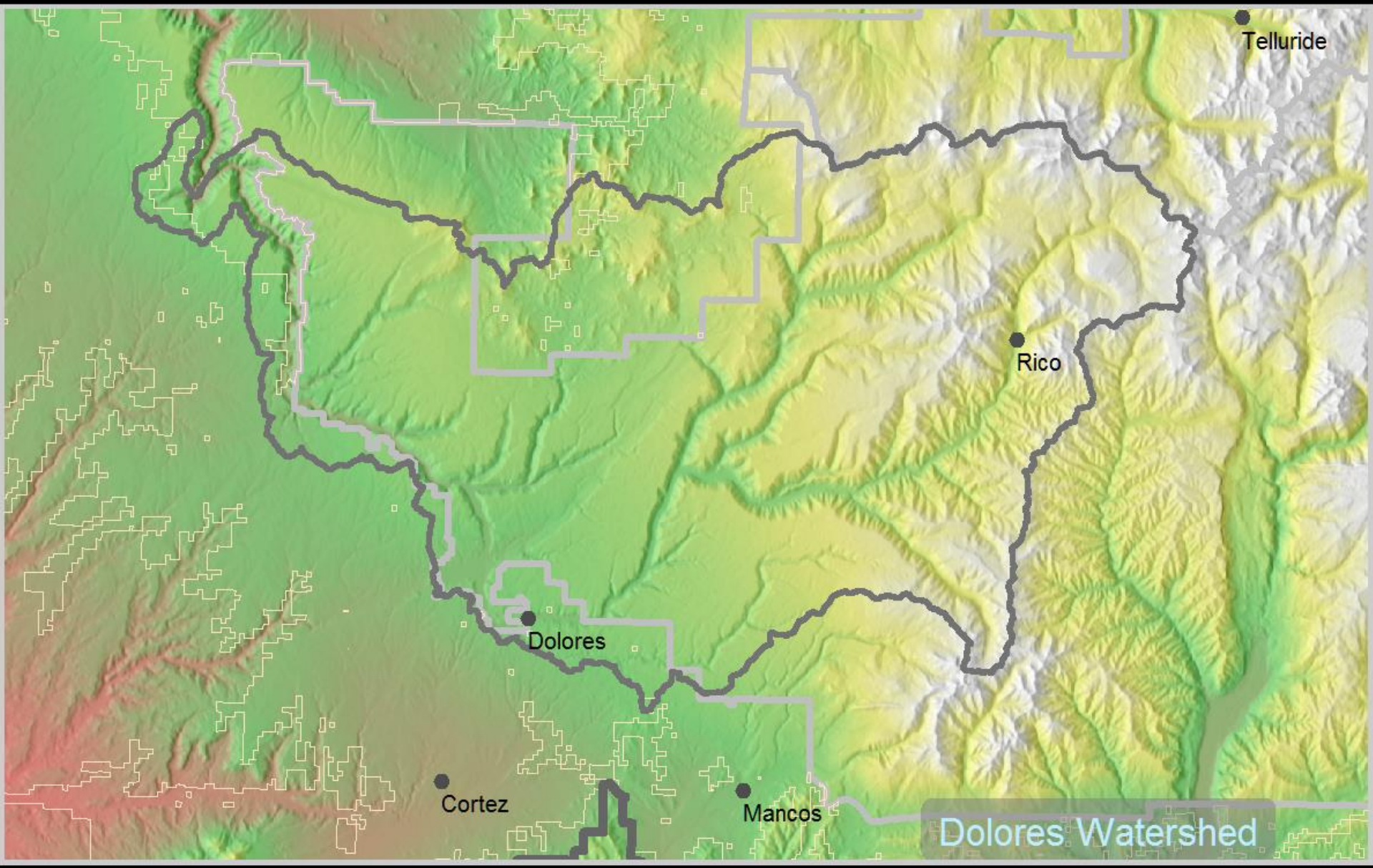
BIOCLIMATE MODELS



Southwest Colorado Bioclimate Project



Full model window, southwestern Colorado


Telluride
Rico
Dolores
Cortez
Mancos
Dolores Watershed

Bioclimate Models

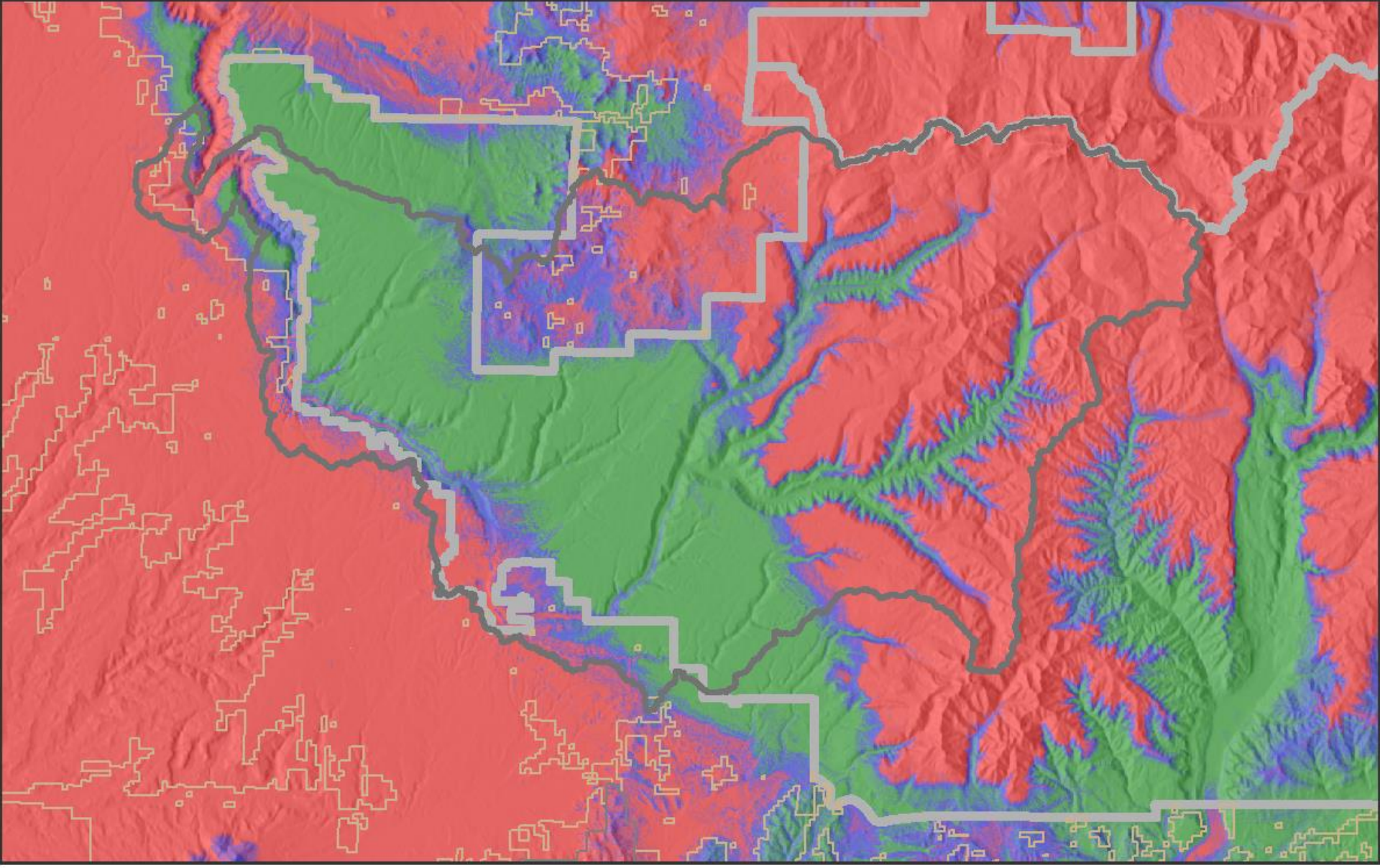
- Train on real point locations
  - Known presence/absence of species
  - Known historic/reference climate
  - Known slope and aspect
- Learn the combinations and interactions of variables associated with presence
- Given a topoclimate, can then predict the likelihood of presence

How they were built

- Training data
  - 854,000 points of known presence/absence
    - Mostly spatial veg data like FSVeg and FIA plots
  - Long-term historical climate at each point
    - Use reference climate 1961-1990
    - Also slope and aspect
- "Random forests" algorithm in R
  - "forests" of many decision "trees", using random subsets of training data

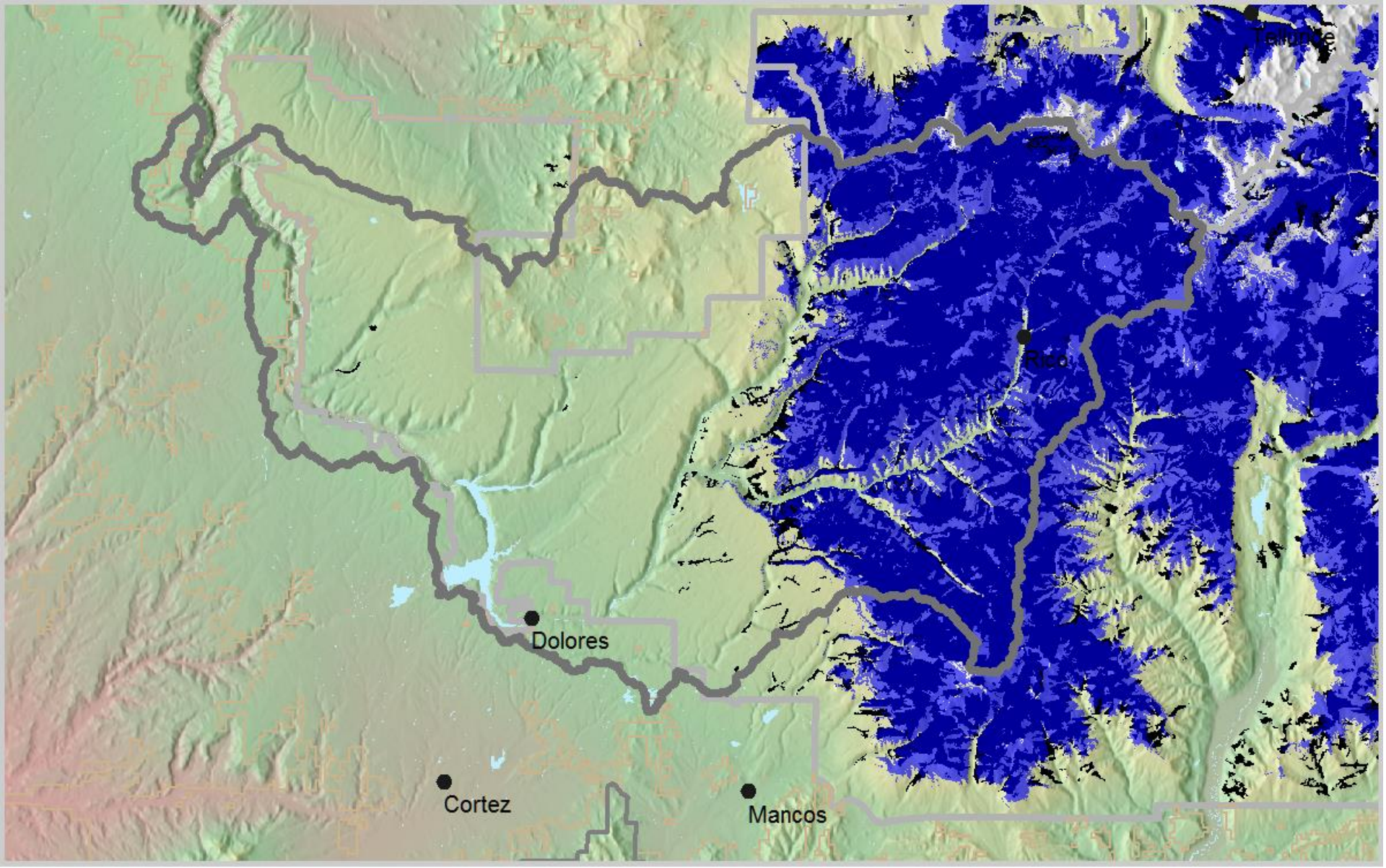
Output

- Proportion of decision trees that ‘vote’ for the topoclimate being suitable.
- If we run each pixel on a map through the model, using each pixel’s climate, slope and aspect . . .



