

Claim: Global Warming has increased U.S. Wildfires

REBUTTAL

In the U.S., wildfires are in the news almost every late summer and fall. The National Interagency Fire Center has recorded the number of fires and acreage affected since 1985. These data show that the trend in the number of fires is actually down while the trend in the acreage burned has increased.

The NWS tracks the number of days where weather (not forest) conditions are conducive to wildfires such that they issue red-flag warnings. The number of red-flag days has not trended upward due to “Global Warming.”

In the past, lightning and campfires caused most forest fires; today most are the result of power lines igniting trees. The power lines have increased proportionately with the population, so it can be reasoned that most of the damage from wild fires in California is partially a result of increased population not Global Warming. The increased danger is also greatly aggravated by [poor government forest management choices](#).

To summarize, any increase in the frequency and/or severity of the impacts of annual end of dry season forest fires are a forest management and environmental and governmental policy induced issue, not a Global Warming induced one.

In the U.S., the 2016/17 winter was a very wet one, and in the mountains in the west, a snowy one (in parts of the northern Sierra, the wettest, snowiest on record). Wet winters cause more spring growth that will dry up in the dry summer heat season and become tinder for late summer and early fall fires before the seasonal rains return.

2017 was an active fire season in the U.S. but by no means a record. The U.S. had 64,610 fires, the 7th most in 11 years and the most since 2012. The 9,574, 533 acres burned was the 4th most in the past 11 years and most since 2015. The fires burned in the Northwest including Montana with a very dry summer then the action shifted south seasonally with

the seasonal start of the wind events like Diablo in northern California and Santa Ana to the south.

Fires spread to northern California in October with an episode of the dry Diablo wind that blows from the east and then in December as strong and persistent Santa Ana winds and dry air triggered a round of large fires in Ventura County.

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection the 2017 California wildfire season was the most destructive one on record with a total of 8,987 fires that burned 1,241,158 acres. It included five of the 20 most destructive wildland-urban interface fires in the state's history.



When it comes to considering the number of deaths and structures destroyed, the seven-fold increase in population in California from 1930 to 2017 must be noted. This increase in population means more people and home structures are in the path of fires.

Fires were in the news again this past summer especially in California coming after a wet March and April. But the reality is the number of fires ranks 8th most in the last 11 years (as of October 5). The fires have burnt the 5th most acres in that period. 2017 through October 5th, had the 5th most number of fifth greatest acreage burnt in the prior 10 years.

Year-to-date statistics	Fires	Acres
2018 (1/1/18 - 10/5/18)	47,853	7,741,080
2017 (1/1/17 - 10/5/17)	50,173	8,439,000
2016 (1/1/16 - 10/5/16)	45,904	4,808,665
2015 (1/1/15 - 10/5/15)	50,417	9,096,950
2014 (1/1/14 -10/5/14)	41,463	3,063,100
2013 (1/1/13 -10/5/13)	39,394	4,159,011
2012 (1/1/12 - 10/5/12)	49,072	8,828,875
2011 (1/1/11 - 10/5/11)	61,220	8,042,223
2010 (1/1/10 - 10/5/10)	57,686	2,991,775
2009 (1/1/09 - 10/5/09)	71,663	5,674,086
2008 (1/1/08 - 10/5/08)	68,696	4,761,445
10-year average Year-to-Date		
2008-2017	53,569	5,986,513

Some of the fires were very large and damaging. In 2017, deadly wildfires consumed over a million acres in West Coast states, damaging structures and forcing thousands to flee their homes.

ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES

California’s catastrophic wildfire season last year illuminated the years’ long stalemate between those who want to cut back the overgrown, beetle-infested national forests and environmentalists who have axed efforts to fell more trees, blaming the destructive fires on climate change. See more in the [Washington Times](#).

In December, 2017, the U.S. Forest Service announced that California had set a record with 129 million dead trees on 8.9 million acres, the result of a five-year drought and beetle-kill, but that its tree mortality task force had removed only about 1 million.

Meanwhile, the logging industry has continued its free fall, with timber harvesting dropping by 80 percent in the past 40 years, as projects in the national forests are killed or delayed by “frivolous litigation from radical environmentalists who would rather see forests and

communities burn than see a logger in the woods,” according to our Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke.

When a bi-partisan bill was passed last summer in California to help fund PGE tree cutting near power lines to lessen fire danger, it was vetoed by Governor Brown.

