

# Massive wildfires in US West bring haze to East Coast

July 21 2021, by Gillian Flaccus

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Smoke blocks the view looking toward Manhattan from Yankee Stadium before the Philadelphia Phillies played the New York Yankees in a baseball game Tuesday, July 20, 2021, in New York. Credit: AP Photo/Adam Hunger

Wildfires in the American West, including one burning in Oregon that's currently the largest in the U.S., are creating hazy skies as far away as New York as the massive infernos spew smoke and ash into the air in columns up to 6 miles (10 kilometers) high.

Skies over New York City were hazy Tuesday as strong winds blew smoke east from California, Oregon, Montana and other states. Oregon's Bootleg Fire grew to 616 square miles (1,595 square kilometers)—half the size of Rhode Island.

Fires also grew on both sides of California's Sierra Nevada. In Alpine County, the so-called California Alps, the Tamarack Fire caused evacuations of several communities and grew to 61 square miles (158 square kilometers) with no containment. The Dixie Fire, near the site of 2018's deadly Paradise Fire, was more than 90 square miles (163 square kilometers) and threatened tiny communities in the Feather River Valley region.

The smoke on the U.S. East Coast was reminiscent of last fall when multiple large fires burning in Oregon in the state's worst fire season in recent memory choked the local skies with pea-soup smoke but also impacted air quality several thousand miles away.

"We're seeing lots of fires producing a tremendous amount of smoke, and ... by the time that smoke gets to the eastern portion of the country where it's usually thinned out, there's just so much smoke in the atmosphere from all these fires that it's still pretty thick," said David Lawrence, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service. "Over the last two years we've seen this phenomenon."



In this photo provided by the Bootleg Fire Incident Command, a tanker drops retardant over the Mitchell Monument area at the Bootleg Fire in southern Oregon on Saturday, July 17, 2021. The 569-square-mile (1,474 square kilometers) Bootleg Fire is burning 300 miles (483 kilometers) southeast of Portland in and around the Fremont-Winema National Forest, a vast expanse of old-growth forest, lakes and wildlife refuges. Credit: Bootleg Fire Incident Command via AP

Tony Galvez fled the Tamarack Fire in California on Tuesday with his daughter at the last minute and found out later that his home was gone.

"I lost my whole life, everything I've ever had. The kids are what's going to matter," he said as he fielded calls from relatives. "I got three teenagers. They're going to go home to a moonscape."

The Oregon fire has ravaged the southern part of the state and has been expanding by up to 4 miles (6 kilometers) a day, pushed by gusting winds and critically dry weather that's turned trees and undergrowth into a tinderbox.

Fire crews have had to retreat from the flames for 10 consecutive days as fireballs jump from treetop to treetop, trees explode, embers fly ahead of the fire to start new blazes and, in some cases, the inferno's heat creates its own weather of shifting winds and dry lightning. Monstrous clouds of smoke and ash have risen up to 6 miles into the sky and are visible for more than 100 air miles.



Smoke from Western wildfires dims the sun before the Philadelphia Phillies played New York Yankees in a baseball game Tuesday, July 20, 2021, in New York. Credit: AP Photo/Adam Hunger





In this photo provided by the Bootleg Fire Incident Command, the Bootleg Fire burns in the background behind the Sycan Marsh in southern Oregon on Saturday, July 17, 2021. The destructive Bootleg Fire, one of the largest in modern Oregon history, has already burned more than 476 square miles (1,210 square kilometers), an area about the size of Los Angeles. Credit: Bootleg Fire Incident Command via AP



In this photo provided by the Bootleg Fire Incident Command, the Bootleg Fire burns behind heavy equipment at the Mitchell Monument in southern Oregon on Saturday, July 17, 2021. The 569-square-mile (1,474 square kilometers) Bootleg Fire is burning 300 miles (483 kilometers) southeast of Portland in and around the Fremont-Winema National Forest, a vast expanse of old-growth forest, lakes and wildlife refuges. Credit: Bootleg Fire Incident Command via AP





In this photo provided by the Bootleg Fire Incident Command, columns of smoke rise from the Bootleg Fire in southern Oregon on Sunday, July 18, 2021. The threat of thunderstorms and lightning has prompted officials in fire-ravaged Oregon to ask for help from outside the Pacific Northwest to prepare for additional blazes as many resources are already devoted to a massive forest fire. Credit: Bootleg Fire Incident Command via AP



Tony Galvez, who lost his home to the Tamarack Fire, talks on his phone with his daughter in Vermont who's setting up a GoFundMe for him as he waved and clapped at passing firefighters in Woodfords, Calif., on Tuesday, July 20, 2021. In Northern California, authorities expanded evacuations for the Tamarack Fire in Alpine County in the Sierra Nevada to include the mountain town of Mesa Vista late Monday. That fire, which exploded over the weekend was 61 square miles (158 square kilometers) with no containment. Credit: AP Photo/Haven Daley