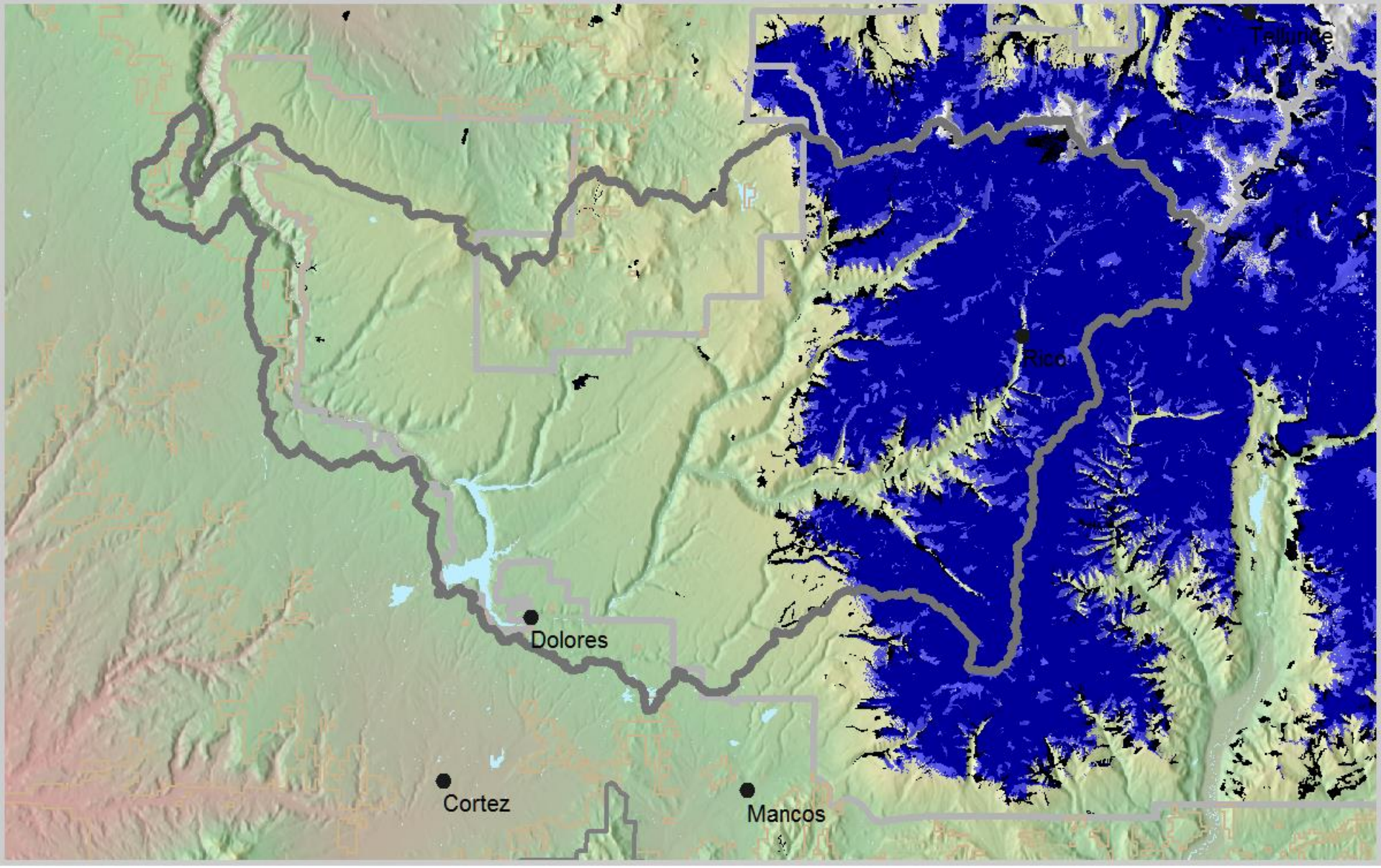
PIPO Proportion of votes

0-10
10-20
20-30
30-40
40-50
50-60
60-70
70-80
80-90
90-100



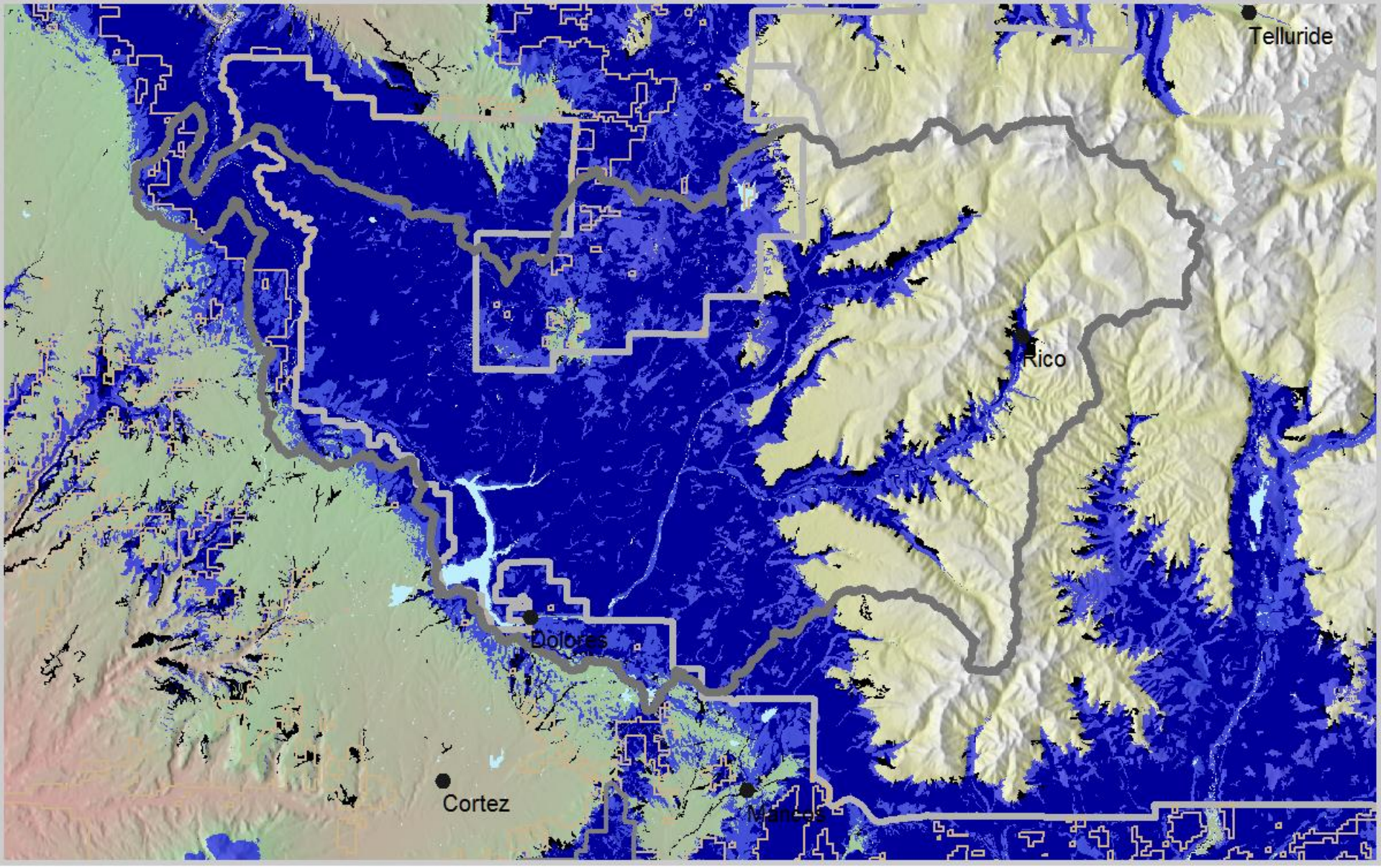
ABLA occurrence in shapefiles (black) vs. reference period votes >=0.5 (blue overlay)

Subalpine fir



PIEN occurrence in shapefiles (black) vs. reference period votes >=0.5 (blue overlay)

Engelmann spruce



QUGA occurrence in shapefiles (black) vs. reference period votes >=0.5 (blue overlay)

Gambel oak

Process for projecting into the future

3 GCMs x 3 RCPs → 9 climates → downscaled → bioclimate models

↓

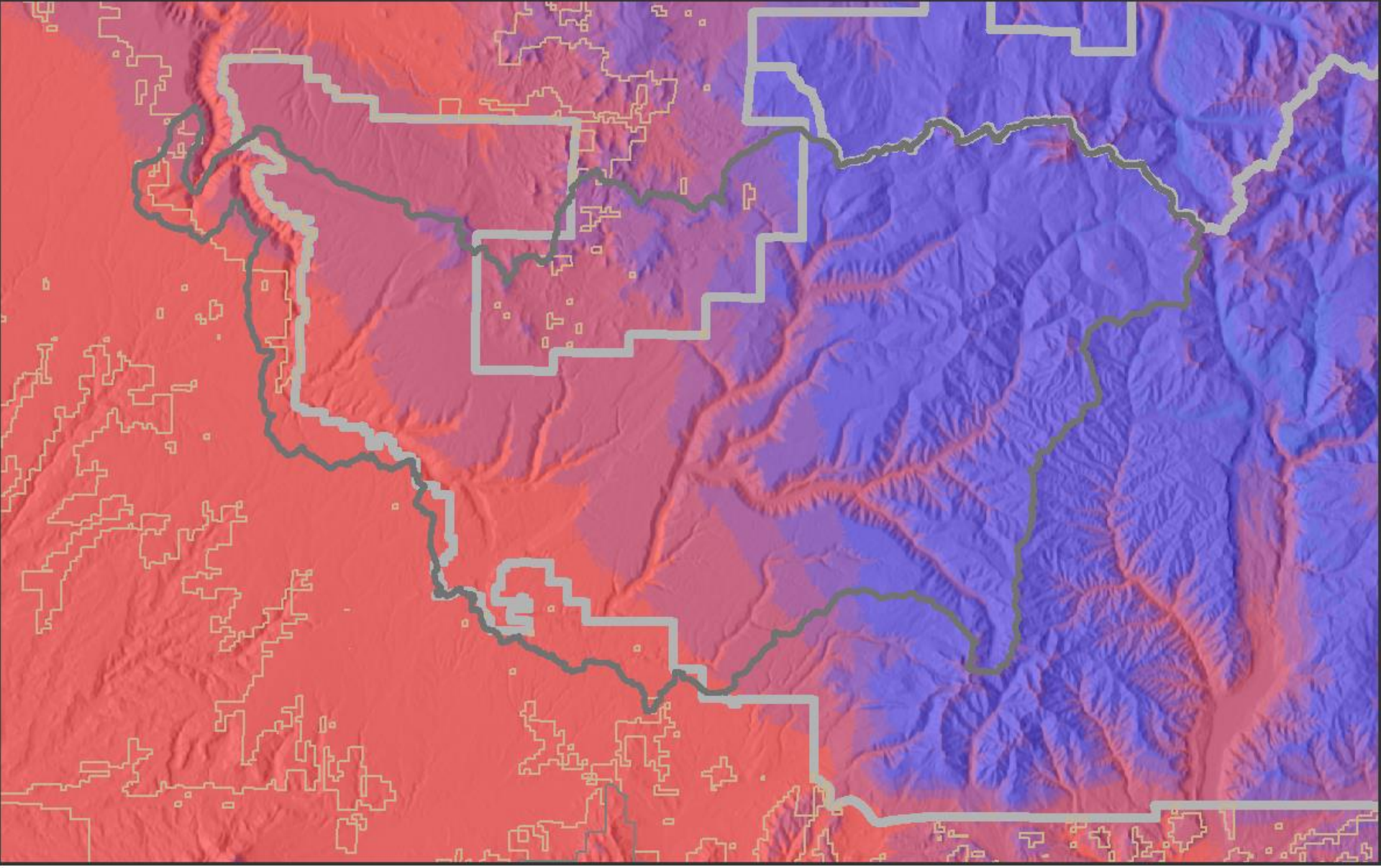
9 outputs

↓

votes averaged

Global climate models used by IPCC:
CCSM4
GFDLCM3
HadGEM2ES

Greenhouse-gas scenarios (RCPs)
RCP 4.5
RCP 6.0
RCP 8.5



Ponderosa pine 2060

PIPO Proportion of votes

0-10	20-30	40-50
10-20	30-40	50-60

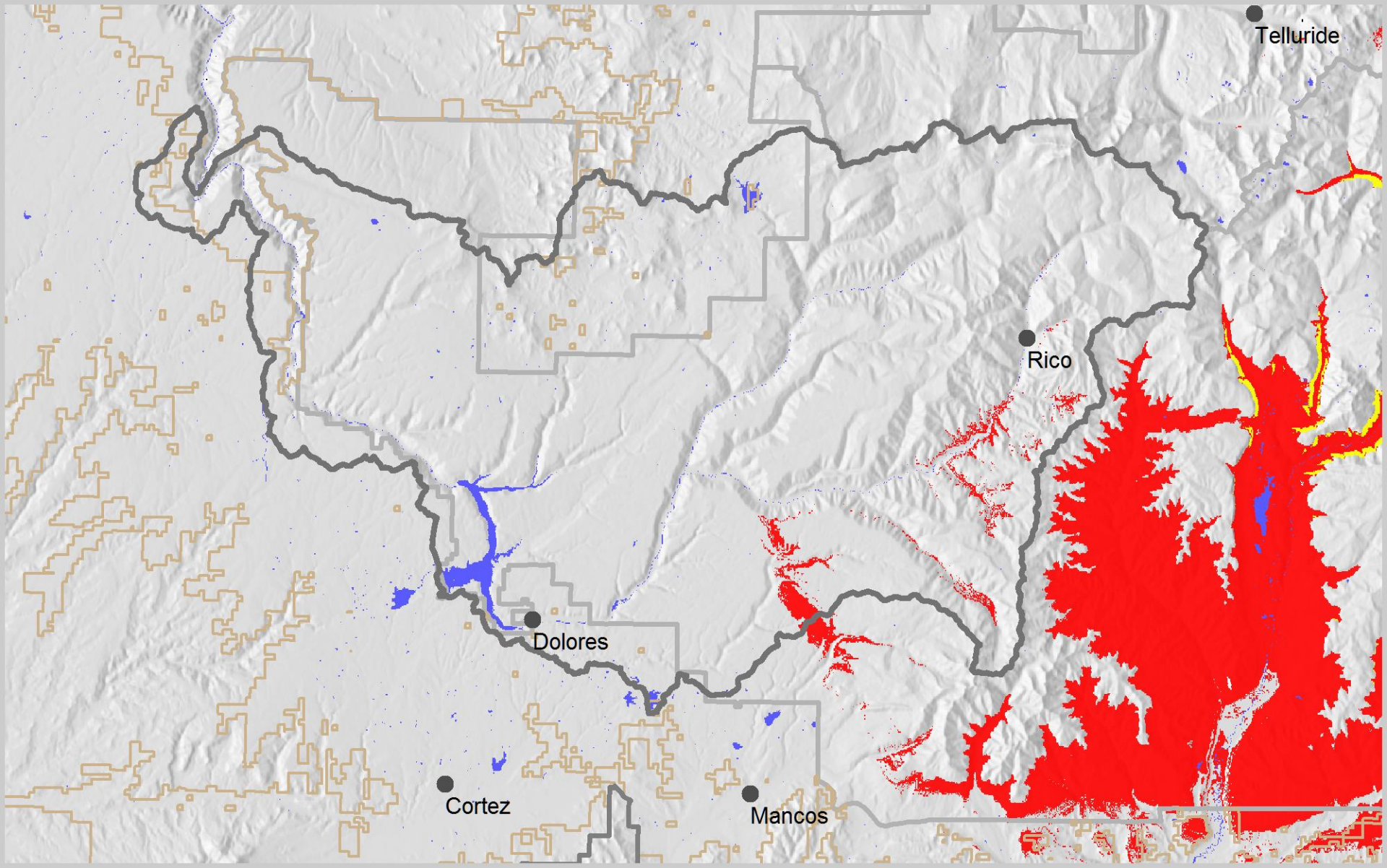
Applying bioclimate models

A FOREST MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Project Change

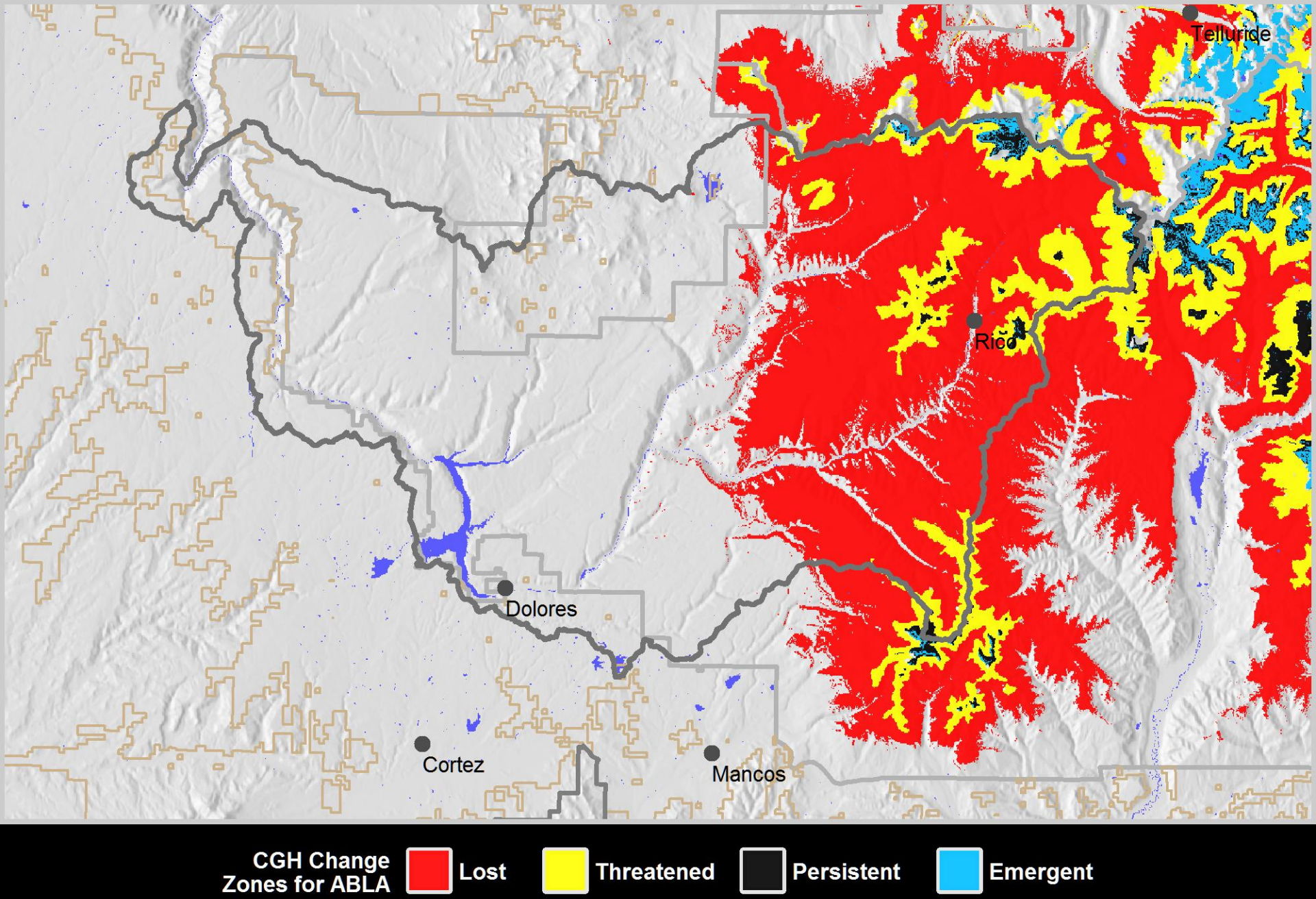
1. Make grids of suitability based on reference and future climates.
2. Use difference in model output between reference and future periods to classify change zones.
   a) Model output ("votes") are 0 (no chance) to 1 (very likely)

