Snapshot of Ongoing Incineration

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1. Introduction

I try to cover any newsworthy events that are mainly caused by anthropomorphic (human-caused) climate change. Wildfires are one of the main disasters caused by this environmental condition, especially this time of year, and 2026 is no exception. Another climate change disaster-type, draught, has fortunately not been severe this year in my home-state (California), but has been severe a bit further east:

Dan McEvoy, a researcher at the Nevada-based Western Regional Climate Center, said the 2026 snowpack in Colorado and Utah was "the worst ever seen in some cases" going back 50 to 75 years.[1]

Also, one of the secondary effects of climate-change-worsened wildfires, smoke, snuck over the border from eastern Canada and visited the Northeast U.S.

The United States is burning faster than usual this year, while massive smoke plumes from Canadian wildfires deplete air quality on both sides of the border. Experts believe the severity of the current fire season, affecting millions of acres of land between both countries, was primed by climate extremes.

More than 100 wildfires raged in Canada on Thursday and strong winds were carrying their smoke — plus more from a few large fires in Minnesota — across the Upper Midwest and northeastern U.S., exposing millions to harmful pollution.

Around 3,500 Canadian fires have enveloped about 2.3 million acres of land this year, a startling statistic that's more or less on par with the country's 10-year average number of acres burned by mid-July. It's actually lower than Canada's 5-year average, which is twice as high after recent extreme fire seasons.

Fire seasons, in Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere across the world, are starting earlier and lasting longer. They're also "harder to contain," smoldering through the winter as "zombie fires," according to the Canadian Climate Institute, which has noted how climate change worsens wildfire threats and, in some instances, may multiply "the likelihood of extreme fire weather" several times over.

2. Year after Year

In the U.S., close to 40,000 fires have burned through more than 3.6 million acres so far in 2026, … according to the U.S. National Interagency Fire Center. That's almost 10,000 more fires, and almost a million more acres burned than the 10-year average for mid-July. In a new advisory, the center said "fire activity is already mirroring conditions normally not seen until later in the season."

[1] Emily Mae Czachor, CBS News, "Climate extremes fuel explosive wildfires in Canada and western US," July 16, 2026, https://www.msn.com/en-us/weather/topstories/climate-extremes-fuel-explosive-wildfires-in-canada-and-western-us/ar-AA283hxD?ocid=BingNewsSerp

Blazes have scorched hundreds of thousands of acres since January in the American West, with Colorado and Utah hit hardest. At the end of June, three firefighters died and two were injured in the Knowles Fire along the states' shared border.

Of the 48 large wildfires still active nationwide, 10 are in Colorado or Utah. Others were in Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington state.

In January 2026, the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), issued its National Seasonal Fire Outlook. This forecast projected above-normal wildfire risk for much of Texas, Florida, Georgia, Carolinas, and the southeastern United States. The elevated risk was linked primarily to persistent atmospheric patterns resembling La Niña, which typically reduce precipitation and increase temperatures in these regions. The outlook considered factors such as expected temperature and precipitation anomalies, soil moisture, and vegetation dryness to predict fire activity for the upcoming season.[2]

Author's comment: On August 19 (today as I'm writing this) I queried my Microsoft Bing Browser with the string: "large wildfires currently active nationwide." The result follows. Note that I left the secondary references in.

Current Large Wildfires Nationwide

As of the latest National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) update, 87 large, uncontained wildfires are burning across the United States, with 29,548 personnel assigned to incidents nationwide National Interagency Fire Center. These fires span multiple states, with the heaviest activity in the West and parts of the South.

Key Active Large Fires:

According to InciWeb and live wildfire trackers, some of the largest and most active incidents include currentwildfires.com:

Big Grass Fire – Oregon (579,169 acres, 85% contained) – Rapidly expanded to over 579,000 acres, requiring 1,200 personnel and costing over $56M allfirefighter.com.

