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Climate Change to Increase Number of High Wildfire Risk Days by Nearly 50 Percent Across the West

New report details 45 years of wildfire trends in 11 Western states, predicts a fiery future.

2015 was the worst year on record for wildfires in the United States, with over 10 million acres burned.

PRINCETON, NJ – Climate change is producing conditions ripe for wildfires across the American West. Temperatures are rising, snowpacks are shrinking, and summers are heating up, drying out forests earlier in the season. Combined with abundant fuel in many locations, these climate-driven changes have produced startling increases in acres burned and the number of large fires across the West.

A new report by [Climate Central](#) details 45 years of state-by-state wildfire trends on U.S. Forest Service lands and provides the first-ever, state-based projections of the increase in high wildfire risk days by 2050. The report, *Western Wildfires: A Fiery Future*, may be found here: <http://www.climatecentral.org/news/western-wildfires-climate-change-20475>.

- Across the Western U.S., the average number of wildfires larger than 1,000 acres burning each year more than **tripled** between the 1970s and the 2010s.
- The area burned by these fires has increased at an even greater rate: In an average year, **six times** more acres of the West burned in wildfires in the 2010s than in the 1970s.
- In Northern states, the increase in the number of large fires is even more extreme. Wyoming, Idaho and Montana experienced a 10-fold increase in



large wildfires between the 1970s and the 2010s; Washington's wildfires increased five-fold; Oregon's wildfires increased seven-fold.

- The overall length of the fire season has grown by an average of about **105 days** since 1970. In the 1970s, the fire season was typically under five months, now it usually lasts more than eight.

And in the not-so-distant future, there will be many more days with high wildfire potential, particularly in Southwestern states. Climate Central's analysis of localized projections from 29 different global climate models found that in most Western states the changing climate will dry out forests and produce substantially more days in the next several decades with high potential for wildfires:

- Arizona is projected to experience the greatest increase, with 34 more high wildfire risk days by 2050, followed by California with 24, New Mexico and Utah with 23 and Nevada with 20.

"As spring and summer temperatures in the West have gone up and alpine snowpacks have gone down, the potential for wildfire has been steadily increasing, at tremendous risk to our health and the economy," said Alyson Kenward, Ph.D, wildfire expert and Vice President of Research at Climate Central. "Our study predicts that climate change will continue to exacerbate these conditions between now and 2050, putting more land -- and people -- at risk."

State-by-state wildfire data is available in the report, including ranked lists of Western states with the most residents vulnerable to wildfire and states that have seen the biggest increases in wildfires.

In addition to the report, Climate Central has created a first-of-its-kind [Wildfire Tracker](#) tool, using satellite monitoring to track, in real time, major fires currently burning across the Western United States. The tracker's unique "smoke visualization" feature reveals the true extent of how far the plume of a wildfire can stretch, potentially impacting air quality for millions of Americans.

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