Change classes	Reference period votes	2056-2065 votes
LOST	≥ 0.5	< 0.3
THREATENED	≥ 0.5	0.3-0.5
PERSISTENT	≥ 0.5	≥ 0.5
EMERGENT	< 0.5	≥ 0.5

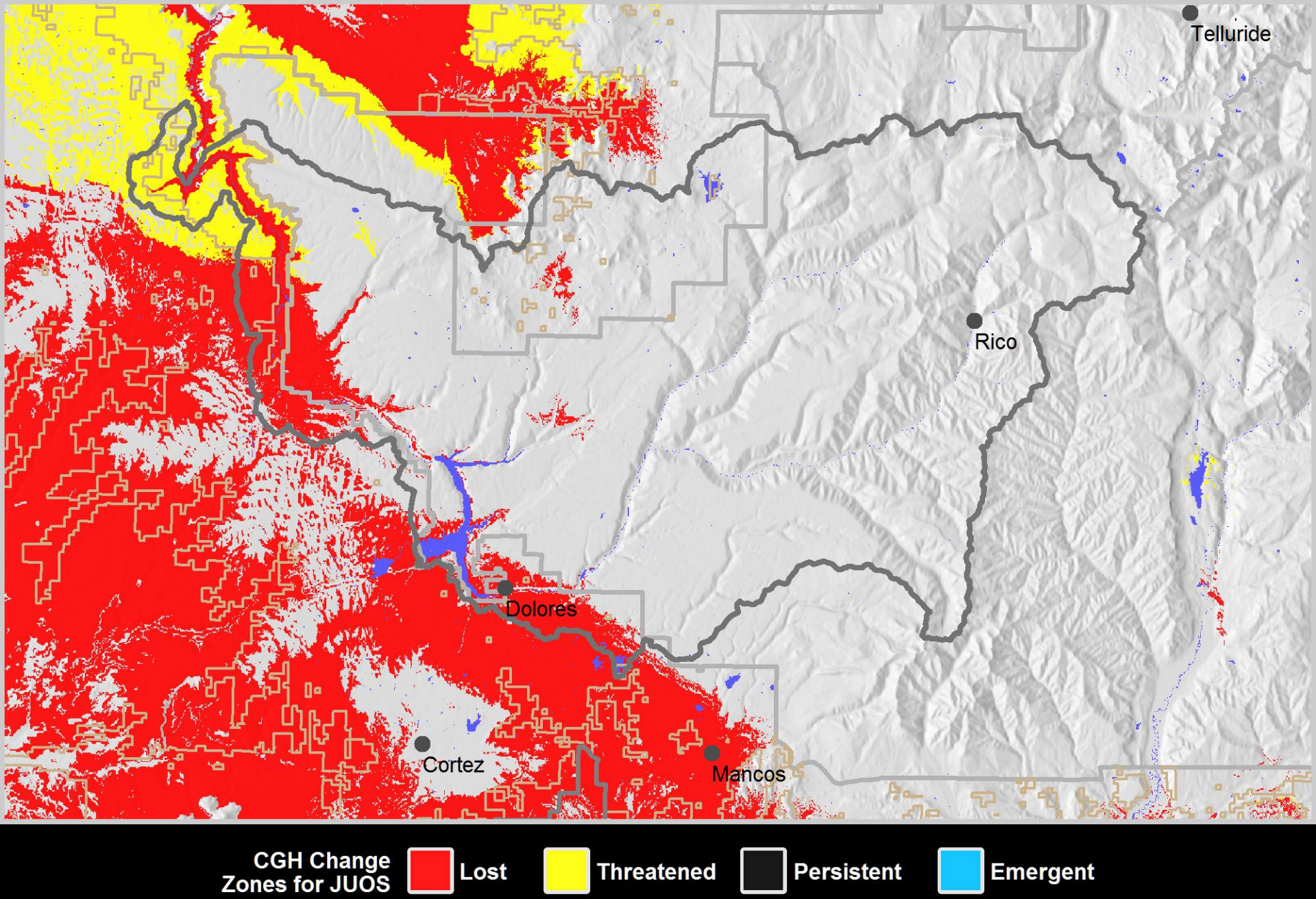


CGH Change Zones for ABCO: Lost, Threatened, Persistent, Emergent

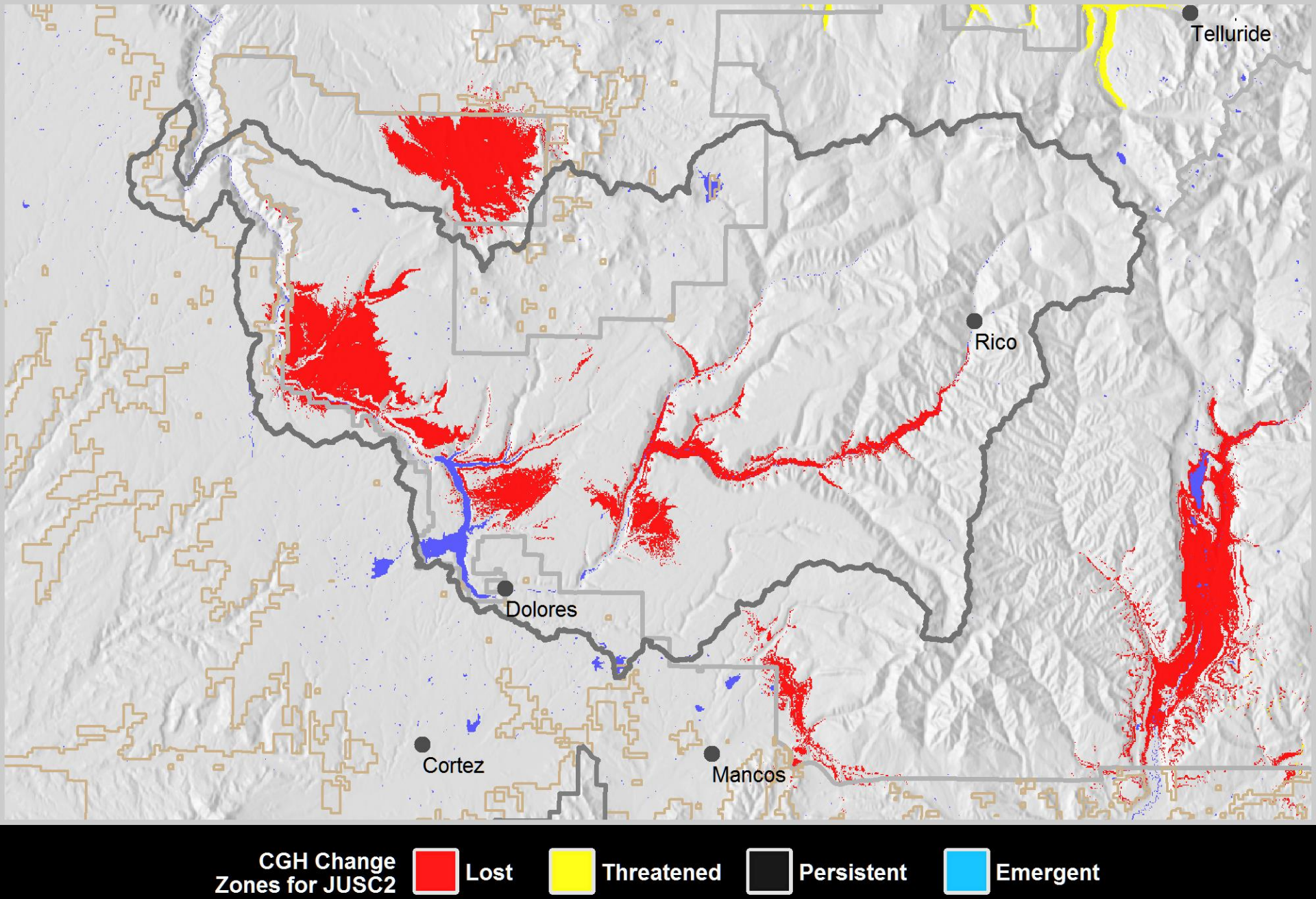
White fir



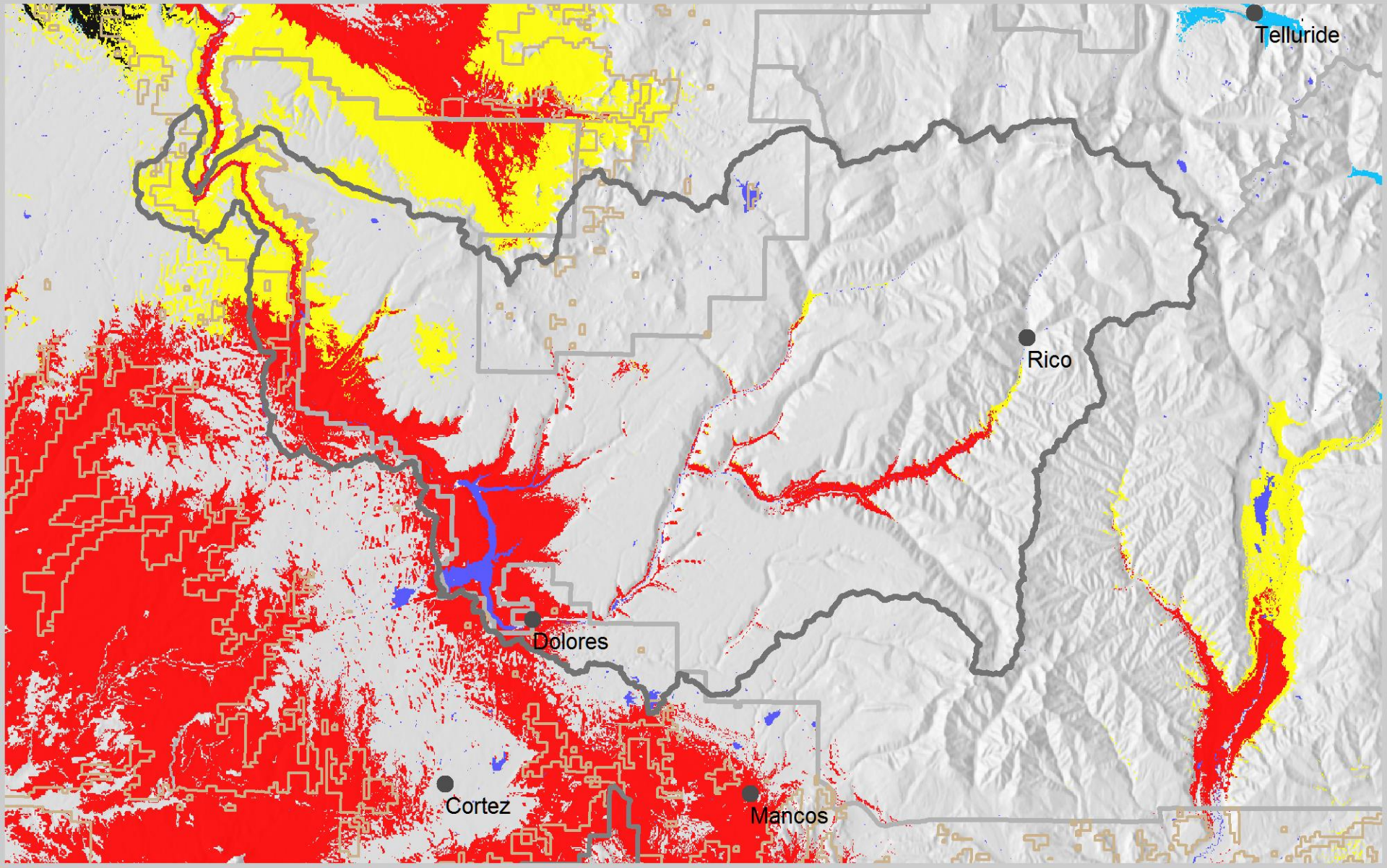
Subalpine fir



Utah juniper

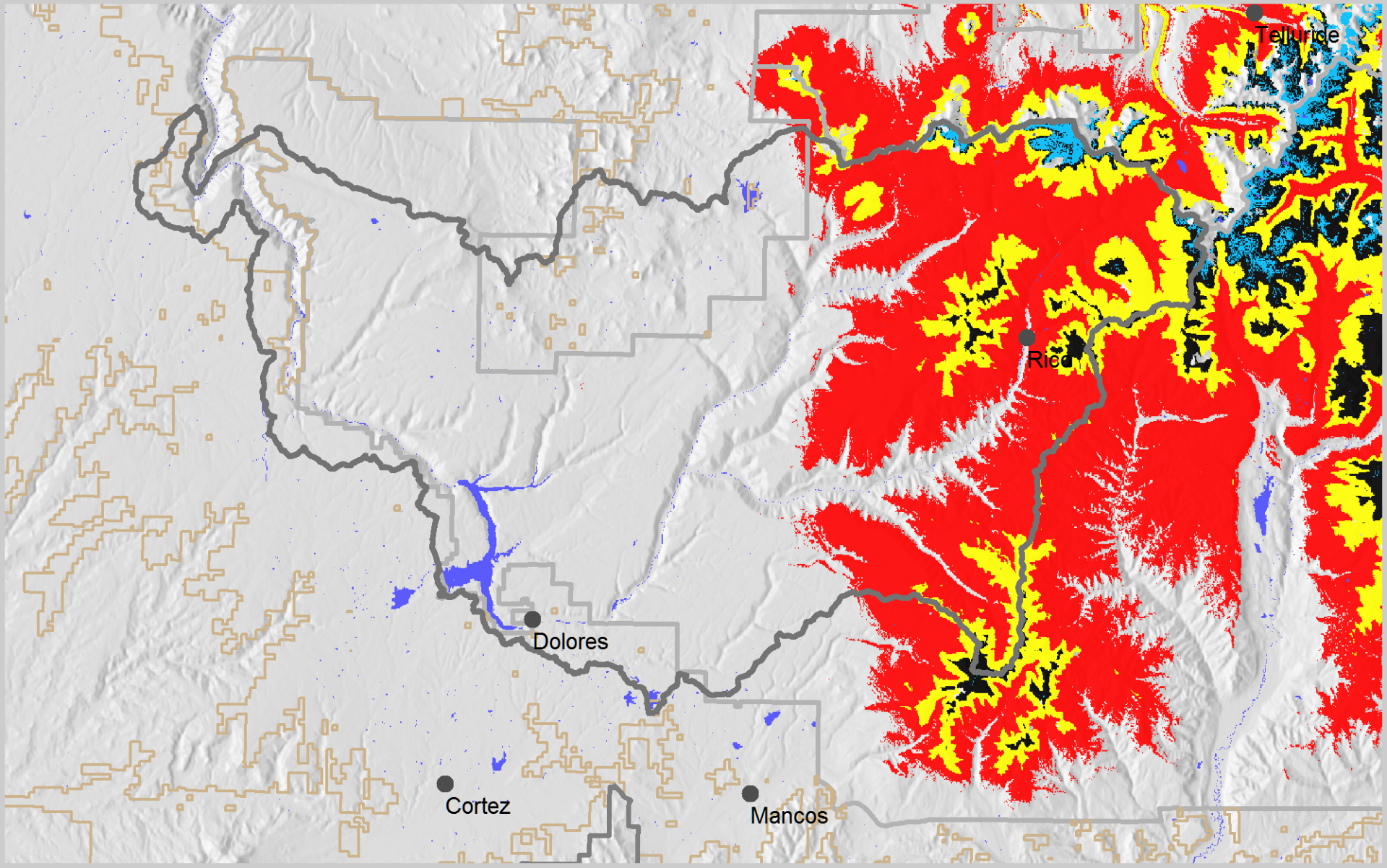


Rocky Mountain juniper



