

U.S. Natural Disasters of 2020

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Bobby Miller takes a break as Emily Hooper (R) packs up their trailer camp ahead of the arrival of Hurricane Laura in Rutherford beach near Cameron, Louisiana on August 26, 2020. - Hurricane Laura is due to strengthen to Category 4 before slamming into the US south coast later Wednesday, forecasters said, as residents of coastal Texas and Louisiana were told to evacuate or shelter. With maximum sustained winds currently of 115 miles (185 kilometers) per hour, the hurricane could trigger a storm surge raising water levels by several feet and affecting areas as much as 30 miles inland. (Photo by ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS / AFP) (Photo by ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP via Getty Images)

So far 2020 has been a standout year for all the wrong reasons, including its devastating natural disasters. Wildfires have ravaged the western U.S., and tropical cyclones have popped up left and right, with several causing significant damage to coastal areas. The latest storm, Hurricane Delta, is headed for the Gulf Coast.

Though they are called natural disasters, the toll they take comes in part from human actions. The buildup of communities in vulnerable areas, such as along the coasts and fire-prone areas of the West, means more people are in harm's way. Climate change, fueled by greenhouse gas emissions from energy use and industrial processes, has also upped the ante. Hotter weather dries out the grasses and forest debris that can ignite, fueling bigger and longer-lasting wildfires. And rising seas and heavier downpours mean higher flood risks during storms.

These factors have helped push some of this year's disasters to surpass—and in some cases, shatter—previous records. This is a running list of all the ones that have been set this year.

Hurricanes



CREOLE, LOUISIANA - OCTOBER 10: An aerial view of flood waters from Hurricane Delta surrounding structures destroyed by Hurricane Laura on October 10, 2020 in Creole, Louisiana. Hurricane Delta made landfall near Creole as a Category 2 storm in Louisiana initially leaving some 300,000 customers without power. (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

The 2020 Atlantic hurricane season has already been a doozy, and it does not even officially end until November 30. Here are some of the records it has already achieved:

This is only the second time that the official alphabetical list of hurricane names has been used up, meaning forecasters have had to move to the supplementary list of Greek letter names.

If one more storm forms, 2020 will tie 2005 as the season with the most named storms on record: 28. (Named storms are those that reach at least tropical storm strength, with winds of 39 to 73 miles per hour.) If two more form, this year will set a new record.

Twenty-four of the 27 storms that formed so far this season were the earliest of their storm number to do so. For example, Delta was the earliest 25th named storm of any season, beating out Tropical Storm Gamma, which formed on November 15, 2005.

When Hurricane Zeta made landfall near Cocodrie, La., on October 28, it became the record 11th named storm to hit the U.S. in a single season. It broke the record set just weeks earlier by Hurricane Delta.

Zeta was also the sixth hurricane to hit the U.S. this year, tying 1886 and 1985 for the most continental U.S. hurricane landfalls in a single season.

Zeta was the record fifth named storm to hit Louisiana in a single season.

Delta's landfall was the first time a Greek-alphabet-named hurricane has made landfall in the U.S.

September, which falls within the peak of the hurricane season, saw a record 10 named storms form within the month. (The previous record was eight.)

In mid-September, there were five storms churning around the Atlantic Ocean simultaneously for only the second time on record.

September 18 marked the second time on record that three named storms—Wilfred, Alpha and Beta—all formed on the same day. The only other time this was known to happen was on August 15, 1893, before hurricanes received official alphabetical names.

(The Atlantic hurricane database, managed by the National Hurricane Center, extends back to 1851. The lists of alternating male and female hurricane names have been in use since 1979.)

Wildfires



TOPSHOT - San Miguel County Firefighters battle a brush fire along Japatul Road during the Valley Fire in Jamul, California on September 6, 2020 - The Valley Fire in the Japatul Valley burned 4,000 acres overnight with no containment and 10 structures destroyed, Cal Fire San Diego said. (Photo by SANDY HUFFAKER / AFP) (Photo by SANDY HUFFAKER/AFP via Getty Images)

