

# 'Extreme' wildfires and heavy smoke grip western US and Canada

July 15 2021, by Andrew Marszal

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A brutal start to the wildfire season in the western United States and Canada worsened Thursday as a massive Oregon blaze exploded in dry, windy conditions and a new California blaze threatened communities devastated by the 2018 Camp Fire.

Wildfire officials raised their preparedness level to the highest tier—the earliest such move in a decade—and Canada's military joined evacuation efforts, as the region reels from the effects of consecutive heat waves that experts say have been worsened by [global warming](#).

"This fire is going to continue to grow—the extremely dry vegetation and weather are not in our favor," said Joe Hessel, who is leading a team tackling Oregon's 227,000-acre Bootleg Fire.

Burning through the equivalent of 130,000 soccer fields, the Bootleg Fire some 250 miles south of Portland is the largest active blaze in the US, bellowing heavy smoke visible from space that is blanketing parts of neighboring Washington and Idaho.

Firefighters have been dispatched from as far away as San Francisco to tackle the massive blaze, which is showing "extreme" growth through drought-affected brush and due to hot, dry and breezy conditions.

It began more than a week ago and is just seven percent contained, having destroyed 21 homes and threatening almost 2,000 more.

The inferno is just one of around 70 [large fires](#) burning some one million acres (400,000 hectares) in the US alone.



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### **'Deja vu'**

The governor of the northwestern state of Montana on Wednesday declared a statewide wildland fire emergency.

And in California, the newly ignited Dixie Fire began ripping through land near the town of Paradise which was razed by the notorious 2018 Camp Fire—the deadliest in the state's modern history, killing 86 people.

"The fire started just a couple of miles [away], on the same road, as the Camp Fire in 2018," David Little of the North Valley Community Foundation, set up to help Camp Fire victims, told the Los Angeles Times.

"It's really a sense of deja vu that's uneasy."

The Dixie Fire doubled in size overnight and was zero percent contained, but was moving away from populated areas such as Paradise.

Elsewhere in California the much larger Beckwourth Complex—a combination of two blazes sparked by lightning last week—neared 100,000 acres Thursday.



Billowing heavy smoke visible from space is blanketing parts of Oregon, Washington and Idaho states.





The Bootleg Fire is burning through the equivalent of 130,000 soccer fields.

Last year was the worst in California's [modern history](#) by acres burnt, but 2021 is currently outpacing even that record destruction. The [fire](#)

season is starting earlier and ending later each year, while much of the state is in the grip of a severe multi-year drought.

In Canada, the armed forces are now participating in wildfire evacuations in British Columbia for the first time since the fires began, a military source told AFP.

Air quality alerts have been issued in many parts of British Columbia due to smoke from forest fires.

As of Thursday afternoon, the province had 309 fires, 23 of which started in the last two days.

Scientists say heat waves arriving in the western US and Canada in late June would have been "virtually impossible" without human-caused climate change.

Human activity has driven global temperatures up, stoking increasingly fierce storms, extreme heat waves, droughts and wildfires.

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Citation: 'Extreme' wildfires and heavy smoke grip western US and Canada (2021, July 15)  
retrieved 10 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2021-07-extreme-wildfires-heavy-western-canada.html>

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