CGH Change Zones for PIED | Lost | Threatened | Persistent | Emergent

Piñon



CGH Change Zones for PIEN

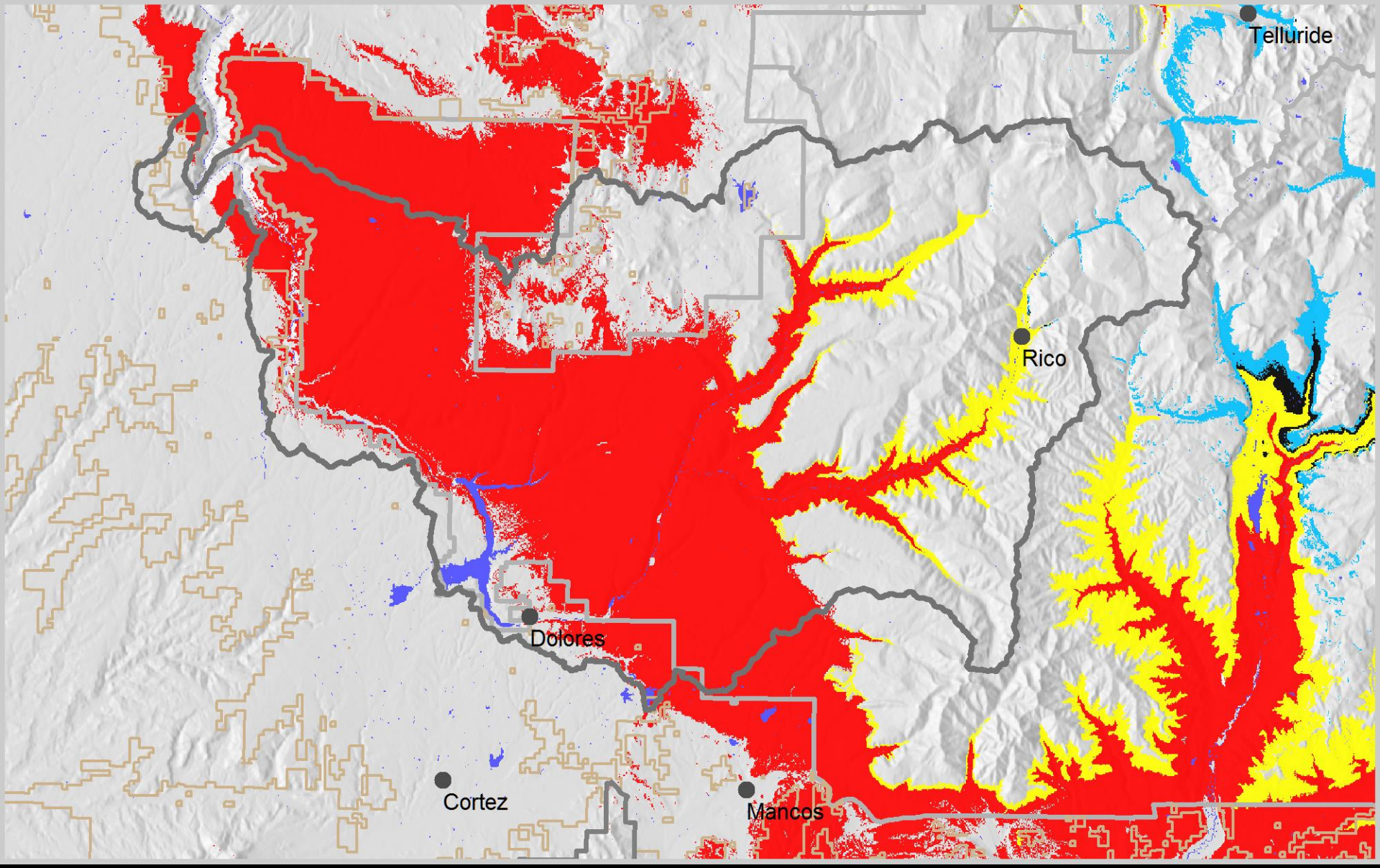
Lost

Threatened

Persistent

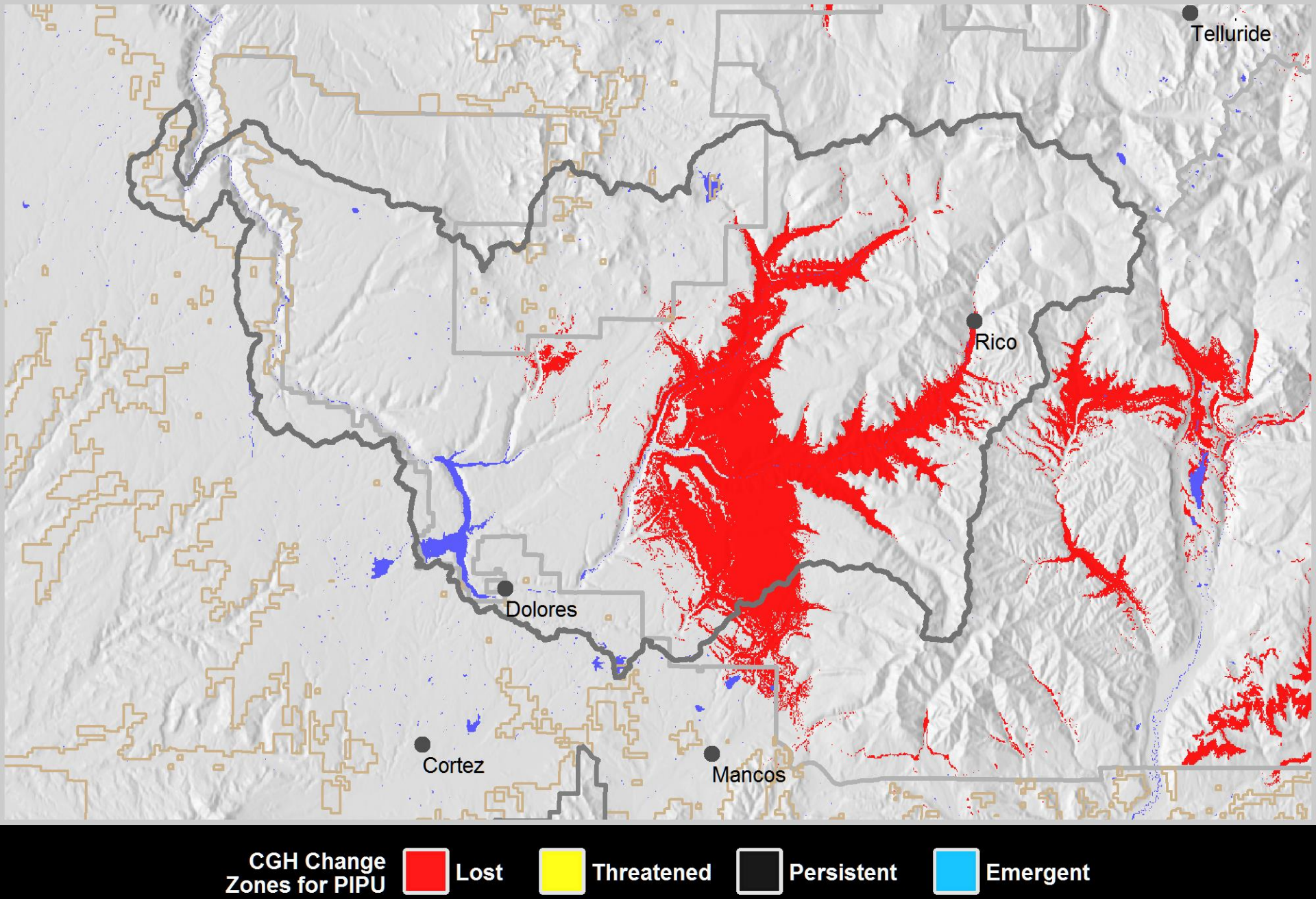
Emergent

Engelmann spruce

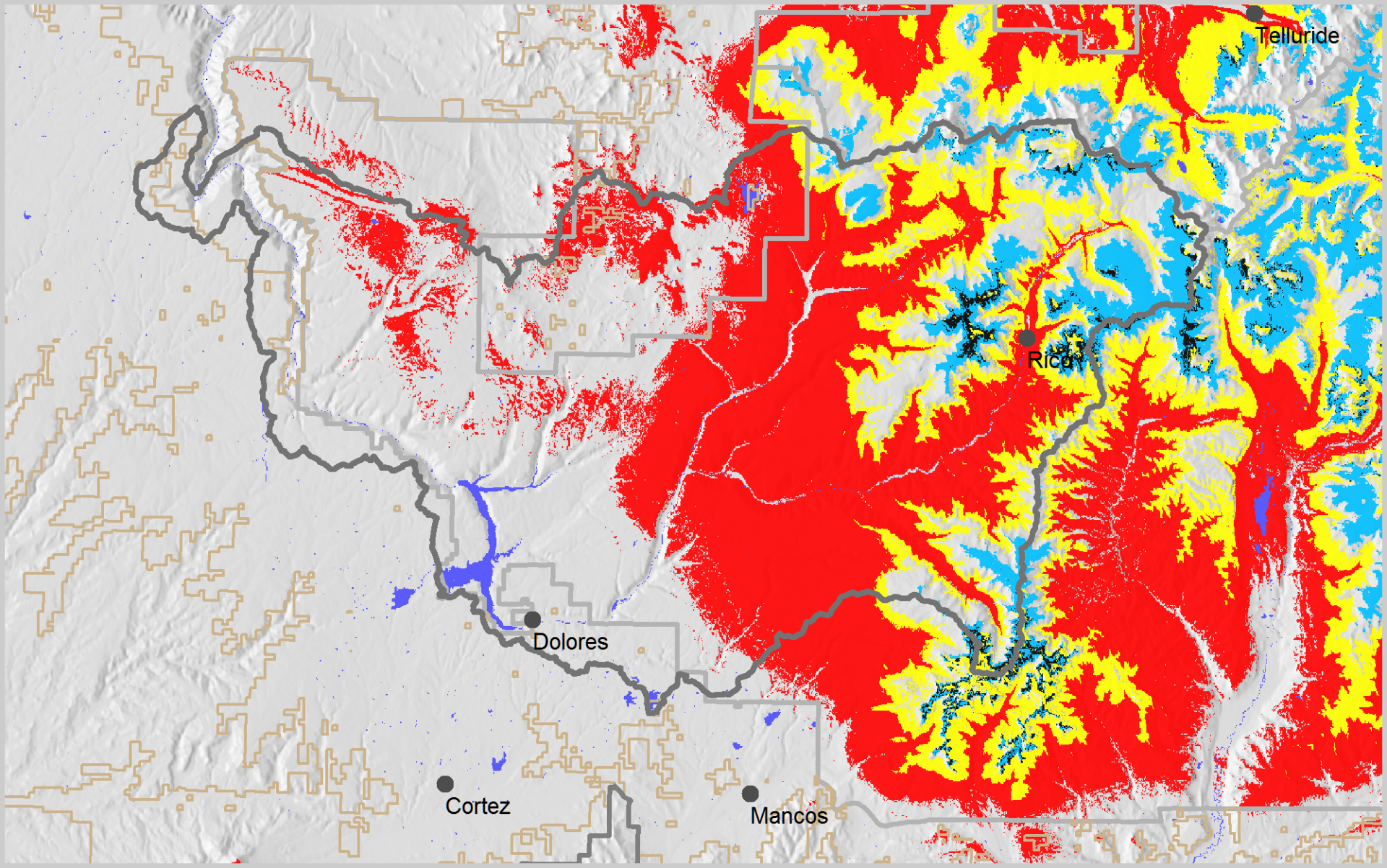


CGH Change Zones for PIPO: Lost, Threatened, Persistent, Emergent

Ponderosa pine

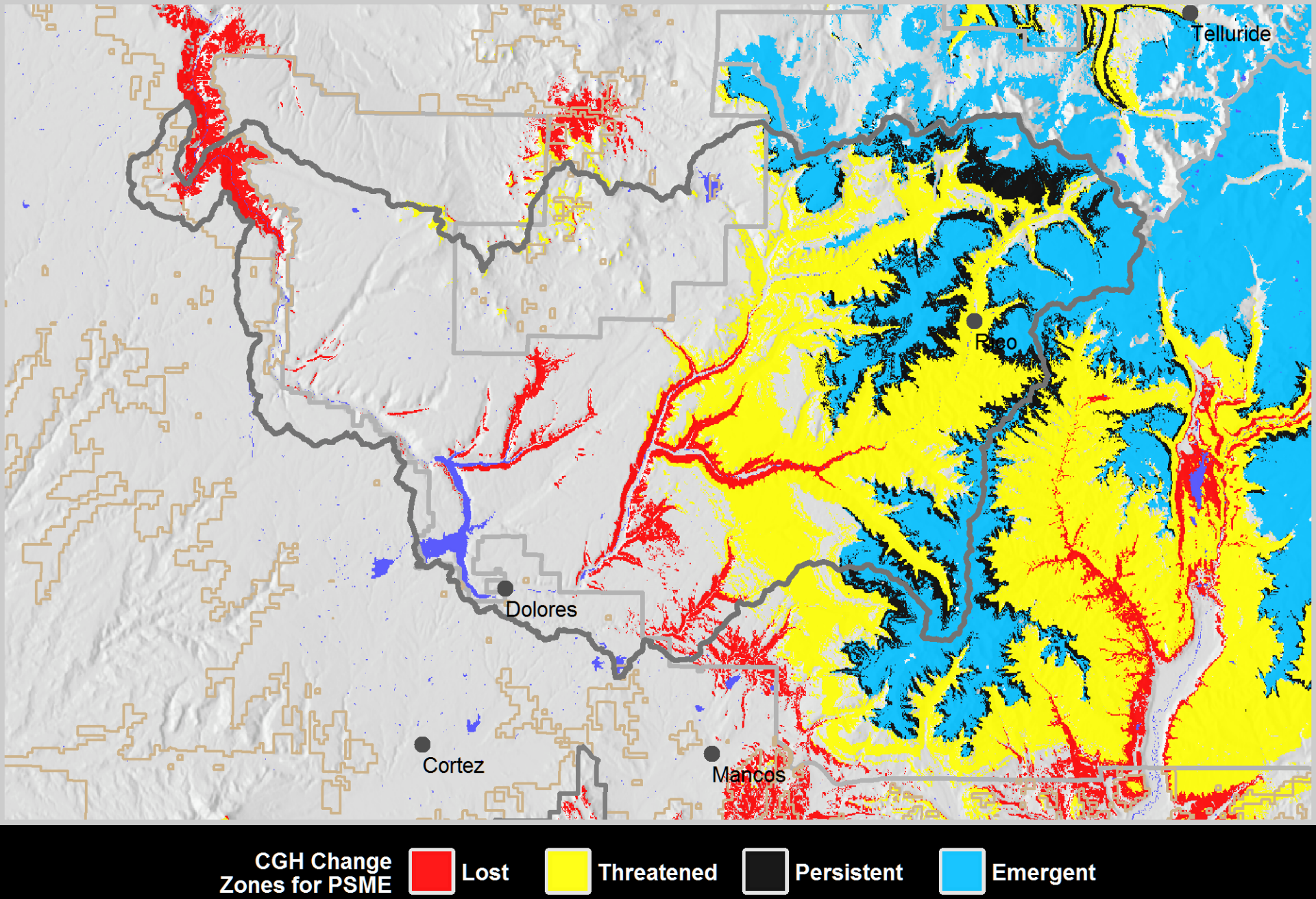

Telluride
Rico
Dolores
Cortez
Mancos
CGH Change Zones for PIPU
Lost
Threatened
Persistent
Emergent

