

CALIFORNIA

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2020 :: LATIMES.COM/CALIFORNIA



IRFAN KHAN Los Angeles Times

FLAMES AND plumes of smoke from the Bobcat fire in Juniper Hills. The blaze, which officials say has made a dramatic push due to the windy conditions, has burned more than 93,842 acres and was threatening some desert communities flanking the San Gabriel Mountains.

California fires' sweeping toll

Nature's dire warnings on climate are impossible to ignore

STEVE LOPEZ

In California, we've come to see drought, extreme heat and deadly fire as the most alarming, obvious evidence of climate change. But life as we know it is being altered in multiple ways, often just out of view.

There was a time not long ago when young great white sharks were seldom found north of Point Conception on the Santa Barbara County coast, because the water was too cold for them. But now there's a sizable population in Monterey Bay, where water has warmed in recent years, and much of the ecosystem has been affected.

"We're seeing a whole host of things happening [See Lopez, B8]

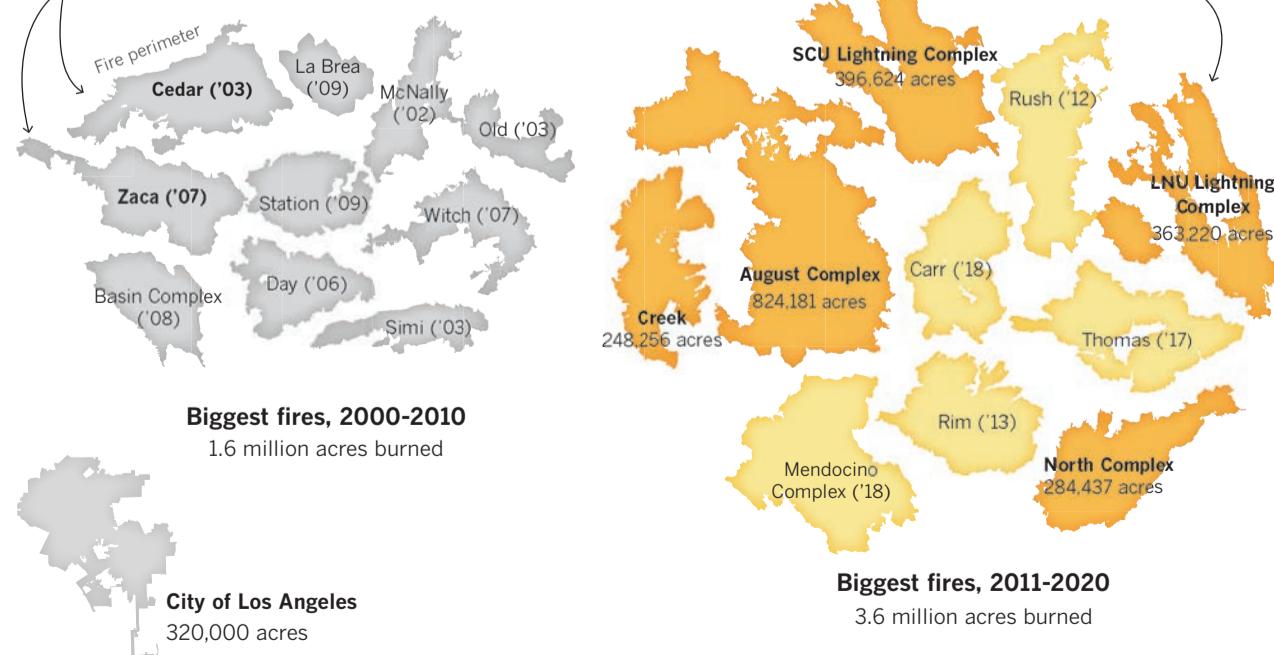


WALLY SKALIJ Los Angeles Times

A STATUE sits on top of a house in Juniper Hills that was leveled by fire Saturday. Several homes in the remote foothills community were lost, a fire official said. The extent of the destruction wasn't immediately clear.

Decades of worsening wildfires

Record-breaking wildfires are occurring more frequently. Eight of the 10 largest fires in modern California history have burned in the past decade. The August Complex fire, now burning, is the largest ever recorded.



