The following article from the *Austin American-Statesman* describes the effects that the huge forest fires of 1988 had on the wild lands of Yellowstone National Park.

Yellowstone Makes a Triumphant Return Ten Years After Fires

By Bruce Babbitt

What a difference a decade makes. Ten years ago this month, Yellowstone National Park was a sea of flames. Some of the largest wildfires in U.S. history swept restlessly across the park's magnificent terrain, incinerating forests, threatening historic buildings. The news media and politicians fanned the flames even higher. Yellowstone, they said, was devastated.

Night after night, horrific images of ash and flame flashed across America's TV screens.

One evening, after showing an enormous expanse of blackened forest, network news anchor Tom Brokaw solemnly concluded: "This is what's left of Yellowstone tonight." But guess what? Fire didn't destroy Yellowstone. Ten years later, we realize fire had the opposite effect. Fire rejuvenated Yellowstone. Elk and other wildlife are healthy.

Tourism is thriving. Biodiversity is booming. New forests are rising from the ashes of old ones. The recovery is so dramatic it deserves a closer look.

First, a bit of background: The 1988 fires were gigantic.

They swept over roughly 793,000 of Yellowstone's 2.2 million acres—one third of the park. Some were lightning-caused; others were of human origin. The $120 million firefighting effort amassed against them has been called the largest in U.S. history. The heroic work saved many key structures. But in the wild lands, it made almost no difference.

What put Yellowstone's fires out was not retardant-dropping planes or armies of firefighters on the ground. It was a quarter inch of autumn rain.

In July and August, as fires raged across the park, business owners fumed. Our future is ruined, they said. Tourism is dead. But today, tourism is very much alive. Yellowstone has set numerous visitation records since 1988. Fire has not repelled tourists; it has attracted them—just as it attracts many species of wildlife. Ten years later, the number one question asked of Yellowstone naturalists remains "What are the effects of the fires?" The answer is simple: The fires were therapeutic. Since 1988, some seventy scientific research projects have looked at various aspects of the Yellowstone fires. Not one has concluded the fires were harmful.

That sounds too good to be true. But it is. The science is there to prove it.

Come to Yellowstone this summer and see for yourself.

Pull off the road near Ice Lake, east of the Norris Geyser Basin. Here the fire burned especially savagely. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of mature lodgepole pine trees were destroyed. But today, the forest floor is a sea of green— knee-high lodgepoles planted, literally, by the fires of 1988.

Yellowstone's lodgepole forest is a place of mystery. In order to live, it must first die. It must burn. The fire that swept through here worked an ancient magic: It scorched lodgepole cones, melted their sticky resin, and freed the seeds locked inside. Within minutes, a new forest was planted.

By suppressing wildfire, as Smokey Bear has taught us to do, we interrupt nature's cycles. We rob our western forests of something they need desperately. We steal their season of rebirth. Without fire, pine forests grow senile, prone to disease, and unnaturally thick.

I'm not suggesting that we worship fire—that we let it run wild outside of natural parks and wilderness areas. But we can use it wisely. We can treat it, when possible, as an ally, not an enemy, and use it more frequently under controlled conditions to protect communities and make forests healthier.

Look closely around Ice Lake and you will almost surely see something else: wildlife. Bison, elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats have all prospered since 1988.

Just as fire rejuvenated lodgepoles, so, too, did it revitalize plants that grazing animals eat.

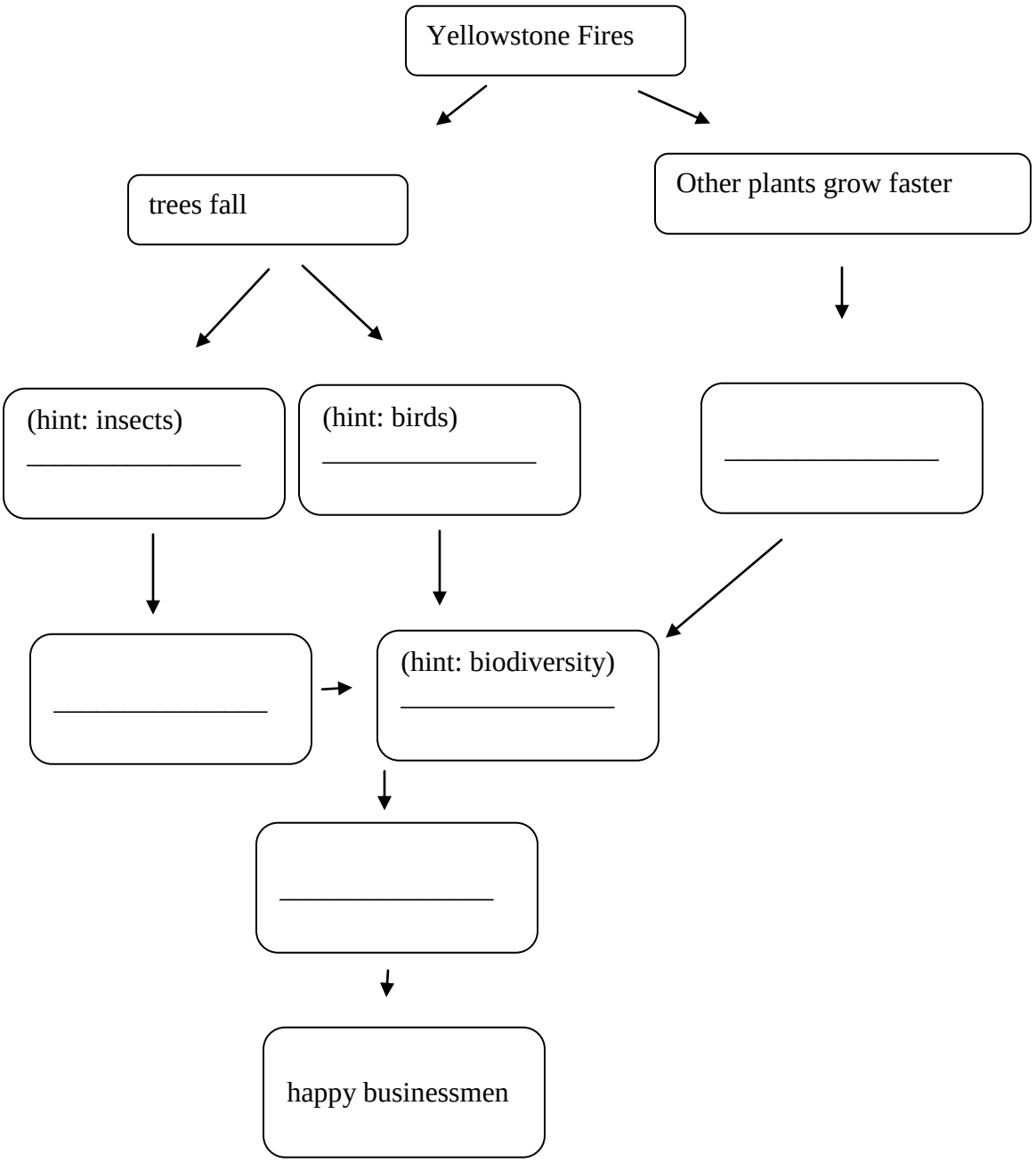
Walt Disney got it wrong: Bambi and his forest friends have nothing to fear—and much to gain—from fire.