Blue spruce

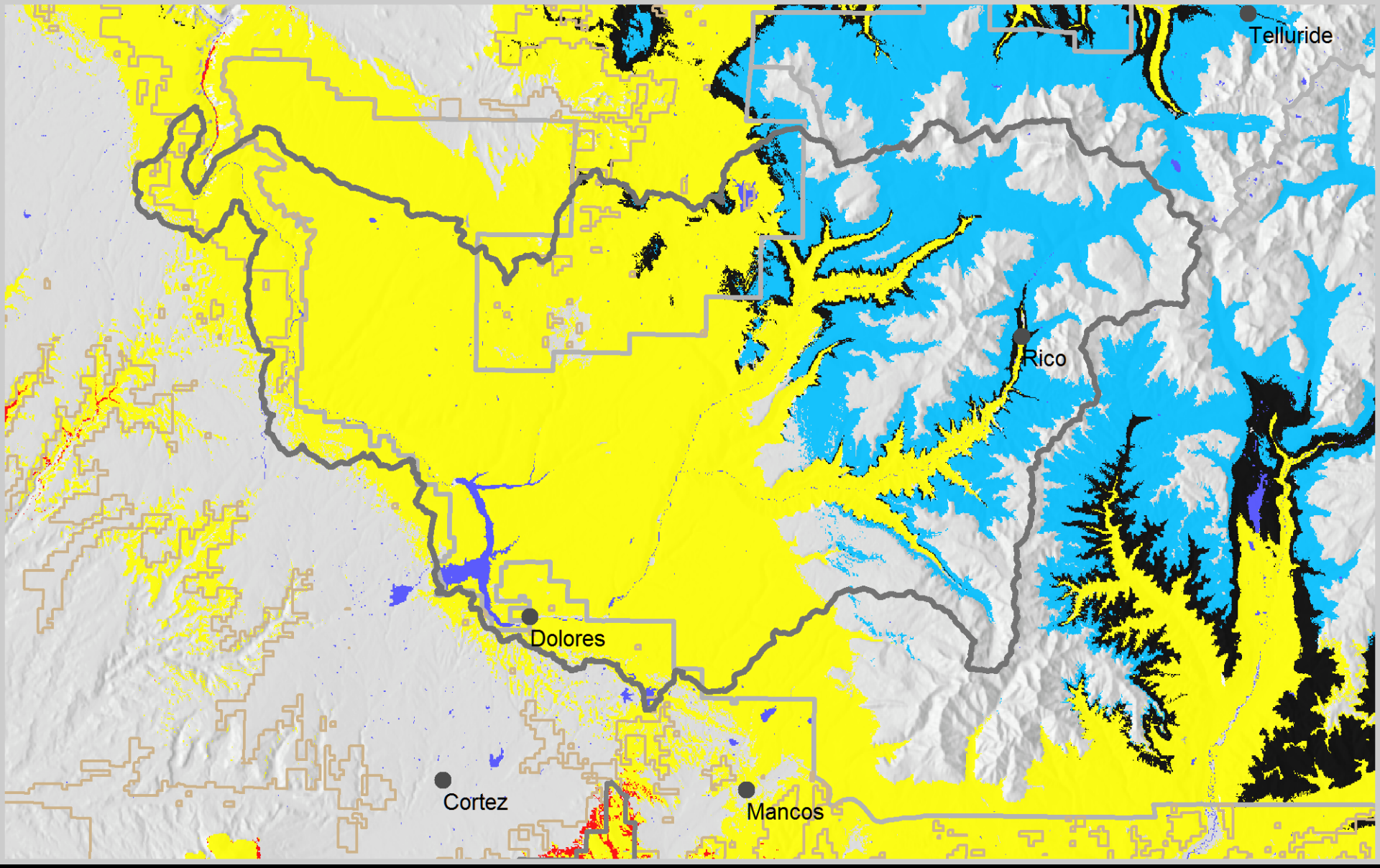


CGH Change Zones for POTR5 | Lost | Threatened | Persistent | Emergent

Aspen

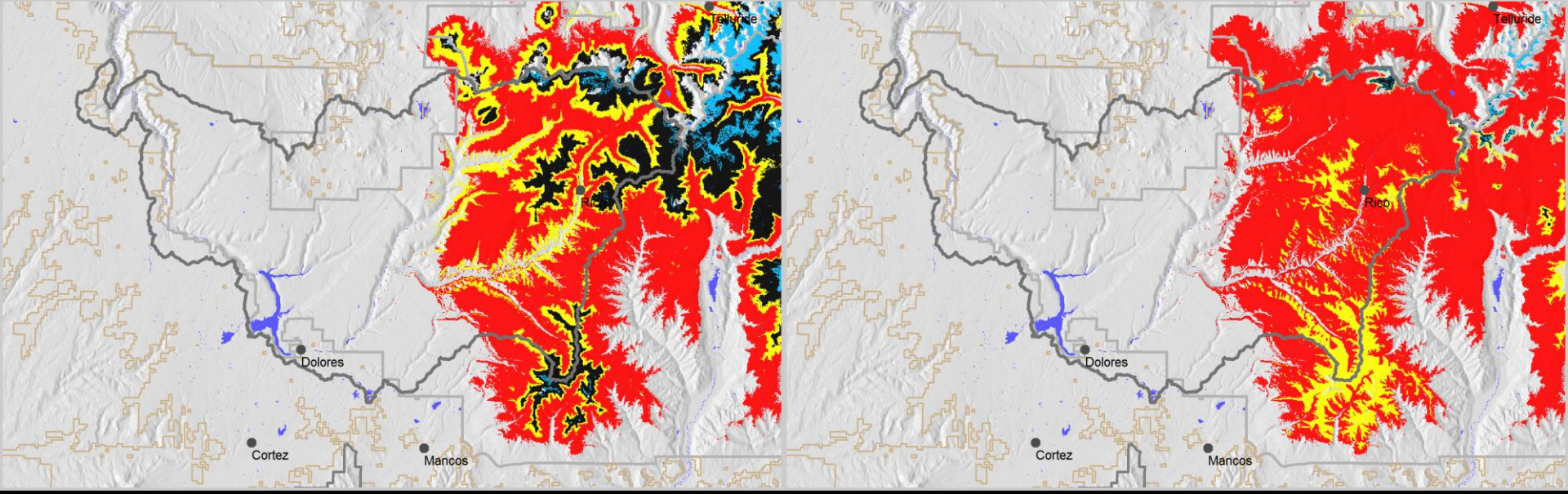

Telluride
Rico
Dolores
Cortez
Mancos
CGH Change Zones for PSME
Lost
Threatened
Persistent
Emergent

Douglas-fir



CGH Change Zones for QUGA | Lost | Threatened | Persistent | Emergent

Gambel oak

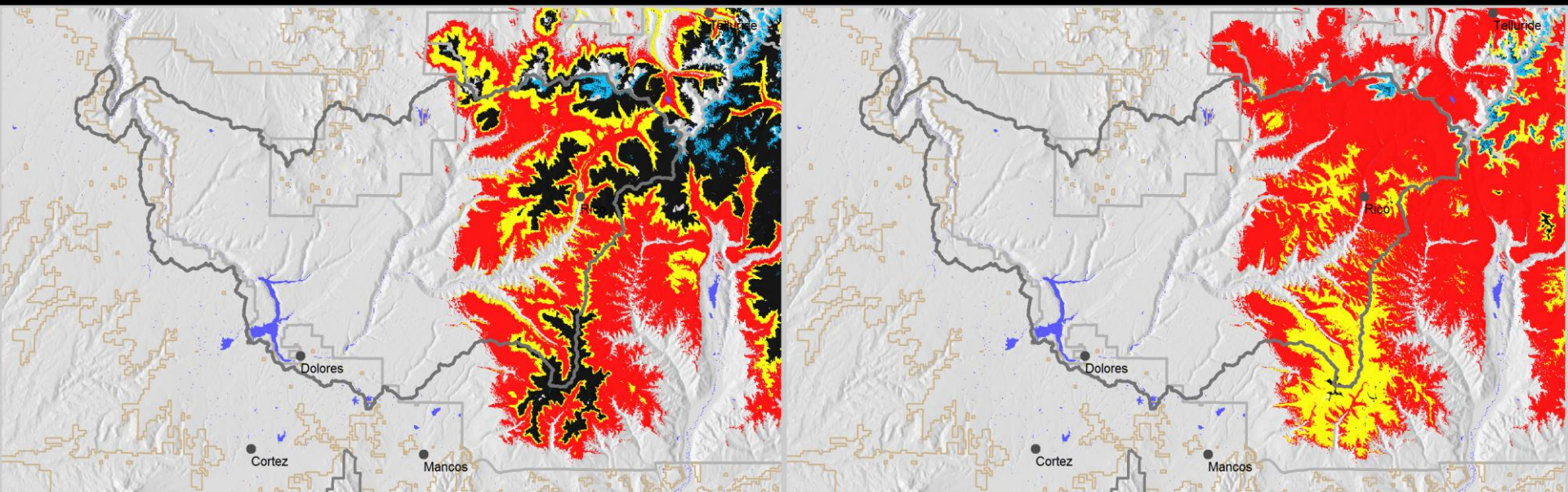


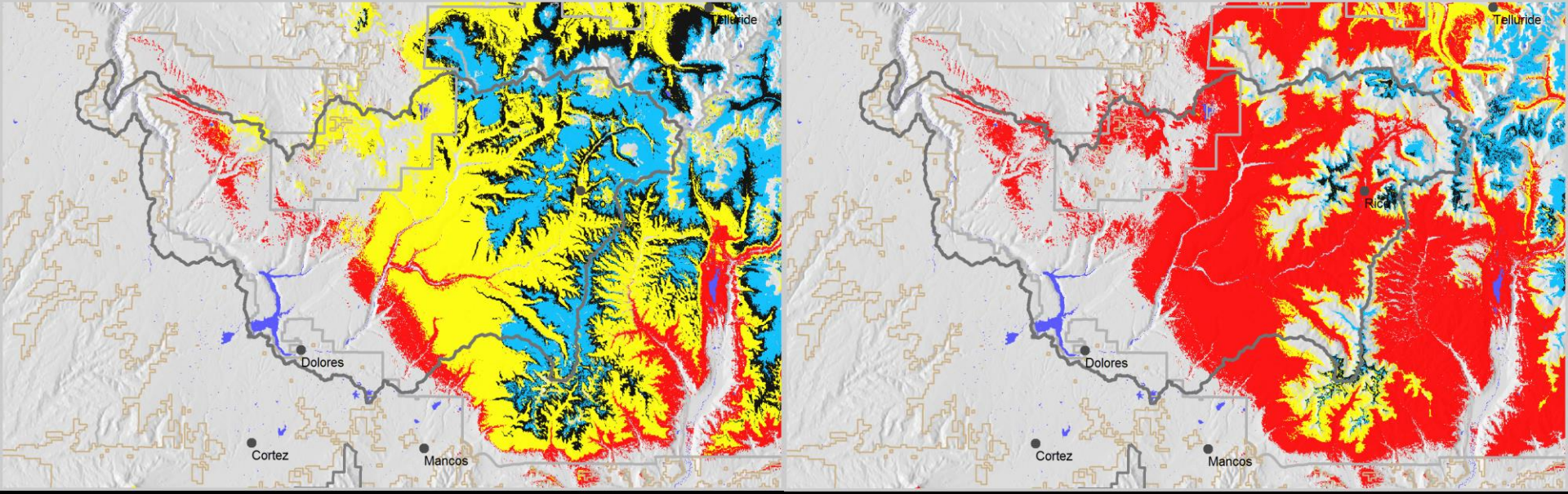
Favorable climate

Subalpine fir

Engelmann spruce

Unfavorable climate





CCSM4_rcp45 Change Zones for POTR5 Lost Threatened Persistent Emergent

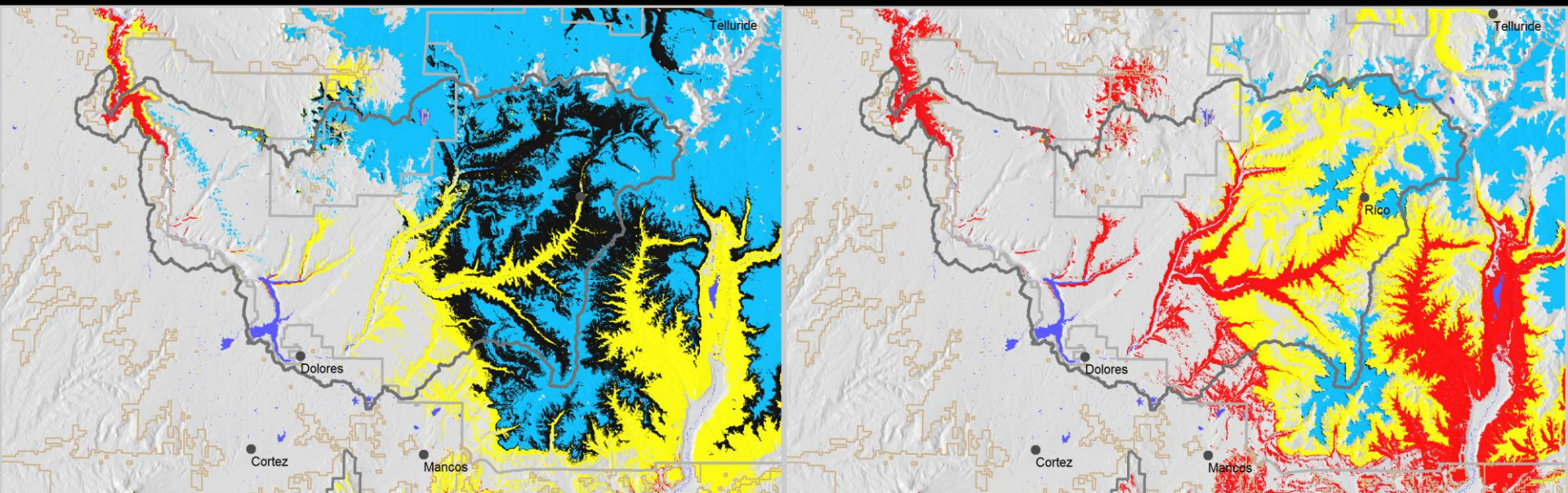
HadGEM2ES_rcp85 Change Zones for POTR5 Lost Threatened Persistent Emergent