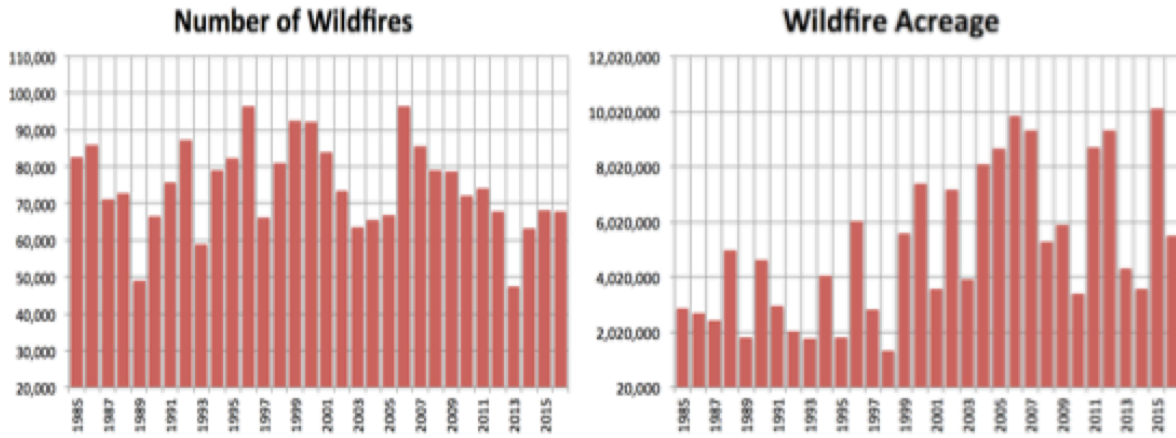
These same radical environmentalists hold growers, farmers and ranchers in the same level of contempt they have for foresters. Their actions have led to the diversion of water to rivers and the Pacific Ocean, threatening agriculture in the #1 agricultural state for produce.

University of Washington Professor of Atmospheric Sciences Cliff Mass pointed out in a recent interview with the Daily Caller: Wildfire area could well be increasing because of previous fire suppression, mismanagement of our forests, and a huge influx of people into the west, lightning fires and providing lots of fuel for them.

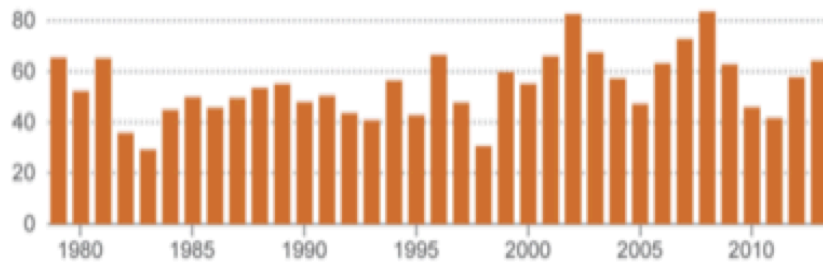
University of Alabama-Huntsville’s Distinguished Professor of Atmospheric Science John Christy says human mismanagement is the more important cause of the huge fires: *If you don’t let the low-intensity fires burn, that fuel builds up year after year. Now once a fire gets going and it gets going enough, it has so much fuel that we can’t put it out. In that sense, you could say that fires today are more intense, but it’s because of human management practices, not because mother-nature has done something.*

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has promoted a change to forest management policies, calling for a more aggressive approach to reduce the excess vegetation that has made the fires worse. See more.

The number of fires and acreage affected since 1985 show the trend in the number of fires is actually down while the trend in the acreage burned has increased. The NWS tracks the number of days where weather conditions are deemed conducive to wildfires such that they issued red-flag warnings. This data shows little, if any, “Global Warming” impact.



Number of weather days conducive to fire, by year



Source: Matt Jolly, U.S. Forest Service

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Finally, it should be noted that large-scale deadly fires are not unique to the nation's recent past. In 1871, during the week of Oct. 8-14, it must have seemed like the whole world was ablaze for residents of the Upper Midwest. Four of the worst fires in U.S. history all broke out in the same week across the region. The Great Chicago Fire, which destroyed about a third of the city's valuation at the time and left more than 100,000 residents homeless, stole the headlines.

But at the same time, three other fires also scorched the region. Blazes leveled the Michigan cities of Holland and Manistee in what has been referred to as the Great Michigan Fire, while across the state another fire destroyed the city of Port Huron. The worst fire of them all, however, might have been the Great Peshtigo Fire, a firestorm that ravaged the Wisconsin countryside, leaving more than 1,500 dead — the most fatalities by fire in U.S. history.”

Bottom Line

In summary, any increased impacts of annual end of dry season forest fires are a forest management and environmental and governmental policy induced issue, not a “Global Warming” induced one.

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