Tough days ahead as Bobcat chews desert land

BY LOUIS SAHAGUN AND ALEX WIGGLESWORTH

Roland Pagan on Saturday stood knee-deep in swirls of smoke on a mesa where the two-story home it took him nine years to build once offered commanding views of the desert flatlands below.

Almost exactly 24 hours earlier, Pagan, 80, stood on a nearby hill and peered through binoculars, watching his house in Juniper Hills collapse in flames.

"The ferocity of this fire was shocking," he said, shaking [See Bobcat fire, B9]

Police lawsuit will be long and complex

Activists' case against LAPD will take years and possibly millions of dollars to resolve.

By KEVIN RECTOR

A lawsuit alleging a brutal and unconstitutional crackdown by Los Angeles police during protests this summer — potentially the largest and most expensive case of its kind in city history — is expected to take years to resolve, even if a settlement is reached along the way.

The discovery process, in which both sides solicit and collect evidence, is only just beginning.

Thousands of records must be collected, and dozens of stakeholders must be deposed, including Mayor Eric Garcetti, LAPD Chief Michel Moore and protesters who suffered injuries, attorneys for both sides said in a joint report filed in U.S. District Court last month.

Presiding U.S. District Judge Consuelo B. Marshall has set a tentative date for a trial, but not for another year and a half — on April 26, 2022.

The city could agree to settle the lawsuit instead, making that schedule moot, but such a decision would almost certainly be followed by protracted negotiations over what is owed to those with claims against the city.

"It's complicated," said Carol Sobel, an attorney for the plaintiffs, who include Black Lives Matter Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Community Action Network and other individual protesters.

The activist groups and [See Lawsuit, B7]

Video raises questions anew

By KEVIN RECTOR

Newly released body camera video from protests in Los Angeles this summer shows L.A. police officers yanking a large protest sign from the hands of a man in a Hollywood intersection, shoving him backward as he puts his hands up, then shooting him in the groin with a foam projectile at close range.

Ben Montemayor, a 28-year-old filmmaker, suffered serious injuries to his testicles as a result and was rushed into emergency surgery, he told The Times in the days that followed.

The video raises new questions about the LAPD's tactics during the summer's tumultuous protests, particularly in regard to their use of the 40-millimeter projectiles — which, by policy,

[See Video, B6]

Pandemic spurs midwife rebirth

Black women want home births to avoid the coronavirus and to 'feel cared for.' B4

UCLA rock star

John Wasson, 86, was a cosmochemist and meteorite expert. B7

Lottery B6

GRAPHIC: The state's blazes are bigger and more destructive, with no relief in sight. CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES, B3

PRIYA KRISHNAKUMAR & SWETHA KANNAN Los Angeles Times

CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

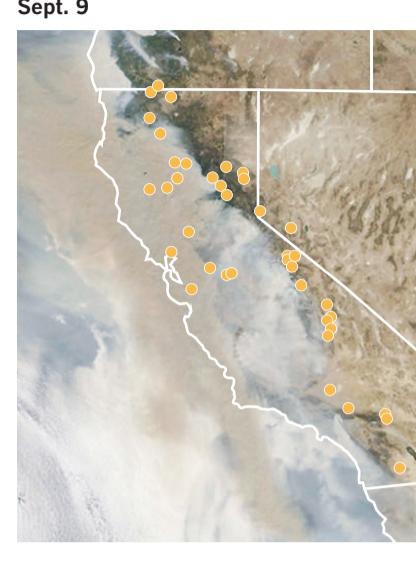
Data analysis presents a bleak picture

BY PRIYA KRISHNAKUMAR & SWETHA KANNAN

KANNAN Fire season in California looks different these days. Temperatures are hotter. Fires are bigger and more destructive. Air quality is the worst it's been in decades, blanketing cities in smoke. Wildfires are a perennial challenge in California, but the scale and destruction of recent fires are worse than anything many can remember.

The Times analyzed decades of data tracking California wildfires and the destruction they've wrought. The analysis found that wildfires and their compounding effects have intensified in recent years — and there's little sign things will improve.