Favorable climate

Aspen

Douglas-fir

Unfavorable climate

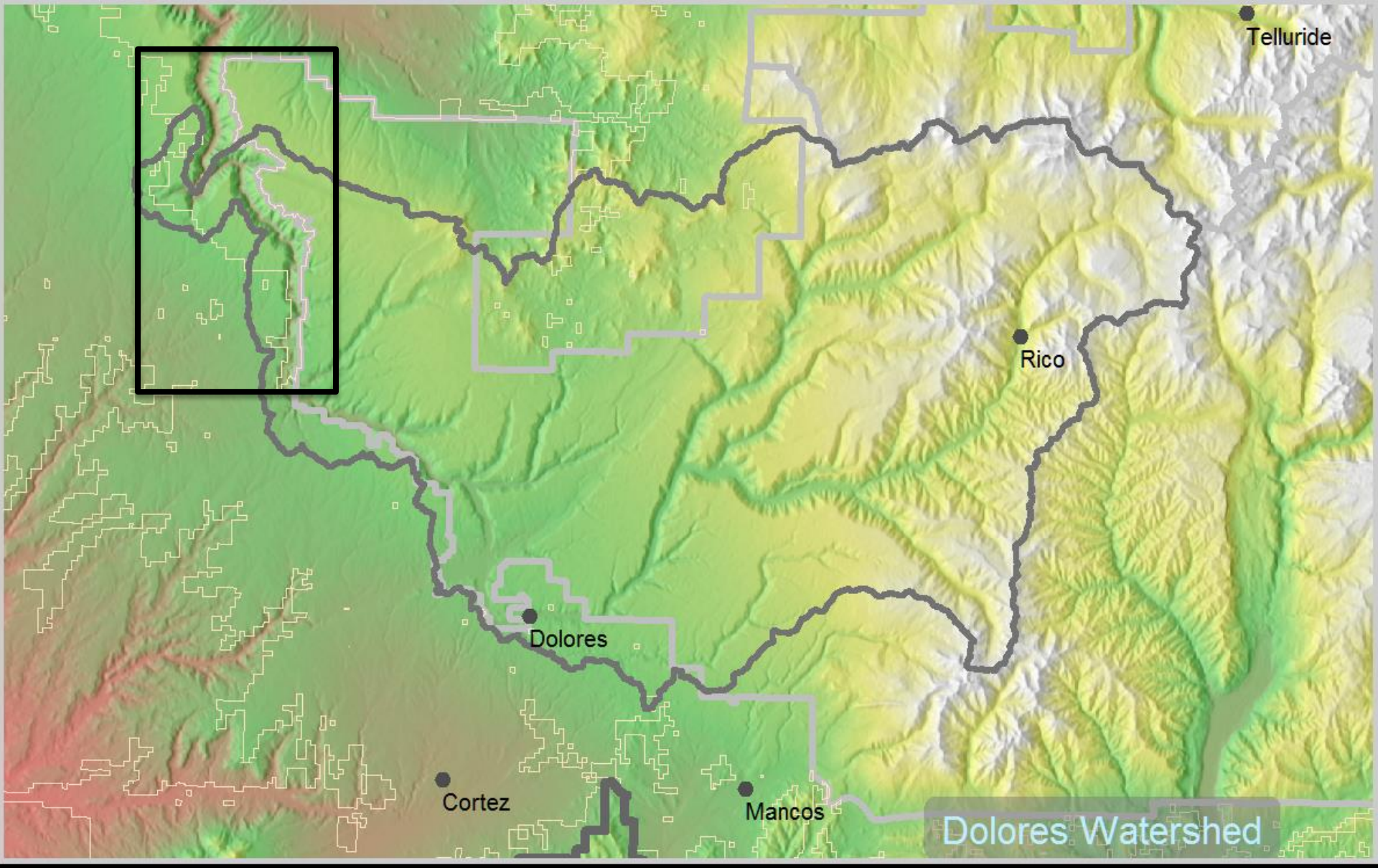


Potential Applications

- Having a good estimate of where species will and will not be suited in the future, we can:
  1. On a given site, apply treatments most appropriate for the future.
  2. Focus efforts where they have the greatest likelihood of long-term success.
  3. Identify sites and strategies to protect special species.
- Planning
  - Forest
  - Landscape assessment
  - Projects

Project area pre-determined

APPLY TREATMENTS APPROPRIATE FOR PROJECTED FUTURE


Telluride
Rico
Dolores
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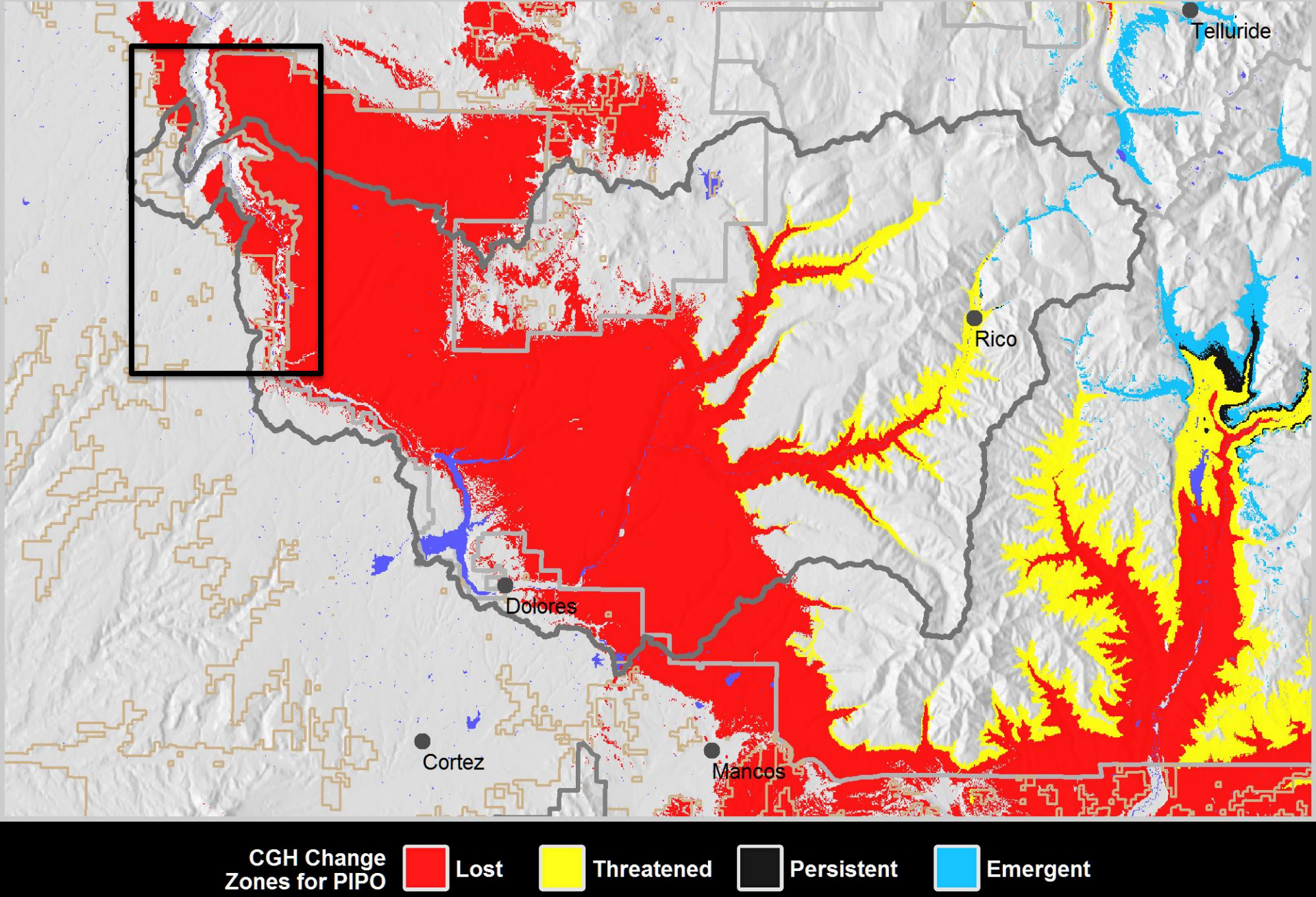
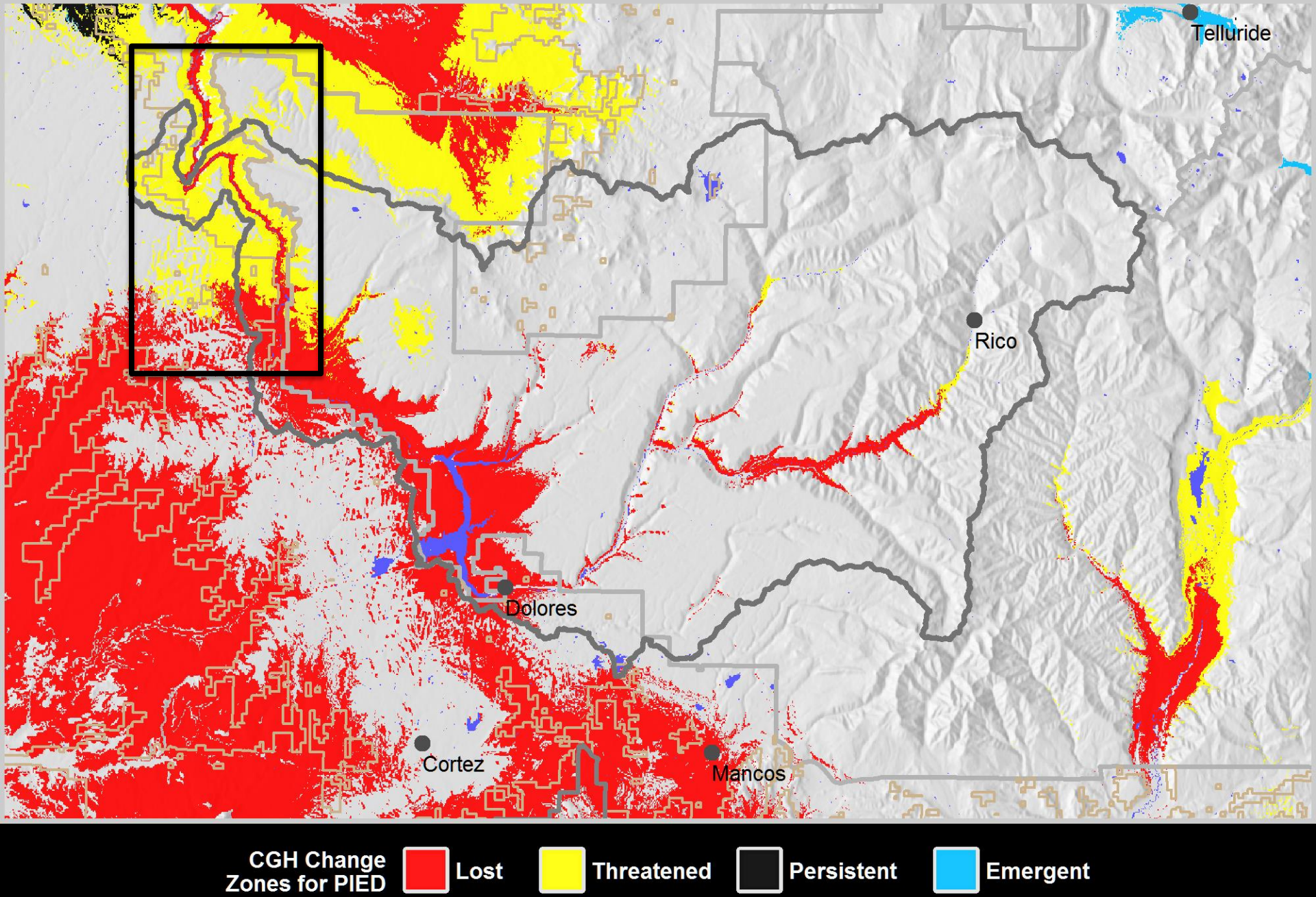
Mancos
Dolores Watershed



Ponderosa pine


Telluride
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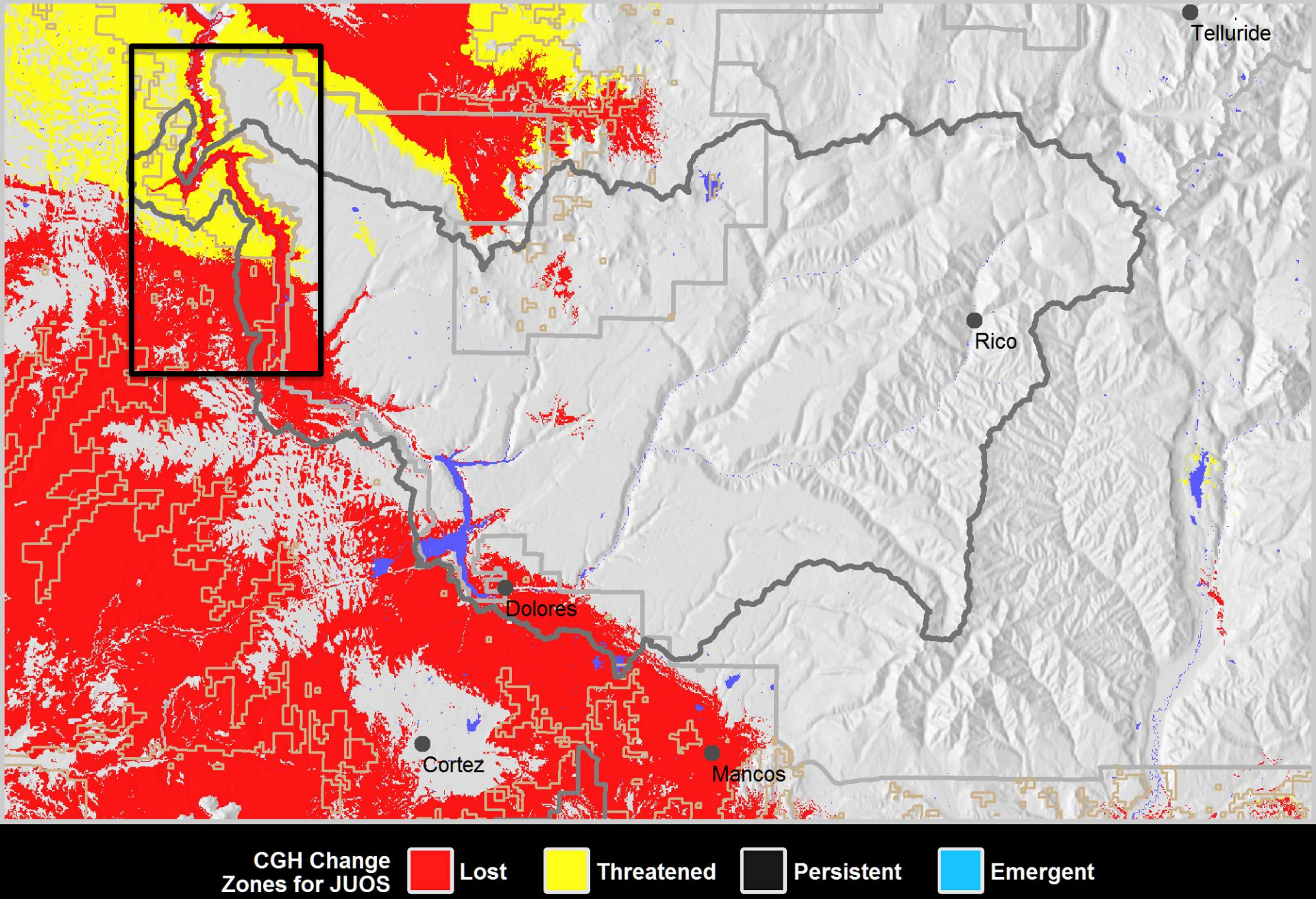
CGH Change Zones for PIED
Lost
Threatened
Persistent
Emergent