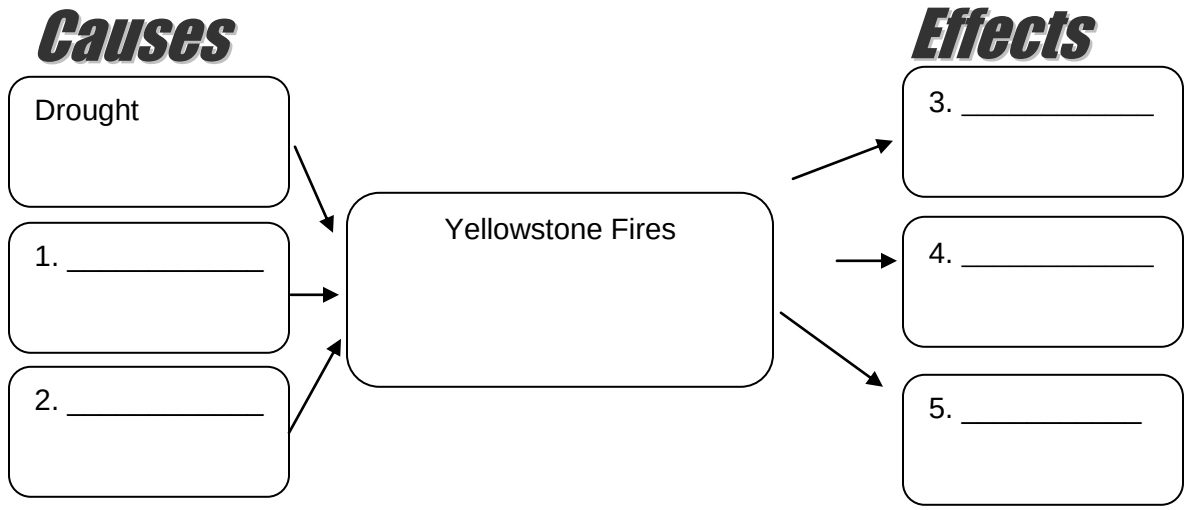
If you're lucky, you may also see Yellowstone's king of beasts: the grizzly bear. To a grizzly, wildfire is a meal ticket.

Fires kill trees, which fall to the ground and fill up with insects: grizzly sushi. Others enjoy the feast, too. Before 1988, three-toed woodpeckers were almost nonexistent in Yellowstone. After 1988, one ornithologist spotted thirty in one day. But dead lodgepoles are more than lunch counters; they are housing opportunities, home sites for mountain bluebirds, tree swallows, and other "cavity-nesting" birds and mammals.

Ten years ago, the news media said fire "blackened" Yellowstone. Today, we know the reverse is true. Fire has painted the park brighter, added color and texture to its ecosystem, and increased the diversity and abundance of its species. As one Yellowstone scientist put it recently, "Biodiversity has gone through a revolution at Yellowstone."

1. As the fires raged, what long-term consequences did people expect?
2. What caused the fires?
3. What is one effect of the Yellowstone fires?
4. What conclusion does the writer draw about forest fires?
5. What animals benefit from fallen trees?




Causes
Effects
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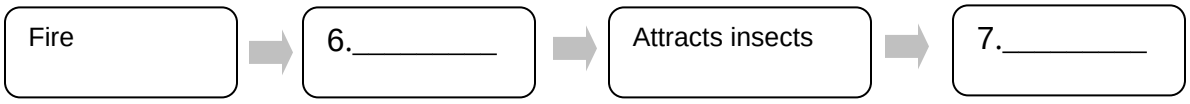
1. _____
2. _____
Yellowstone Fires
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____


Fire
6._____
Attracts insects
7._____