

DEADLY CLIMATIC EXTREMES: THE CALIFORNIAN WILDFIRE



@ Sanket 🕒 18th Nov 2020 📁 Current Affairs

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As we know that the year 2020 has left no stone unturned to prove itself to be the worst, another event has been added to the sequel to destruction- *Wildfires in California*.



More than 3.5 Million acres have burned across the state so far in 2020. High temperatures and strong winds have made the situation even worse. The *Death Valley* in Southern California have reached approx. 130 degrees which, if confirmed would be the highest temperature ever recorded on the planet Earth. In recent weeks, a list of wildfires have ignited across the state, leading to the destruction of life and property.

But what's it about California that makes wildfires so calamitous ?

It's the changing Climate. Thousands of lightning strikes have sparked hundreds of fires across California. The average daily temperature for this time of year are about 3° or 4° F warmer in California, than at the beginning of the 20th century.



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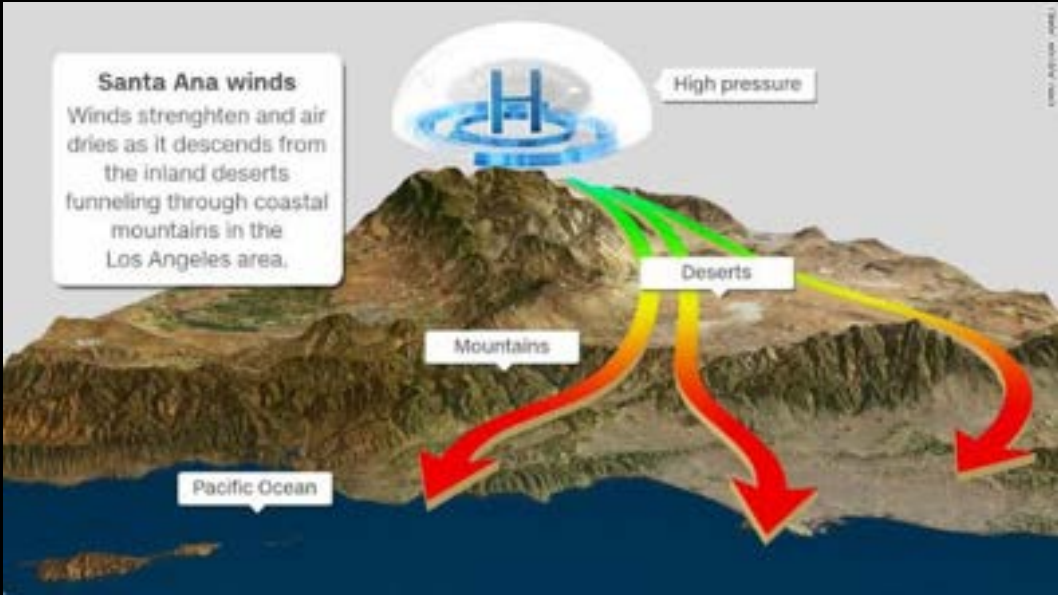
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Studies have clearly found that climate change intensifies heat waves, which help create the conditions for wildfires to burn stormily and spread rapidly. Climate change causes forest fuels to be more dry, create warmer and drier conditions, increased drought that increases the wildfire risk. Historically, California has had many wildfires, which have increased exponentially in recent times. It is estimated that the frequency of western US wildfires have **increased by 400%** since 1970. The windy conditions are also exacerbating the spread of lung damaging smoke coming from the fires in the midst of the **Covid-19** Pandemic.

The presence of ***Santa Ana Winds*** is like pouring fuel into the fire. These winds are often associated with a sense of pending disaster. These ripping winds can easily turn a small fire into a terrible one. The fires that started under Santa Ana Wind conditions are responsible for nearly half of the total area burned in the region and **80% of the economic losses** over two decades.



Lack of Management

In some way People and the State are also equally responsible for the disaster. In their choices to where to live, People are increasingly moving into areas near forests, known as **The Urban-Wildland interface**, that are inclined to burn and the government failed to regulate that.

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It'll sound strange but the history of suppressing wildfires in US has actually made the present day wildfires worse. Every time the state fought a fire successfully, a bunch of stuff that would have burned didn't burn. And so over the last hundred years there had an accumulation of plants in a lot of areas, causing more intense fire.

Impacts of the Wildfire

- (a) Loss of economy and life
- (b) Air pollution by small particulate matter, dust and allergens
- (c) Land degradation, as high temperatures consume all the nutrients from a land
- (d) Loss of Biodiversity



Way Forward

Some immediate solutions to Wildfires include not planting easily flammable tree species in the forest fire region, not allowing human development near forest zones.

However, in the long run, working on controlling green house gas emission should be the main motive.

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