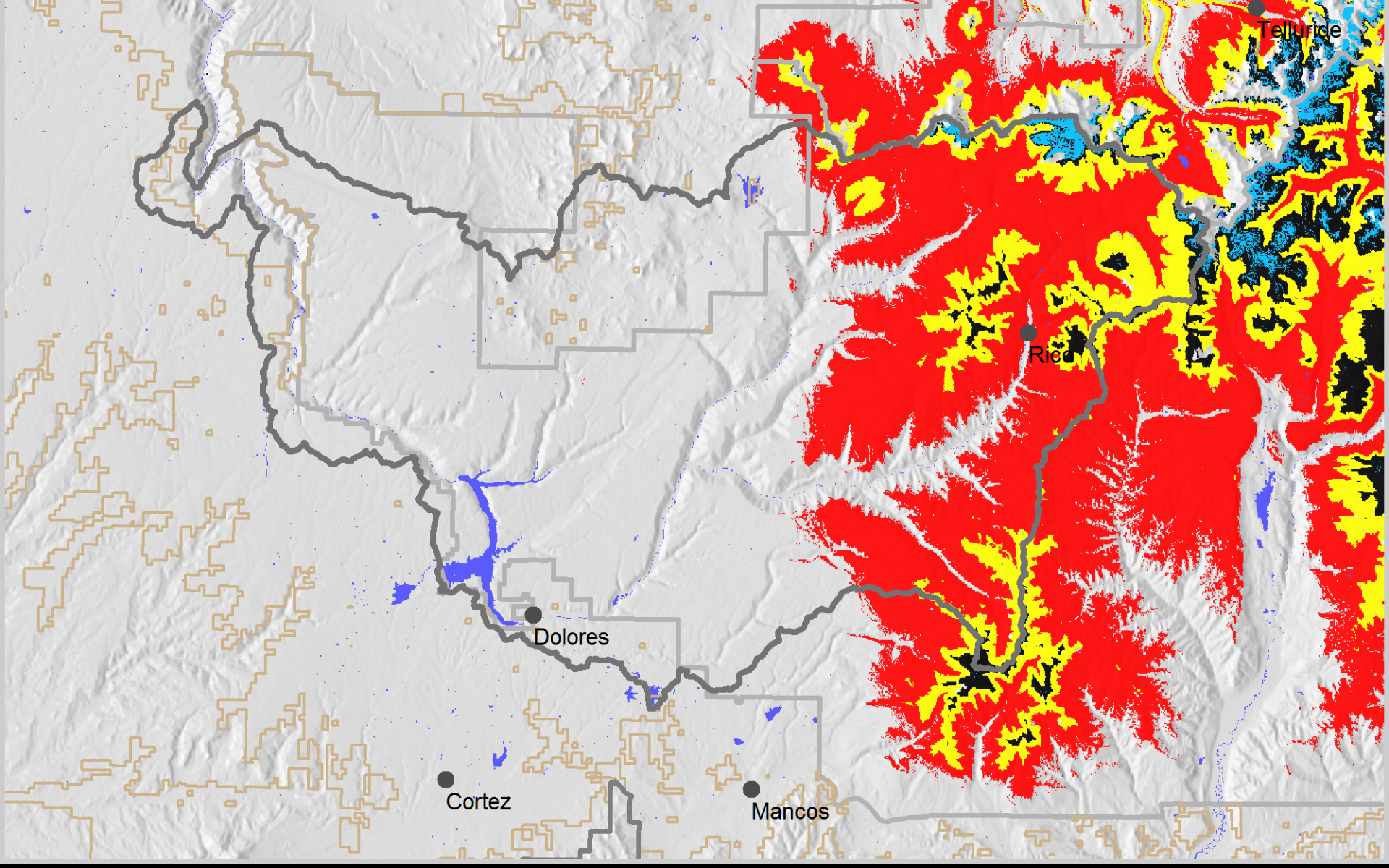
Piñon



Utah juniper

Where should we manage spruce for timber?

IDENTIFY AREAS ON THE LANDSCAPE WHERE TREATMENTS HAVE THE GREATEST CHANCE OF LONG-TERM SUCCESS



CGH Change Zones for PIEN: Lost, Threatened, Persistent, Emergent

Engelmann spruce

Where to manage spruce?

PERSISTENT zone

- Manage as normal.

THREATENED zone

- Manage as 2nd priority, but
- Focus more on resilience.

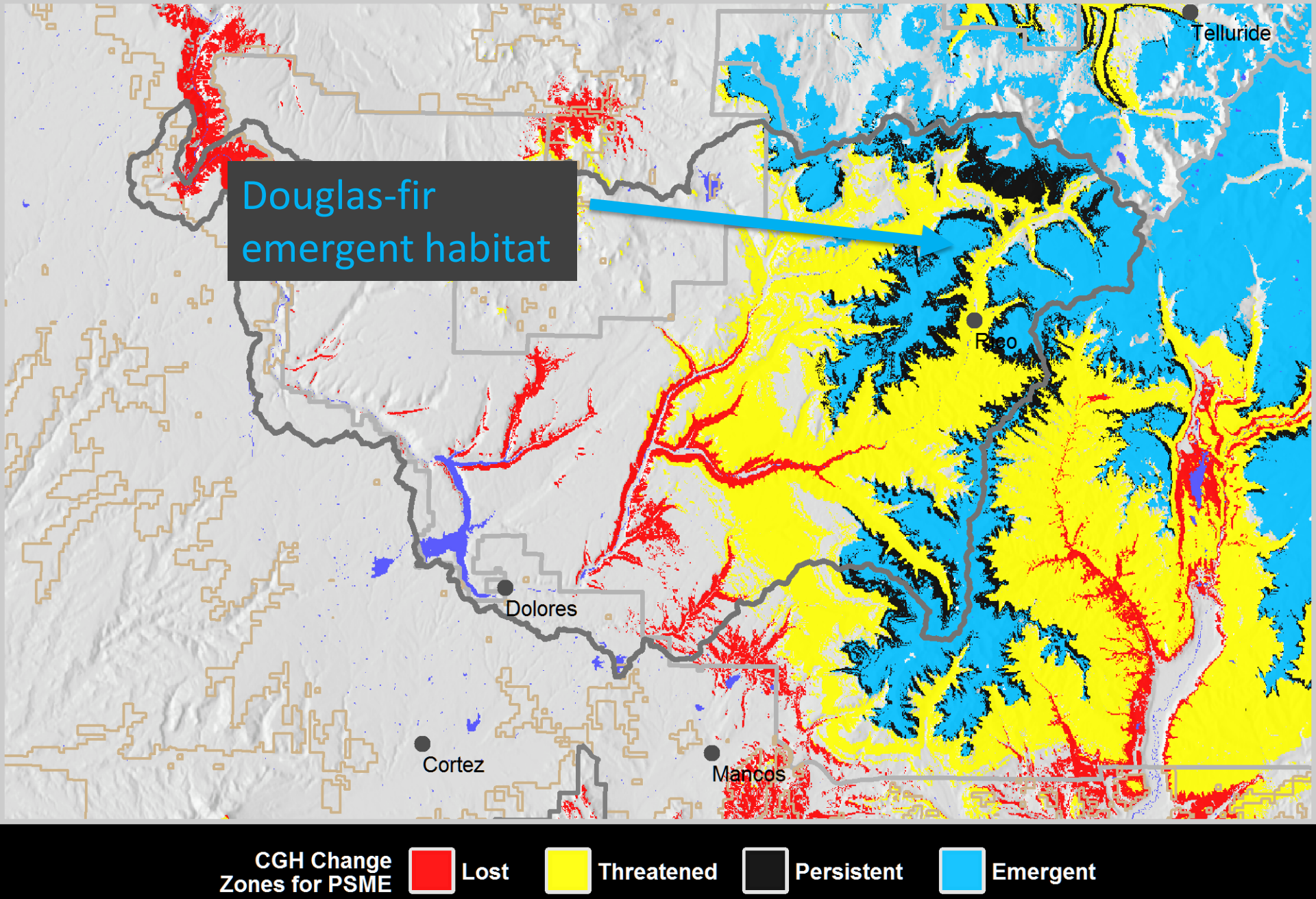
LOST zone

- Avoid investing in the future of spruce.
- Treat for short-term benefits and to
- Begin pushing cover-type to the future.

What about the EMERGENT zone?

ASSISTED AND FACILITATED MIGRATION

- Assisted migration:
  - Movement of species and populations to facilitate range expansion in direct management response to climate change
- Facilitated migration
  - Enhancing opportunities for self-migration by favoring seed production and dispersal in current habitat and receptive seedbeds in nearby emergent habitat.


Douglas-fir emergent habitat
Telluride
Rico
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CGH Change Zones for PSME
Lost
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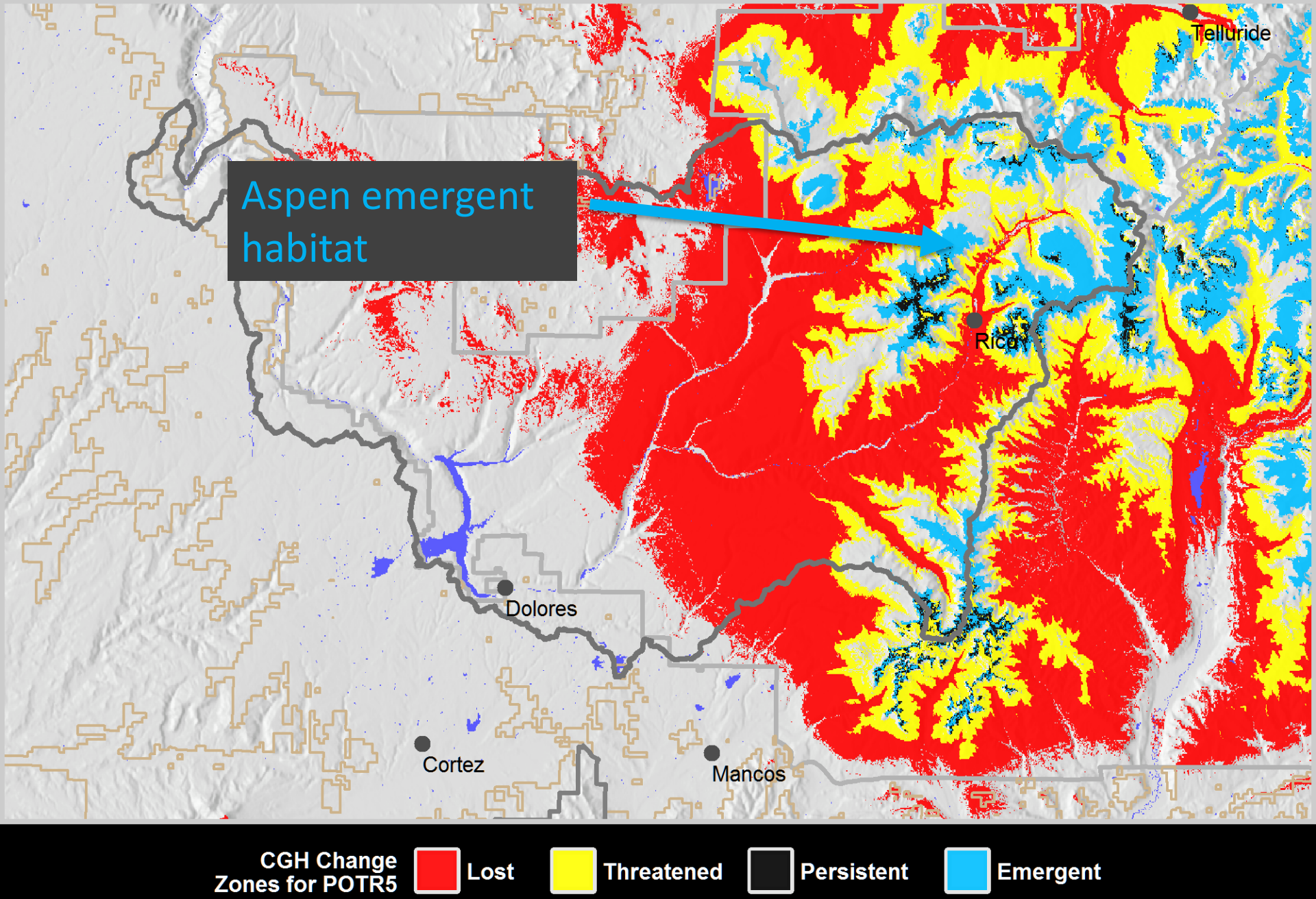
Aspen emergent habitat
Telluride
Rico
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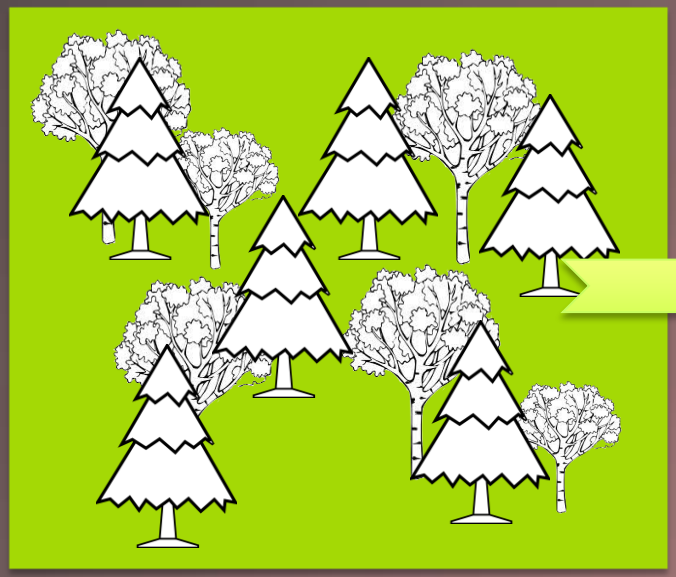
Mancos
CGH Change Zones for POTR5
Lost
Threatened
Persistent
Emergent