Crosswhite Fire – Oregon (344,917 acres, 87% contained) – Expanded to over 344,000 acres, with over $83M in costs.

Coleman Creek Fire – Oregon (308,721 acres, 95% contained) – Grew to over 309,000 acres, with hundreds of personnel and over $11M in costs.

Tartar Fire – Idaho (158,027 acres, 98% contained) – Rapid growth from ~147,000 to 158,000 acres in days.

Sinlahakin Fire – Washington (154,178 acres, 44% contained) – Sustained extreme fire behavior, over $57M in costs.

Mukluk Fire – Alaska (5,077 acres) – Active in the state.

Picture Rock Fire – Oregon (1,277 acres).

Valley Fire – Montana (200 acres).

Sarpy Fire – Montana (897 acres).

Casey Lake Fire – Texas (443 acres).

Austin Fire – Oregon (2,901 acres).

[2] NIFC 2026 National Fire Outlook: "A Worrying Picture from Coast to Coast," May 10, 2026, https://www.nwfirewatch.com/article/nifc-2026-national-fire-outlook-a-worrying-picture-from-coast-to-coast

2.1. California

California has experienced an active 2026 fire season driven by extreme heat, minimal winter snowpack, and dry vegetation. As of mid-2026, CAL FIRE reports:

- *3,750 wildfires*
- *144,204 acres burned*
- *55 structures destroyed*[3]

Below is an image from an earlier press conference that our Governor Newsom had. I believe they are looking at a CAL-FIRE airplane, part of the nation's largest state-owned aerial firefighting fleet

3. The Western US In-General

The 2026 wildfire season in the western U.S. is severe, with millions of acres burned, numerous large fires, fatalities, and widespread evacuations across multiple states.[4]

3.1. Current Fire Activity

As of mid-July 2026, the western U.S. is experiencing extreme wildfire conditions due to drought, high temperatures, and strong southwest winds. Major fires are active in Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and California. Fires such as the Cottonwood Fire (Utah, ~60,000 acres), Wild Goose Fire (Utah, ~12,665 acres), Snyder Fire complex (Colorado, deadly, merged from multiple starts), and Lyons Ferry Fire (Washington, 30,000 acres) are among the largest and most destructive currently burning.

Fire behavior is rapid and unpredictable, with some fires spreading five to nine miles in a single afternoon under strong winds and dry conditions

In Colorado, three firefighters were killed on the Snyder Fire, highlighting the dangers of extreme fire behavior

[3] Query of Microsoft Bing Browser for "Recent California wildfires"
[4] Query of Microsoft Bing Browser for "Recent Western U.S. wildfires" I expect both of these queries were performed in July 2026 (it is now September 1, 2026 and I am on the last proofing pass of this paper).

In Washington, the Chelan Hills Fire destroyed approximately 100 structures and caused one fatality, while the Upriver Fire led to evacuations of over 10,000 people

3.2. Seasonal Overview

The 2026 wildfire season is projected to be larger and more destructive than average, with 5.5 to 8 million acres expected to burn across the U.S. despite a slightly lower number of ignitions compared to 2025

The interior Northwest, Rockies, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Idaho, and western Montana face the highest risk due to drought, heat, and below-average snowpack.

California's wildfire risk is also increasing, particularly in interior valleys, foothills, and lower elevations, with an estimated 500,000 to 750,000 acres projected to burn.

3.3. Firefighting and Preparedness

Firefighting efforts are extensive, with over 16,800 personnel deployed nationwide and 48 large fires uncontained as of mid-July

Fire managers are using incident management teams, ground crews, and aerial firefighting assets, but terrain, wind, and fuel conditions make containment challenging.

Residents are advised to monitor local emergency alerts, follow evacuation orders, and prepare emergency supplies.

