Claim: Global Warming has increased U.S. Wildfires

REBUTTAL

Wildfires are in the news almost every late summer and fall. The National Interagency Fire Center has recorded the number of fires and acreage affected since 1985 show the number of fires is actually down slightly though the acreage burned had increased before leveling off the last 20 years. The NWS tracks the number of days where conditions are conducive to wildfires when they issue red-flag warnings. It is little changed.

This was an active fire season in the U.S. but my no means a record. The U.S. had 64,610 fires, the 7th most since in 11 years and the most since 2012. The 9,574, 533 acres burned was the 4th most in 11 years and most since 2015. The fires burned in the Northwest including Montana with a very dry summer then the action shifted south seasonally with the seasonal start of the wind events like Diablo in northern California and Santa Ana to the south.

Fires spread to northern California in October with an episode of the dry Diablo wind that blows from the east and then in December as strong and persistent Santa Ana winds and dry air triggered a round of large fires in Ventura County.

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection the 2017 California wildfire season was the most destructive one on record with a total of 8,987 fires that burned 1,241,158 acres. It included five of the 20 most destructive wildland-urban interface fires in the state's history.

When it comes to considering the number of deaths and structures destroyed, the seven-fold increase in population in California from 1930 to 2017 must be noted. Not only does this increase in population mean more people and home structures in the path of fires, but it also means more fires. Lightning and campfires caused most historic fires; today most are the result of power lines igniting trees. The power lines have increased proportionately with the population, so it can be reasoned that most of the damage from wild fires in California is a result of increased population not Global Warming. The increased danger is also greatly aggravated by poor government forest management choices.

Satellites capture the smoke from the Ventura County wildfires in December 2017.

Source: NASA

"In 1871, during the week of Oct. 8-14, it must have seemed like the whole world was ablaze for residents of the Upper Midwest (Link.) Four of the worst fires in U.S. history all broke out in the same week across the region. The Great Chicago Fire, which destroyed about a third of the city's valuation at the time and left more than 100,000 residents homeless, stole the headlines.

But at the same time, three other fires also scorched the region. Blazes leveled the Michigan cities of Holland and Manistee in what has been referred to as the Great Michigan Fire, while across the state another fire destroyed the city of Port Huron. The worst fire of them all, however, might have been the Great Peshtigo Fire, a firestorm that ravaged the Wisconsin countryside, leaving more than 1,500 dead — the most fatalities by fire in U.S. history."

Weather and normal seasonal and year-to-year variations brings fires to the west every year and other areas from time to time. This past winter was a very wet one, and in the mountains in the west, a snowy one. Wet winters cause more spring growth that will dry up in the dry summer heat season and become tinder for late summer and early fall fires before the seasonal rains return.

