

CLIMATE CHANGE AND WILDFIRE IN IDAHO, OREGON, AND WASHINGTON

LARGE AND SEVERE FIRES IN THE NORTHWEST ARE ASSOCIATED WITH WARM AND DRY CONDITIONS. THESE CONDITIONS ARE LIKELY TO OCCUR MORE FREQUENTLY WITH CLIMATE CHANGE.

TEMPERATURES ARE RISING

Average annual temperature across Idaho, Oregon, and Washington has increased **2°F since 1895** and are projected to increase by **5.8° F by 2050**.

FORESTS ARE DRIER FOR LONGER PERIODS

Drier soils and vegetation mean that Northwest forests are primed for wildfire to **ignite and spread**.

AREA BURNED HAS INCREASED

Wildfires are larger and more costly than ever before. All future fire models suggest that **there will be more fire in the Northwest in the future**.

SNOWPACK IS DECREASING

Less snowpack is accumulating over the winter and melting earlier than before. More precipitation is falling as rain.

HOW WILL CHANGING WILDFIRE PATTERNS AFFECT NORTHWEST FORESTS?

- Fire-intolerant species could be replaced by species that are better able to survive fires.
- The number of trees in dry forests could decrease, and it could be harder for new trees to grow.
- Areas that have already burned could burn again more easily, which could affect conifer regrowth.
- As old forests burn, young forests could become more common, which could harm species that live in old forests.
- Invasive plants could establish more easily after fires and could outcompete native plants.
- Fire, drought, insect outbreaks, and invasive species could interact to drive forest change in a warming climate.

CAN WE SAY THAT A WILDFIRE IS CAUSED BY CLIMATE CHANGE?

Until a scientific attribution analysis of fire conditions is completed, experts cannot say for certain whether a fire was caused by climate change. Many other factors influence wildfire, including people, weather, fuel levels, and forest management. However, recent trends in wildfire are consistent with climate change projections and what is expected in the future.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Climate Change and Wildfire in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington - a Hub webpage; <https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/hubs/northwest/topic/climate-change-and-wildfire-idaho-oregon-and-washington>



Changing Wildfire, Changing Forests - a scientific article explaining the effects of changing fire regimes on forests in the Northwest; <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s42408-019-0062-8>



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