*priya@latimes.com
swetha.kannan@latimes.com*



In a 10-year span of shattered records, 2020 tops them all

Hundreds of wildfires of varying sizes scorch the state each year, and the total area consumed has increased sharply in the last decade. But 2020 has already shattered the all-time record, with 3.4 million acres burned so far. Hot, dry winds tend to pick up in the fall, so even more acres may burn this year.

City of Los Angeles: 320,000 acres

A grid map of the City of Los Angeles where each square represents 10,000 acres. The entire city is filled with these squares, indicating the scale of the burn.

Yosemite National Park: 748,000 acres

A grid map of Yosemite National Park where each square represents 10,000 acres. The park is filled with these squares, indicating the scale of the burn.

2001-10: 7.03 million acres

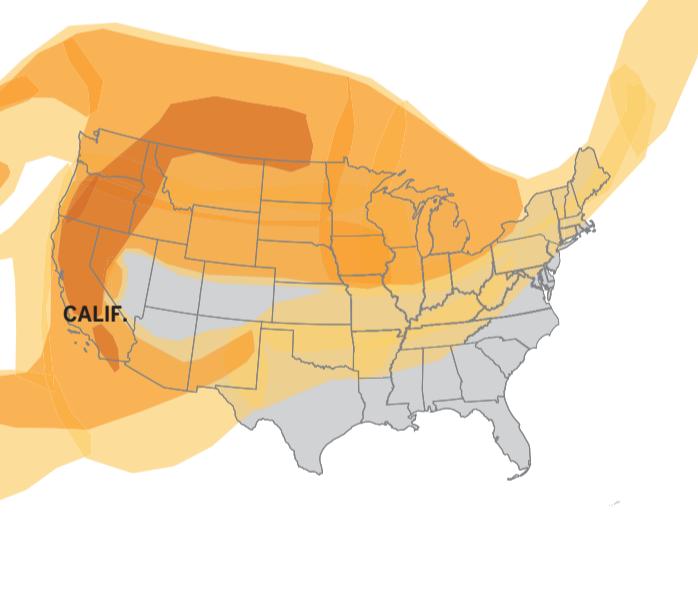
A large grid map of California where each square represents 10,000 acres. The entire state is filled with these squares, indicating the scale of the burn over a 10-year period.

Total burned from 2011-20: 11 million acres

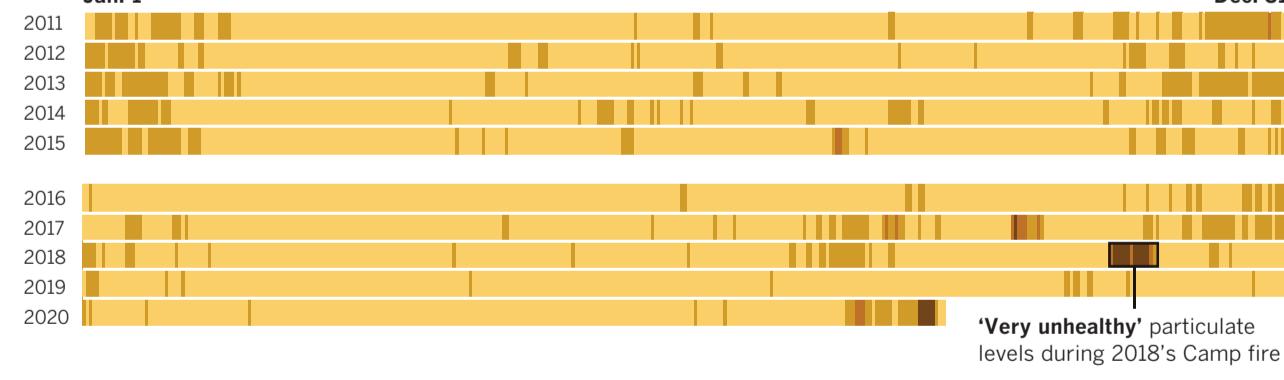
A large grid map of California where each square represents 10,000 acres. The entire state is filled with these squares, indicating the scale of the burn over a 10-year period.

Smoke is contributing to the worst air quality in decades

Last week, smoke from fires on the West Coast reached all the way across the Atlantic Ocean.