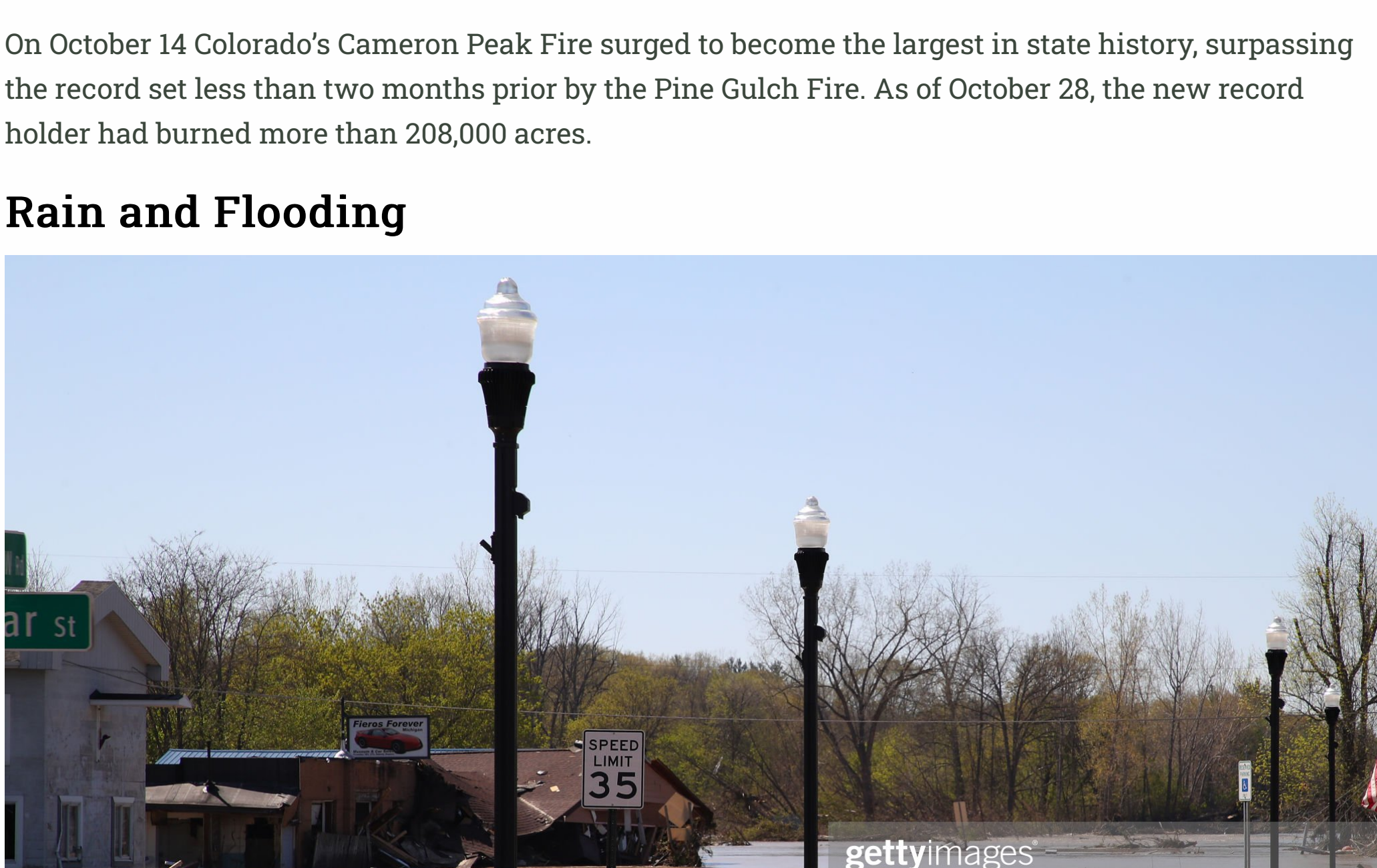
Wildfires have taken an enormous toll on western U.S. communities, both from flames and harmful smoke. California has borne the worst of it. Here are some of the records that have been set:

Fires have so far burned more than four million acres across California, about doubling the previous record of nearly two million acres set in 2018. Quality records of fires size in California go back to 1932. The August Complex Fire alone has burned more than one million acres, by far the largest in California's history. The previous record of more than 459,000 acres was set in 2018 by the Mendocino Complex Fire.

Five of California's six largest fires are burning this year.

On October 14 Colorado's Cameron Peak Fire surged to become the largest in state history, surpassing the record set less than two months prior by the Pine Gulch Fire. As of October 28, the new record holder had burned more than 208,000 acres.

Rain and Flooding



SANFORD, MICHIGAN - MAY 20: Main Street is flooded after water from the Tittabawassee River breached a nearby dam on May 20, 2020 in Sanford, Michigan. Thousands of residents have been ordered to evacuate after two dams in Sanford and Edenville collapsed causing water from the Tittabawassee River to flood nearby communities. (Photo by Gregory Shamus/Getty Images)

Heavy rain sent water levels in the Tittabawassee River to record highs in May, causing the failures of the Edenville and Sanford dams near Midland, Mich. Some 10,000 residents had to evacuate because of the subsequent floods.

Heat



USA, Southwest, Arizona, Apache Junction, Lost Dutchman State Park, Saguaro cactus and moon, Apache Junction. (Photo by: Dukas/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

Phoenix set a record for the most days with temperatures of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher with 144 days. Heat, especially over prolonged periods, can exacerbate existing health conditions and is one of the leading causes of weather-related deaths in the U.S.

Overall

So far this year, the U.S. has had 16 natural disasters (including wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes and drought) that each caused at least \$1 billion in damage, tying the record set in both 2011 and 2017—with several months left to go. Such statistics have been compiled since 1980.