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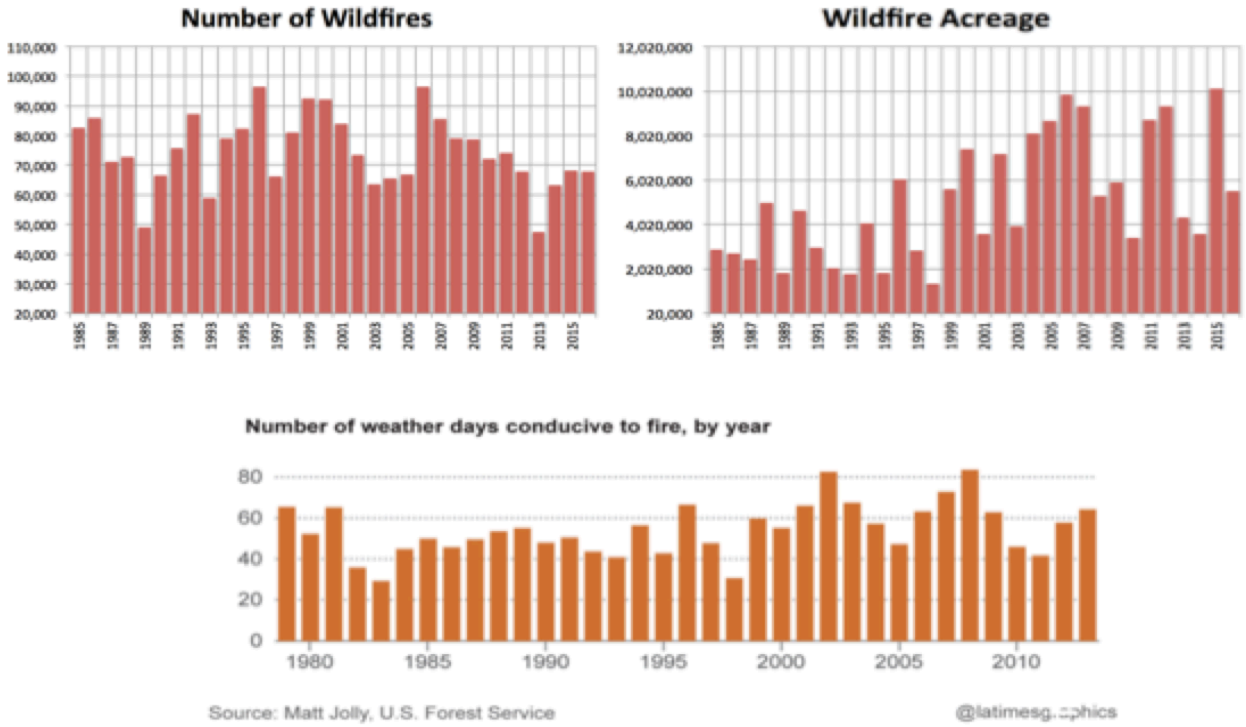

Cliff Mass of the University of Washington wrote on his blog *"A number of political leaders, media outlets, and activist groups have boldly stated that these fires were caused by, enhanced by, or consistent with climate change forced by anthropogenic global warming."* Cliff shows how this is clearly not the case, then he concludes:

"Those that are claiming the global warming is having an impact are doing so either out of ignorance or their wish to use coastal wildfires for their own purposes. For politicians, claiming that the big wildfires are the result of global warming provides a convenient excuse not to address the real problems:

** Irresponsible development of homes and buildings in natural areas that had a long history of wildfires.*

** Many decades of fire suppression that have left some areas vulnerable to catastrophic fires.*

** Lack of planning or maintenance of electrical infrastructure, making ignition of fires more probable when strong winds blow.*

** Lack of attention to emergency management, or to providing sufficient fire fighting resources*

** Poor building codes, improper building materials (wood shake roofs), and lack of protective space around homes/buildings.*

And to be extremely cynical, some politicians on the left see the fires as a convenient partisan tool. Wildfires are not a global warming issue, but a sustainable and

resilience issue that our society, on both sides of the political spectrum, must deal with."

MORE ON THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES

People find it desirable to live in the quiet beauty of the hilly wooded developments away from the big cities - unfortunately in areas that are vulnerable to wildfires when the strong seasonal winds blow at the end of the dry season.

The danger is aggravated by bad environmental and governmental policies. Last summer, Governor Brown vetoed a bi-partisan bill to help subsidize PGE tree removal from near power lines and transformers as the law requires. The downed trees and power lines/transformers are believed to be the cause of at least some of the fires as the sparks ignited the dry brush and the cinders and sparks are carried by the same winds that brought down the lines and transformers.

The National Park Service changed its policy in 1968 to recognize fire as a natural ecological process. Fires on federal lands were to be allowed to run their courses where possible.

In a May, 2017 congressional hearing, Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., said, "Forty-five years ago, we began imposing laws that have made the management of our forests all but impossible." "Time and again, we see vivid boundaries between the young, healthy, growing forests managed by state, local, and private landholders, and the choked, dying, or burned federal forests,"

McClintock said. "The laws of the past 45 years have not only failed to protect the forest environment—they have done immeasurable harm to our forests." In an October, 2017 House address, McClintock pinned the blame of poor forest management on bad 1970s laws, like the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act. He said these laws "have resulted in endlessly time-consuming and cost-prohibitive restrictions and requirements that have made the scientific management of our forests virtually impossible."

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has promoted a change to forest management policies, calling for a more aggressive approach to reduce the excess vegetation that has made the fires worse. See more.

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