

# Climate change affecting wildfires

By Laura Gonzalez - July 29, 2016



*Firefighters work all night to deter fire from spreading towards Santa Clarita homes. Photo credit: Associated Press*

Homes evacuated, thousands of acres scorched and hundreds of Santa Clarita residents left anxiously waiting to hear whether their homes will be the next victim of a fiery trend.

The peak of fire season is yet to come but wild fires in Western United states have already burned over 2.6 million acres in 2016 according to recent reports from the U.S Department of the Interior.

Last year was the most severe on record, with more than 10 million acres burned which is roughly twice the size of Massachusetts.

The factors contributing to these raging fires are record high temperatures and persistent drought.

Average annual temperatures worldwide have increased by 1.9 degrees Fahrenheit in the last decade and snow packs are now melting up to 4 weeks earlier than in previous decades, leaving landscapes drier and making it easier for wildfires to spread when they start, according to a National Climate Assessment Study.

If global temperatures continue to increase, the National Wildlife Federation predicts, the area of forests burned is projected to double in size by the end of the century.

Climate conditions are causing longer, hotter, and costlier fire seasons.

In the last 15 years the Interior has exceeded its fire suppression budget six times.

The Santa Clarita sand fire alone is using more than 2,700 firefighters, 214 engines, 63 hand crews, 11 water tenders, 20 helicopters and 35 dozers totaling around \$28 million.

Catastrophic wildfires account for only 2 percent of fires, but consume 30 percent of suppression costs. “This in turn is forcing us to use funds slated for resiliency projects to suppress wildfires,” said The Interior Report.

People have tried for decades to suppress wildfires from spreading but have ignored another key issue—stopping wildfires from happening in the first place.

“We urgently need to address the runaway growth of fire suppression costs, and continue funding other critical programs that protect communities and infrastructure,” said the Interior Report.