3.4. Smoke and Air Quality

Smoke from western wildfires is affecting air quality far beyond fire zones, reaching the Midwest, Great Lakes, and Northeast, causing hazy skies and potential health risks

AccuWeather and other services provide Wildfire Proximity Alerts and Air Quality Alerts to help residents and businesses respond quickly

3.5. Key Takeaways

High-risk states: Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, California

Major fires: Cottonwood, Wild Goose, Snyder, Lyons Ferry, Chelan Hills, Upriver

Fatalities: At least 3 firefighters in Colorado, 1 civilian in Washington

Seasonal forecast: 5.5–8 million acres expected to burn, with larger, faster-spreading fires than average

Precautions: Evacuations, monitoring alerts, preparing emergency kits, and protecting property from fire hazards

Residents and travelers in the western U.S. should remain vigilant, stay updated on fire perimeters via live maps such as WFCA Fire Map[5] and NIFC Maps[6], and follow all local safety instructions.

[5] https://wfca.com/fire-map
[6] https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/maps

4. Eastern U.S.

The Eastern U.S. experienced a “really severe wildfire season.” However, had we experienced the same number and severity of wildfires in the western U.S., we would have considered it a great season. Wildfires are a completely different type of problem in the west vs. the east because of our aridity in much of the west, especially in the southwestern parts (Southern California) and central parts (east of the SF Bay Area, Sacramento, and Nevada around Reno).

The west is much more arid in most sub-regions. The east has more precipitation but has much higher fuel-loadings and less wildland fire fighting infrastructure. With human-caused climate change, even the east may dry out at the end of their fire season, and start seeing more wildfires which will stress their mutual-aid capacity.

The bad news is, that this will likely be near our (the Western U.S.) peak fire season, and thus the capacity for providing east-traveling aid will greatly be diminished.

The other (sort-of) bad news is that our emissions of greenhouse gas, although in a long-term-period of decline, increased in 2025.

The continental U.S. has seen a sustained emissions decline since 2005, but 2025’s 2.4% increase signals a temporary setback. The rebound was weather- and demand-driven rather than policy-related, and it underscores the vulnerability of emissions trends to economic, energy, and climate extremes.[7]

5. Late News Regarding Western U.S. Wildfires

As of early August 2026, the western United States is experiencing one of its most severe wildfire seasons on record, with over 2.8 million acres burning across 27–28 states and 381 active fires. The Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain states are at the epicenter of the crisis.

5.1. Major Active Fires

Big Grass Fire – Malheur County, OR: ~358,900 acres, 39% contained.

0445 Crosswhite Fire – Wheeler County, OR: ~311,400 acres, 57% contained.

Tartar Fire – Washington County, ID: ~147,400 acres, 41–53% contained depending on source (see next subsection).

Kaiser Canyon Fire – Okanogan County, WA: ~136,900 acres, 43% contained.

Sinlahekin Fire – Okanogan County, WA: ~120,700 acres, 20% contained (see next subsection).

Babylon Fire – San Juan County, UT: ~107,200 acres, 95% contained.

Aspen Acres Fire – Custer County, CO: ~101,900 acres, 68% contained.

Cottonwood Fire – Beaver County, UT: ~97,500 acres, 95% contained.

[7] Result of a query od Microsoft Bing: “recent trends in greenhouse gas emissions for the continental U.S.”

5.2. Severe Incidents

Spokane Area Fires (Washington) – Old Trails, Autumn Lake, and Fairview fires have destroyed over 700 structures and forced more than 60,000 evacuations, marking the largest natural disaster in Spokane County.

Aspen Acres Fire (Colorado) – Over 100,000 acres burned, 71% contained, destroyed more than 300 homes.

Sinlahekin Fire (Washington) – Level 3 evacuation orders in place for Okanogan County.

According to a August 6 news release (today, as I'm finalizing the first draft of this post), the Tartar Fire in Washington County, Idaho grew approximately 4,000 acres overnight, with continued potential to move beyond planned containment lines towards Highway 95 and the Midvale area.