Facilitating Migration

Persistent or Threatened



Emergent

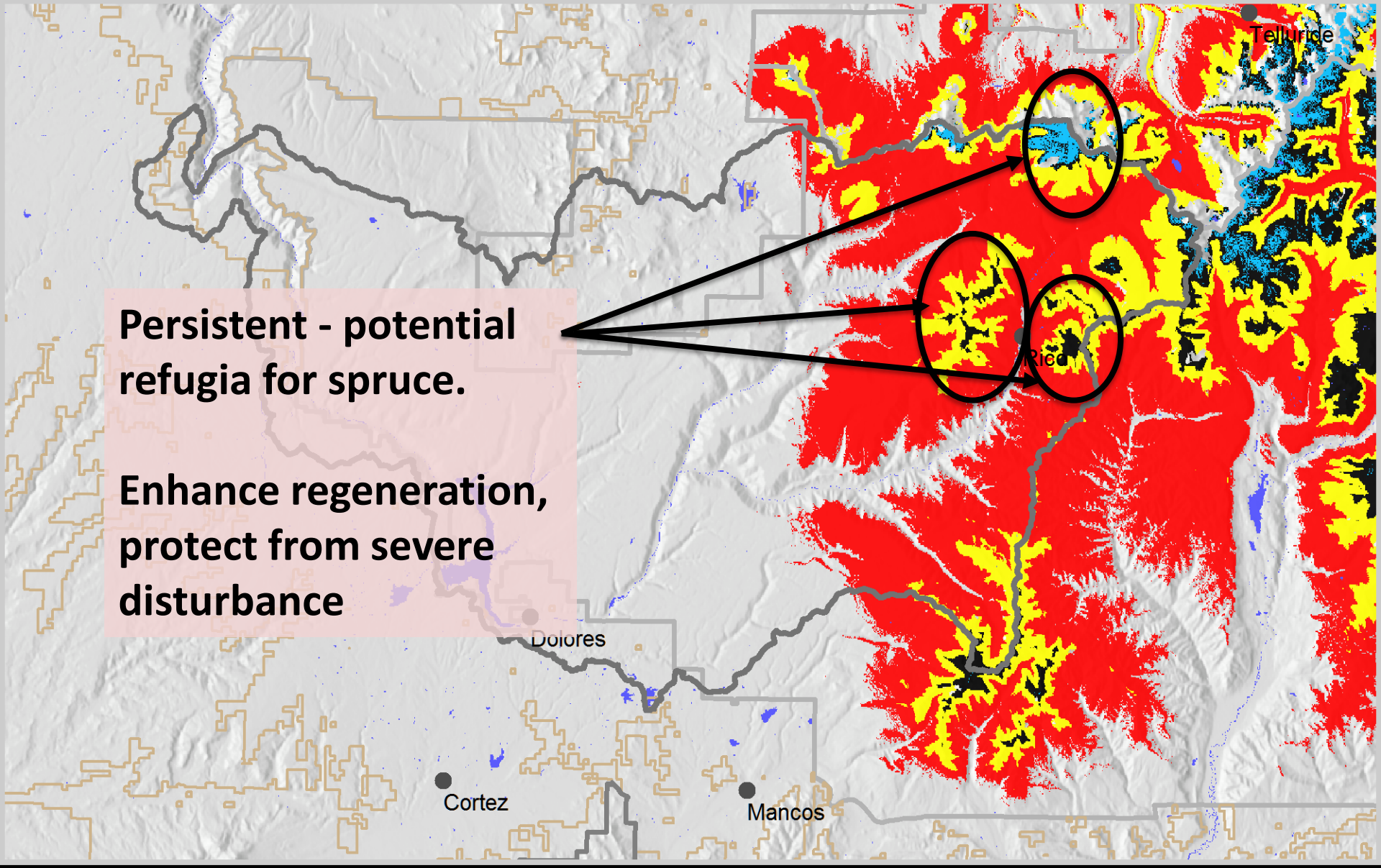
Prevailing wind

Promote existing (female) aspen near Emergent areas to enhance seed production

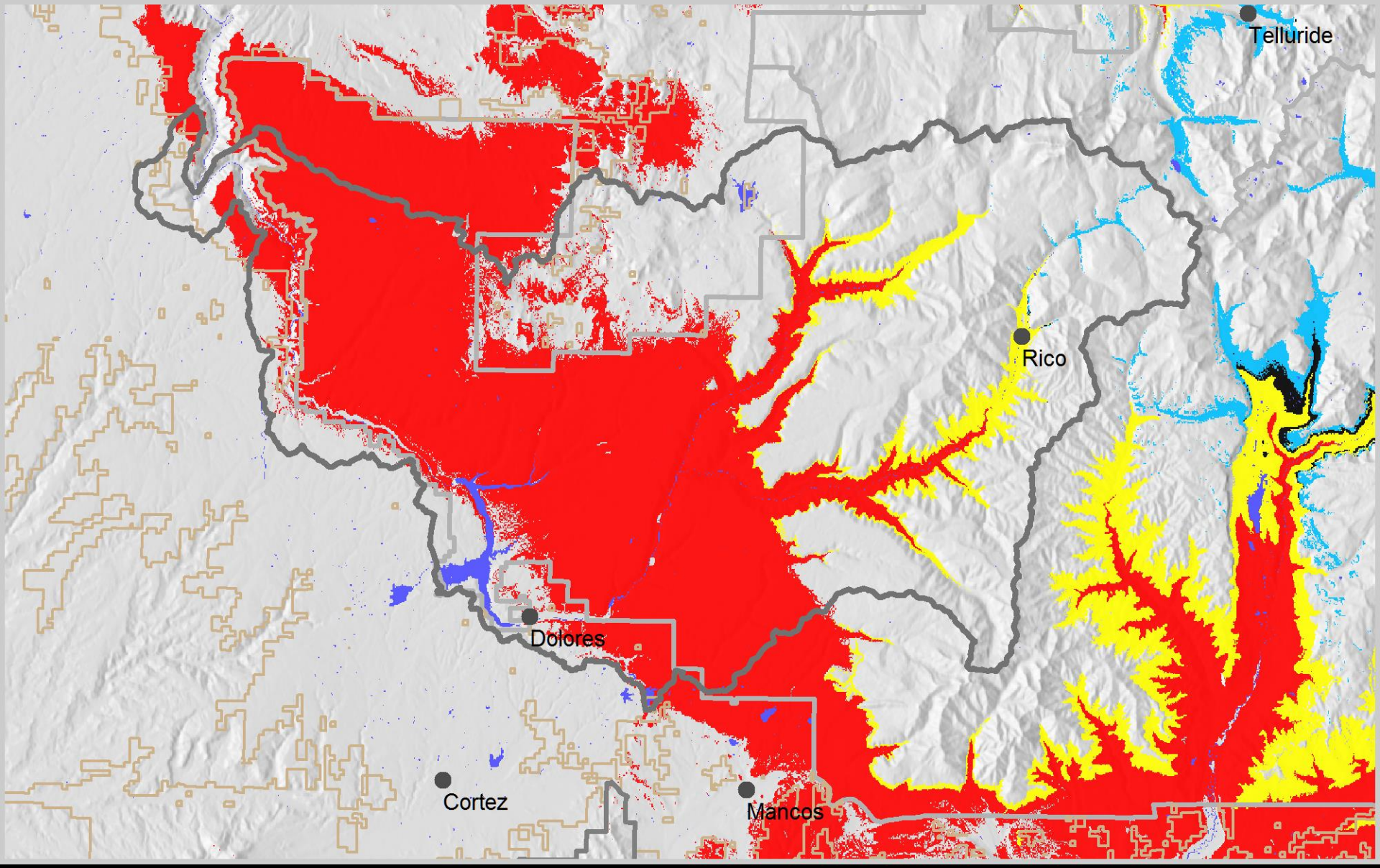
Favor disturbances (esp. fire) in newly suitable areas to facilitate aspen establishment

Climate refugia

PROTECTING SPECIES AT RISK

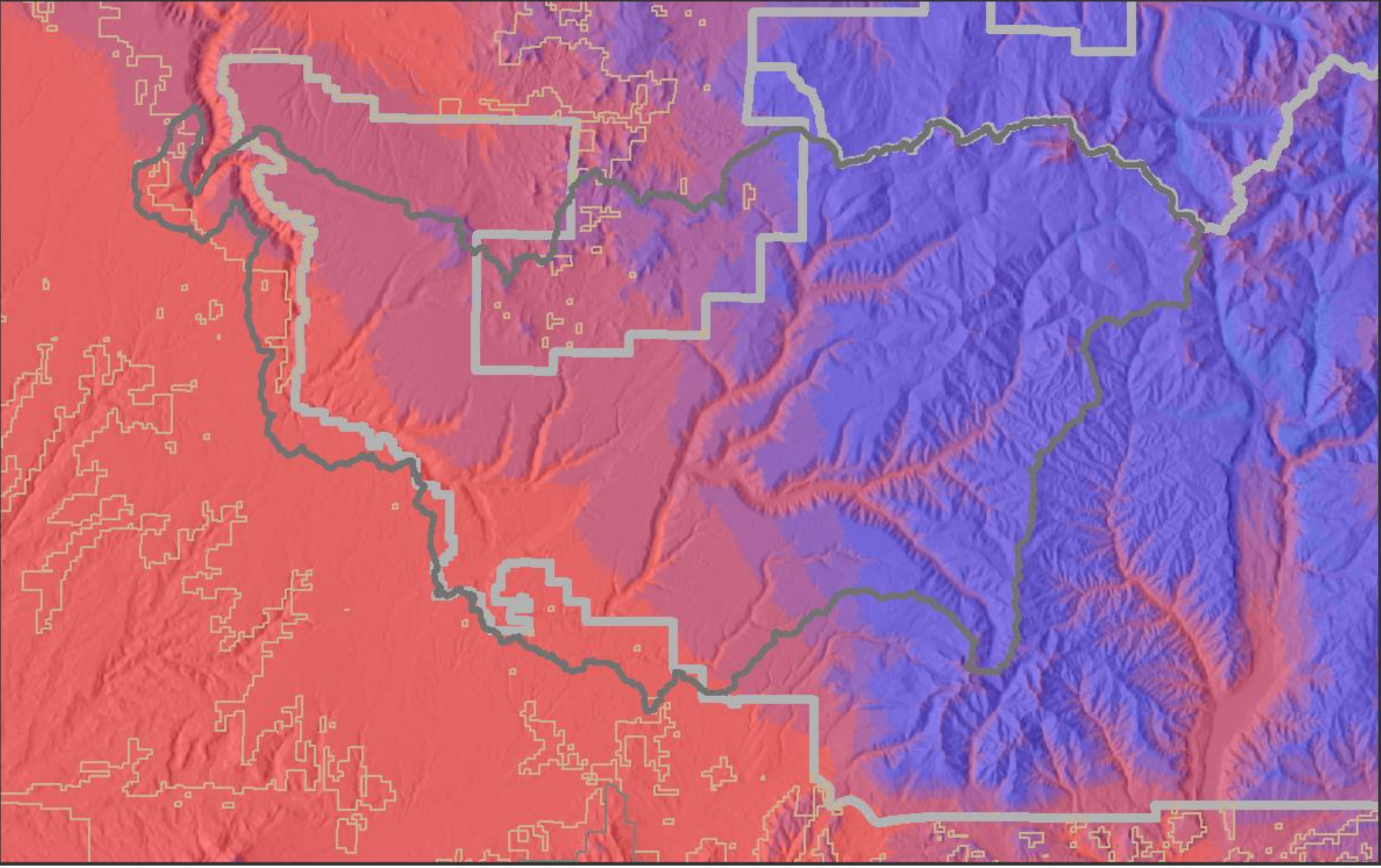


Engelmann spruce



CGH Change Zones for PIPO: Lost, Threatened, Persistent, Emergent

Ponderosa pine



Ponderosa pine 2060

PIPO Proportion of votes

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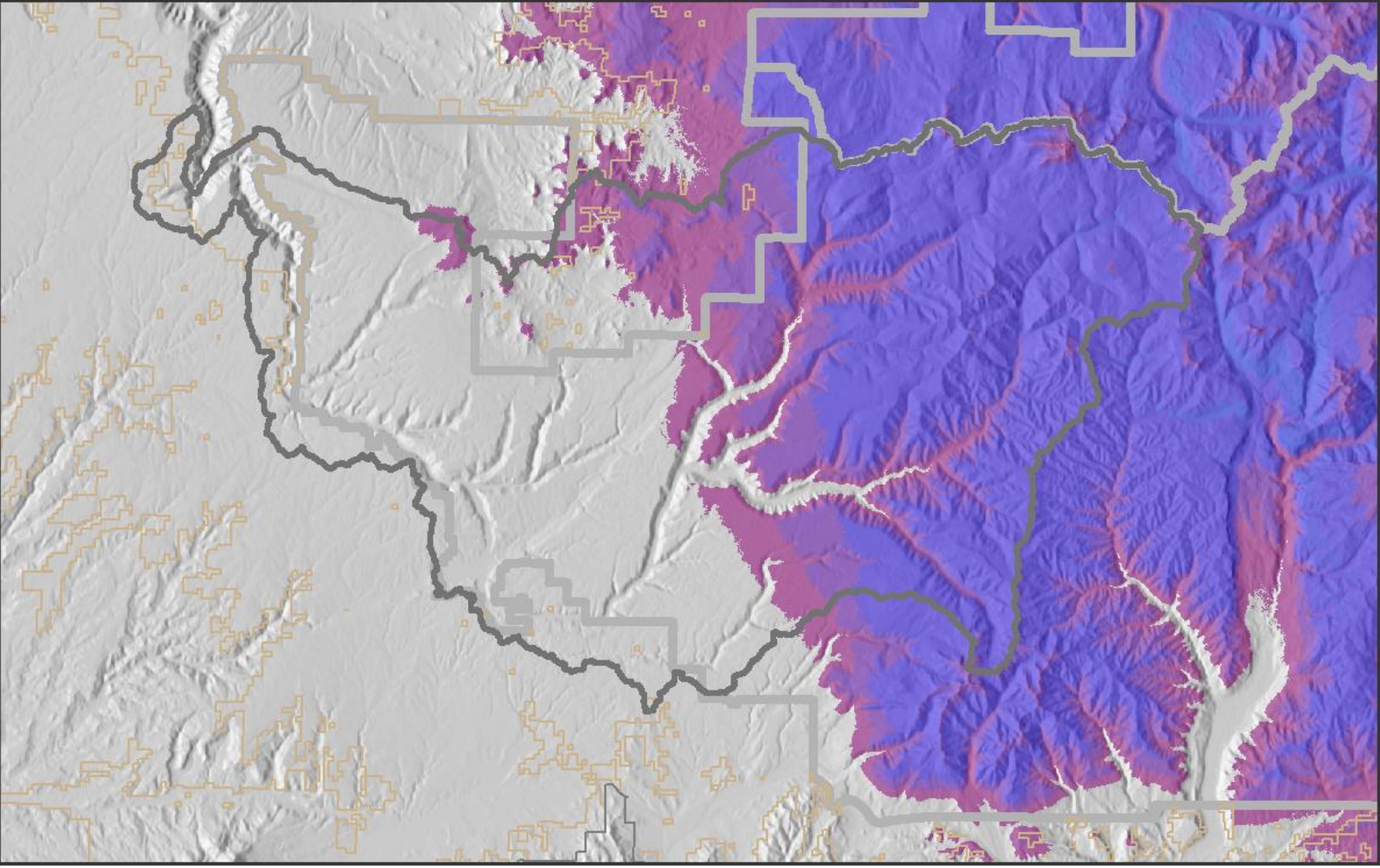

PIPO Proportion of votes

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10-20
20-30
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40-50
50-60

Conclusion

- Bioclimate models can be used to:
  - Design treatments most appropriate for the future.
  - Focus resources where there is the greatest likelihood of long-term success.
  - Identify best approaches and sites to manage species at risk.

“If you don’t plan for the future,

you’re planning for the past”