When wildfire smoke settles close to the ground, it spreads harmful microscopic particles that can enter the bloodstream. Since 2015, scientists have reported "very unhealthy" levels of these particles in the Napa Valley area 15 times, a reading not recorded in the previous five years.

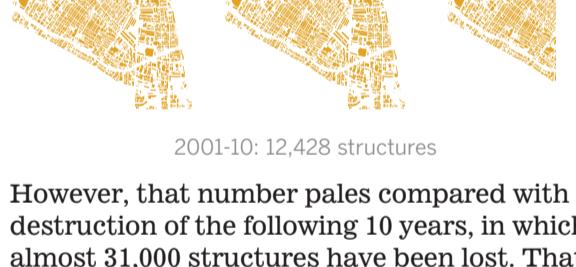


'Very unhealthy' particulate levels during 2018's Camp fire



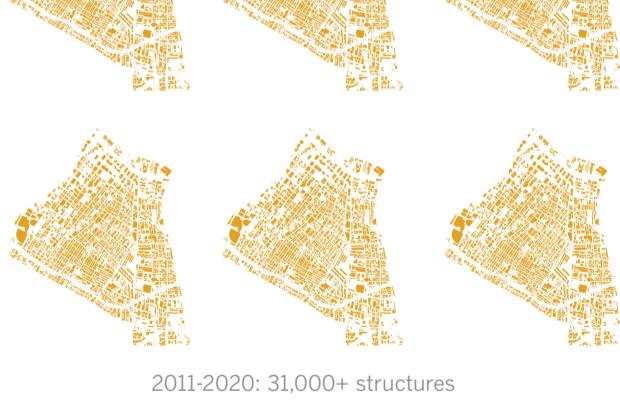
Downtown L.A.
(Approx. 5,100 buildings)

From 2001 to 2010, wildfires destroyed 12,428 structures across the state. That's a building footprint more than twice the size of downtown.



2001-10: 12,428 structures

However, that number pales compared with the destruction of the following 10 years, in which almost 31,000 structures have been lost. That's the equivalent of about six L.A. downtowns.



2011-2020: 31,000+ structures

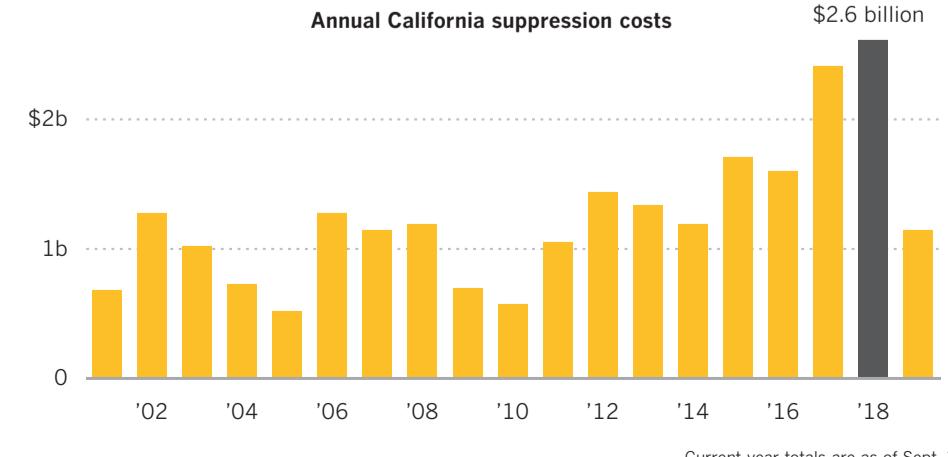
Rising heat and drought are likely to worsen things

Summers in California are getting hotter. On Sept. 6, Los Angeles County hit its highest recorded temperature at 121 degrees. Hot summer months dry out vegetation, and several years of drought have primed large areas of the state for fires.



What will it take to slow the spread?

Firefighting costs have ballooned this year. Without investment in fire prevention and changes to combat the effects of climate change, experts say California likely has more record-setting fire seasons in store.



Current year totals are as of Sept. 18

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, National Interagency Fire Center, U.S. Department of Agriculture, NASA Worldview