## The biggest wildfires in Oregon history

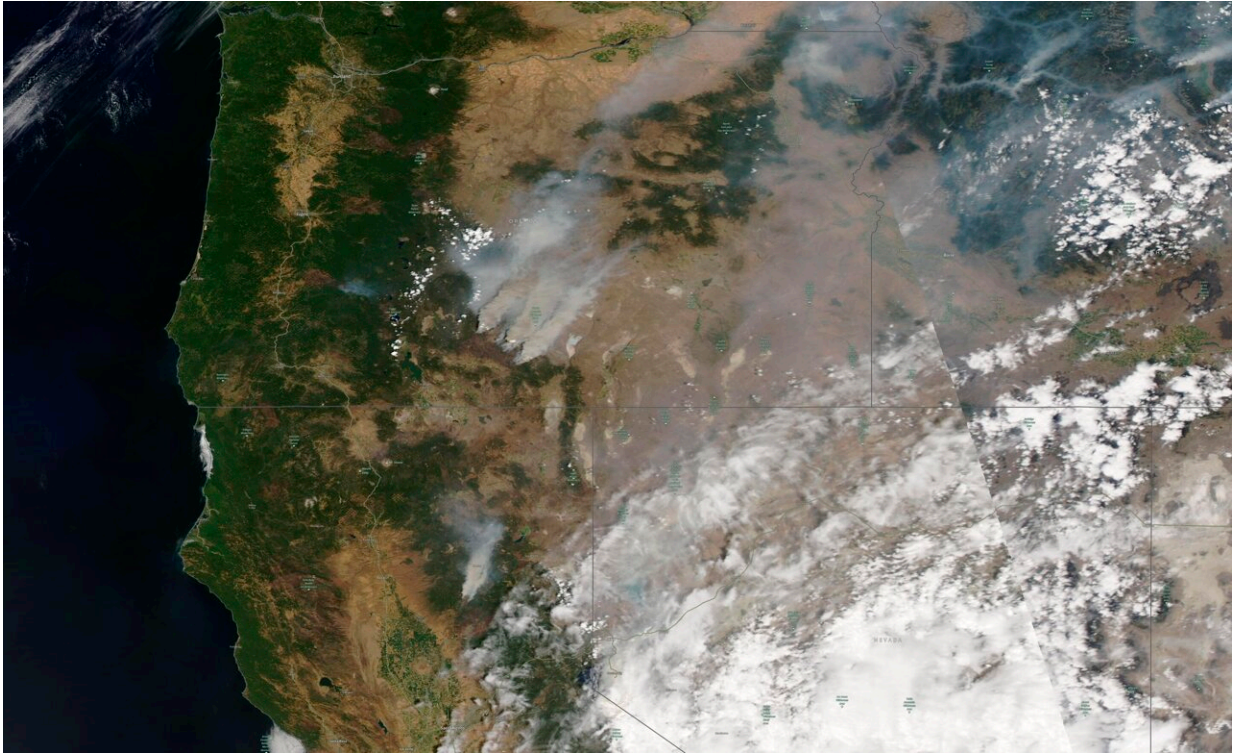
The Biscuit Fire is the largest forest fire. The Long Draw Fire is the largest fire of any type, forest, rangeland or other.

YEAR	FIRE	ACRES
2012	Long Draw fire	558
2002	Biscuit fire	500
2014	Buzzard Complex	396
<b>2021</b>	<b>Bootleg</b>	<b>352</b>
2012	Holloway	245
2020	Breachie Creek	193
2017	Chetco Bar fire	191
2001	Lakeview Complex	179
2020	Holiday Farm	173
2012	Miller Homestead	161

Source: Oregon State University



This preview image of an AP digital embed shows the largest fires in Oregon's history. Credit: AP Digital Embed



This satellite image provided by Satellite image ©2021 Maxar Technologies shows overview of wildfires from Oregon, Idaho, and Northern California on Sunday, July 18, 2021. Extremely dry conditions and heat waves tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight. Climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive. Credit: Satellite image ©2021 Maxar Technologies via AP



Smoke from blocks the view looking toward Manhattan from Yankee Stadium before the Philadelphia Phillies played the New York Yankees in a baseball game Tuesday, July 20, 2021, in New York. Credit: AP Photo/Adam Hunger





Staten Island Ferry commuters take in the view of lower Manhattan seen through haze, Tuesday, July 20, 2021, in New York. Smoke from wildfires across the U.S. West, including Oregon's Bootleg Fire, has wafted over large swaths of the eastern United States. David Lawrence, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said the skies could be hazy for the next couple weeks. Credit: AP Photo/Mary Altaffer



Staten Island ferry commuters walk past a view of the Statue of Liberty seen through haze, Tuesday, July 20, 2021, in New York. Smoke from wildfires across the U.S. West, including Oregon's Bootleg Fire, has wafted over large swaths of the eastern United States. The New York City sky was hazy with smoke from fires thousands of miles away. David Lawrence, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said the skies could be hazy for the next couple weeks. Credit: AP Photo/Mary Altaffer

The fire in the Fremont-Winema National Forest merged with a smaller nearby blaze Tuesday, and it has repeatedly breached a perimeter of treeless dirt and fire retardant meant to stop its advance.

A red flag weather warning signifying dangerous fire conditions was in effect through Tuesday and possibly longer. The fire is 32% contained.

"We're in this for as long as it takes to safely confine this monster," Incident Commander Rob Allen said.

At least 2,000 homes have been evacuated at some point during the fire and another 5,000 threatened. At least 70 homes and more than 100 outbuildings have gone up in flames. Thick smoke chokes the area where residents and wildlife alike have already been dealing with months of drought and extreme heat. No one is known to have died.

Extremely dry conditions and heat waves tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight. Climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

On Tuesday, officials temporarily closed all recreational and public access to state-managed lands in eastern Washington due to fire danger, starting Friday. The closure will affect about 2,260 square miles (5,853 square kilometers) of land.

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