

Battling 18 blazes, California may face worst fire season

8 August 2018



Firefighters monitor a backfire while battling the Ranch Fire, part of the Mendocino Complex Fire, on Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2018, near Ladoga, Calif. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)

The largest wildfire ever recorded in California needed just 11 days to blacken an area nearly the size of Los Angeles—and it's only one of many enormous blazes that could make this the worst fire season in state history.

Some 14,000 firefighters from as far away as Florida and even New Zealand are struggling to curb 18 fires in the midst of a sweltering summer that has seen wind-whipped flames carve their way through national forest land and rural areas, threaten urban areas and incinerate neighborhoods.

"For whatever reason, fires are burning much more intensely, much more quickly than they were before," said Mark A. Hartwig, president of the California Fire Chiefs Association.

California is seeing earlier, longer and more destructive wildfire seasons because of drought, warmer weather attributed to climate change and

home construction deeper into the forests.

Some of the largest fires have erupted just within the past few weeks as the state has seen record-setting temperatures—and the historically worst months of wildfire season are still to come.

In Southern California, a smoky forest fire raged Wednesday in mostly unoccupied land—but firefighting crews were concerned the flames could race down hillsides toward foothill communities.



Firefighters monitor a backfire while battling the Ranch Fire, part of the Mendocino Complex Fire, on Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2018, near Ladoga, Calif. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)

The blaze churning through the Cleveland National Forest south of Los Angeles was just 5 percent contained.

Flames that erupted Monday have blackened nearly 6-and-a-half square miles (17 square kilometers) of dry brush and timber. Several cabins have burned and two rural canyons and some campgrounds have been evacuated.

In Northern California, the record-setting Mendocino Complex—twin fires being fought as a single conflagration—gained ground Wednesday but more slowly because its own smoke covered the area and lowered the temperature, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.



A plane drops fire retardant as firefighters continue to battle a wildfire in the Cleveland National Forest near Corona, Calif. on Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2018. Firefighters are working in rugged terrain amid scorching temperatures that have prompted warnings about excessive heat and extreme fire danger for much of the region. (Watchara Phomicinda/The Orange County Register via AP)

A firefighter lights a backfire while battling the Ranch Fire, part of the Mendocino Complex Fire, on Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2018, near Ladoga, Calif. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)

The flames, which had burned 470 square miles (1,217 square kilometers), were raging in mostly remote areas but 116 homes were destroyed. Two firefighters have been injured.

Fire crews expect to gain control of the massive blaze in September, the state forestry and fire protection agency said.

The blaze that broke out July 27 initially spread quickly because of what officials said was a perfect combination of weather, rugged topography and abundant brush and timber turned to tinder by years of drought.

Resources also were thin at first because thousands of firefighters already were battling a fire hundreds of miles north. That fire, which spread into the city of Redding, killed six people and destroyed more than 1,000 homes. The so-called Carr Fire was less than half contained.

In becoming the biggest fire in California history, the Mendocino Complex fire broke a record set just eight months ago. A blaze in Southern California in December killed two people, burned 440 square miles (1,140 square kilometers) and destroyed more than 1,000 buildings.

California's firefighting costs have more than tripled from \$242 million in the 2013 fiscal year to \$773 million in the 2018 fiscal year that ended June 30, according to Cal Fire.

"We're in uncharted territory," Gov. Jerry Brown warned last week. "Since civilization emerged 10,000 years ago, we haven't had this kind of heat condition, and it's going to continue getting worse. That's the way it is."



This Aug. 6, 2018 satellite image provided by DigitalGlobe shows plumes of smoke from the "River Fire" burning vegetation west of Clear Lake, Calif. The dark brown areas at center, encircled by lighter-colored bulldozed trails, shows burned vegetation around the South Cow Mountain recreation area. (Satellite Image ©2018 DigitalGlobe, a Maxar company, via AP)



This Monday, Aug. 6, 2018 satellite image provided by DigitalGlobe shows plumes of smoke from the "Ranch Fire" north of Clear Lake, Calif. The dark brown areas show burned vegetation. (Satellite Image ©2018 DigitalGlobe, a Maxar company, via AP)



This Aug. 1, 2018, satellite image provided by DigitalGlobe shows plumes of smoke from the Carr Fire, which is burning vegetation around the area west of Shasta Lake, right, Trinity Lake, upper left, and Whiskeytown Lake, hidden at center by the plumes, near Redding, Calif., bottom right. (Satellite Image ©2018 DigitalGlobe, a Maxar company via AP)



This image provided by NASA shows the California wildfires captured from the International Space Station on Aug. 3, 2018 by European Space Agency astronaut Alexander Gerst. Northern California is grappling with the largest wildfire in California history, breaking a record set only months earlier. Experts say this may become the new normal as climate change coupled with the expansion of homes into undeveloped areas creates more intense and devastating blazes. (Alexander Gerst/NASA via AP)



Evacuees from Lucerne, from left, Ken Bennett with Ember Reynolds, 8, and Lisa Reynolds watch the sunset as smoke from the Ranch Fire rises into the sky at Austin Park Beach in California's Clearlake with Mount Konocti in the background. (Kent Porter/The Press Democrat via AP)

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