



CALIFORNIA ON FIRE

As wildfires rage across the state of California, homes are ravaged and entire cities are diminished to ash. Homeowners evacuate in a frenzy, taking with them whatever they can store in their vehicles or, in more extreme situations, on their backs. This is a scene that has become alarmingly familiar to residents of the state.

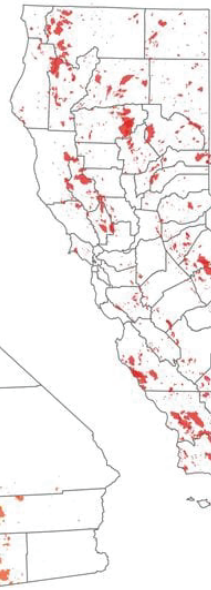
1940–1960



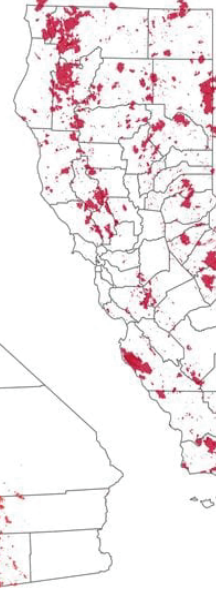
1961–1980



1981–2000



2001–2018



Scale of fire severity

more
severe

less
severe



Retrieved from The Washington Post, “The staggering scale of California’s wildfires” Aug 7. 2018

Although the state has historically suffered severe fires, the situation has worsened in the past decade. Distribution of fires across the state has remained relatively consistent over the past century, though the scale of the fires has grown increasingly severe. As the map indicates, fires across California tend to occur in the same regions, though these fires have grown in size and severity over the years.

Several elements contribute to the prevalence of fires in California. The state's history of fire suppression, climate and dense population all play a role.

California and its fire authorities sport a long history of suppressing fires across the state to protect residential areas. In other words, things that would have burned were prevented from doing so by entities that fight fires. The suppression of past wildfires has worsened the severity of those taking place today. The United States Forest Service has tried to rectify this suppression with controlled burns.



As noted in the New York Times piece, "Why does California Have So Many Wildfires," California gets most of its moisture in the fall and winter. Its vegetation then dries throughout the summer, due to warm climates and lack of rainfall. That vegetation then serves as kindling for fires. Once fires do occur, winds throughout the state, especially in the fall, send sparks flying through the air, causing quick spread that is difficult to contain. (Pierre-Louis)

The word "wildfire" inherently evokes the sense that these blazes occur naturally, as a byproduct of the "wild." That is a misconception. Although many California fires are still in the process of lengthy investigations to reveal their causes, it is known that often times, humans are responsible. 2017 Sonoma County fires can be traced back to downed power lines. The 2018 Carr fire was the result of sparks from a blown tire. (California State-wide Fire Statistics)



BY THE NUMBERS

1.37 MILLION acres burned so far in California in 2018. (California Statewide Fire Statistics)

\$85 BILLION fiscal toll of California fires in 2017. (Lada)

2.04 MILLION California households at extreme risk of wildfire. (Verisk Insurance Solutions)

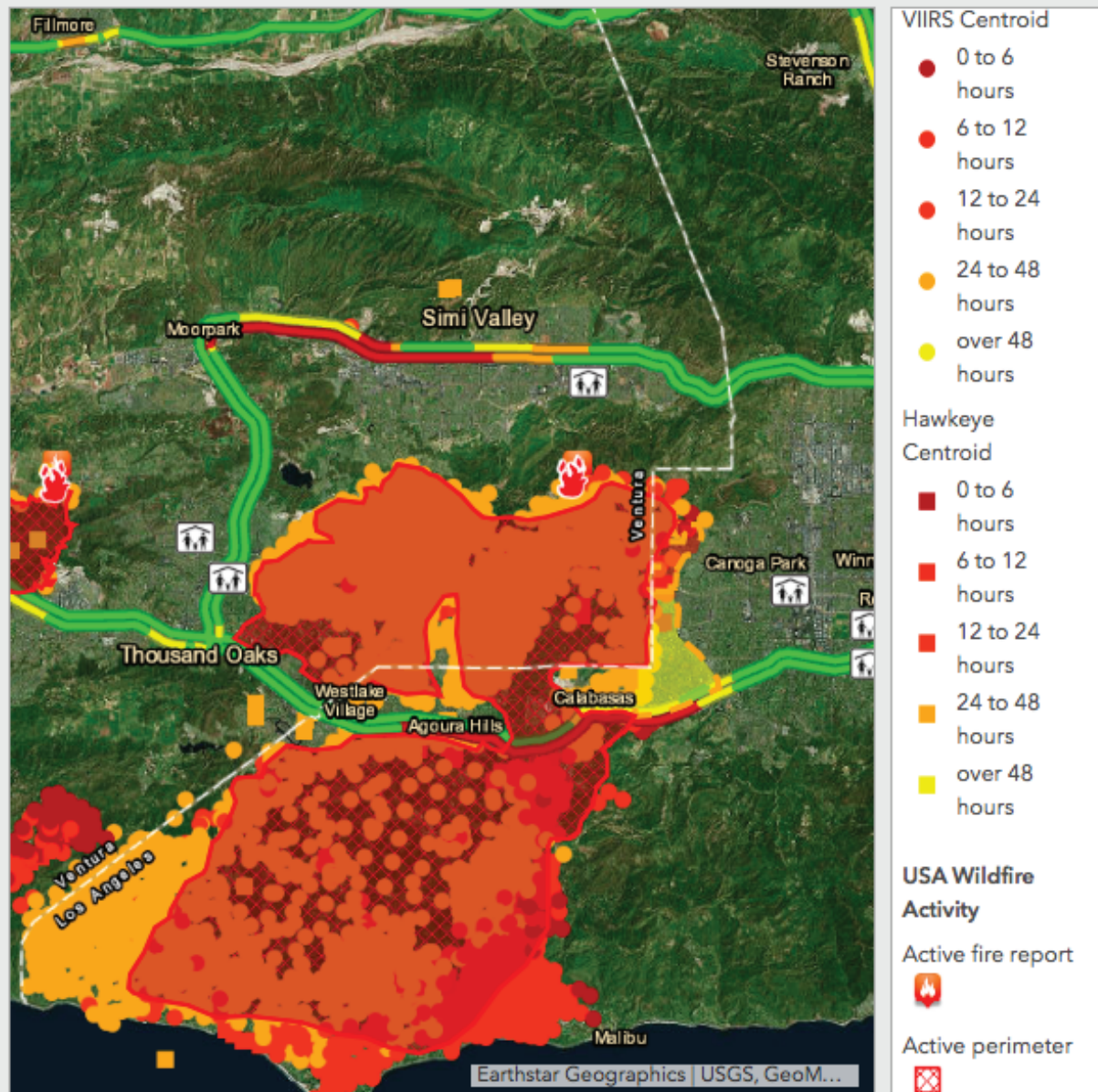
40,000 people evacuated in 2017 due to threat of wildfire. (California Statewide Fire Statistics)

8,400 homes destroyed by wildfires in 2017. (California Statewide Fire Statistics)

6,814 wildfires in California in 2018 so far. (California Statewide Fire Statistics)

42 lives lost in 2017 wildfires. (California Statewide Fire Statistics)

THE WOOLSEY FIRE



The Woolsey fire began on Thursday, Nov. 8, 2018, in Ventura County, CA. The blaze is a quintessential example of California fires. The blaze began during the heart of California's fire season, worsened by dry weather and whipping Santa Ana winds. The winds prevented emergency officials from dispatching aerial units, hindering their ability to slow the growth of the fire. The Woolsey fire soon jumped the 101 freeway and began encroaching into Malibu. After only 24 hours of its burn, the Woolsey fire had destroyed 70,000 acres, forced the evacuation of 200,000 homes, and claimed two lives. ("The Woolsey Fire...") The spread of the fire can be seen pictured left, in a map made by ABC 7.

YOU CAN PREPARE.

If you are a California resident living in an area of high risk, consider the following tips for preparing your home in case of a wildfire.

1. Keep flammable objects (lawn mowers, oil or gas cans, propane tanks and wood piles) at least 30 feet away from your home at all times. Move flammables, such as lawn furniture and toys, during wildfire activity.

2. Keep roofs, gutters, decks and patios clear of leaves, pine needles or other flammables at all times.

3. Remove flammable mulch and vegetation within 5 feet of the home and replace with nonflammable material.

4. Remove tree or shrub branches that overhang within 10 feet of your house, roof or chimney.

5. Keep lawns watered and mowed, or if water-conserving, make sure debris is removed within 30 feet of home.

("How to Prepare Your Home for Wildfire")

