

State of California reeling from record high temperatures, early wildfire season

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An extreme high-pressure region led to record setting high temperatures last weekend across the state of California. The high temperatures led to mass power outages along with a series of devastating wildfires.

All-time record temperatures were recorded in the Los Angeles area in particular. Van Nuys regional airport recorded a temperature of 117 degrees Fahrenheit (47.2 degrees Celsius), while the University of California Los Angeles recorded a temperature of 111 degrees Fahrenheit (43.9 degrees Celsius).

The record high temperatures led to peak electrical usage as well. According to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP), energy demand in Los Angeles reached an all-time July high of 6,256 megawatts on Friday, breaking the previous record set in 2006 of 6,165 megawatts.

According to DWP, more than 32,800 households were without power on Friday, while 20,000 of those remained without power into Saturday. Southern California Edison reported that 18,000 of their customers were without power due to the heat wave.

Most significantly, the hot temperatures led to a series of wildfires across the state.

In the area of San Bernardino, a two-hour drive east of Los Angeles, the Valley Fire has burned through more than 1,000 acres after it started on Friday afternoon. The fire forced the evacuation of more than 1,000 residents in the small community of Forest Falls and is only about 5 percent contained as of Sunday.

The West Fire burning in the Cuyamaca Mountains near San Diego tore through 504 acres and destroyed several homes; 2,400 residents were forced to evacuate the area. Cooler weather on Sunday, however, brought the fire to 81 percent containment and many of the residents have begun to return.

The largest of the weekend fires was the Klamathon

Fire near the border of Oregon. That fire is now responsible for at least one death, and as of Saturday had burned through 22,000 acres. The fire is now 20 percent contained.

Mandatory evacuations were in effect in the city of Burbank due to a multi-acre fire there, while wildfires have once again brought disaster to the coastal area of Santa Barbara.

The Holiday Fire in the Santa Barbara community of Goleta was nearly impossible for firefighters to contain Friday night, prompting thousands to evacuate. In addition to high temperatures, the high-pressure front brought hot, dry, gale force winds, a regional weather phenomenon known as “sundowner” winds. These winds were so strong that helicopters and planes were unable to fly over and deliver water and fire retardant chemicals to the blazes.

Improved conditions led to 80 percent containment in Goleta by Saturday evening, however, with most of the 2,500 evacuees being allowed to return to their homes. While fire officials are still taking stock of the damage, it is believed that at least 20 homes were destroyed as a result of the fire.

Last December, the Santa Barbara region fell victim to the Thomas Fire, the largest single wildfire in the state’s recorded history. Before full containment, it burned through 281,893 acres, destroyed 1,063 homes and other structures and damaged 280 others. The fire caused more than \$2.176 billion in damages.

A few months earlier, wildfires ripped through Napa and Sonoma counties in Northern California, burning more than 200,000 acres and killing 44 people. These fires caused more than \$9.4 billion in damages.

The Thomas Fire, for its part, had created optimal conditions for horrific flash flooding and mudslides in the coastal city of Montecito. One hundred homes were

destroyed and more than 21 people lost their lives in the flooding. Fire officials are now warning of flash floods as a result of the latest fires and have advised residents to stay out of low-lying areas.

Considering the extreme weather conditions over the past weekend, it is remarkable that there has been relatively little loss of life and property. California, however, is once more in the midst of drought conditions and the fires themselves have begun two months in advance of the official fire season.

As is always the case, the damages caused by the fires are attributable to the capitalist system's complete subordination of human safety to the interests of private profit. In a state with the second highest concentration of billionaires in the country, the administration of Democratic Governor Brown has made sure that only a piddling amount will be spent on future fire prevention efforts, and only a fraction of that will be used to make past victims whole.

The state's 2018-19 fiscal year budget includes only \$35 million in recovery costs for the Northern California wildfires. Only \$1.765 billion is allocated for fire suppression and recovery in general, an amount even less than the damages caused by the Thomas Fire alone.

While Brown's term as governor will soon come to an end, both gubernatorial frontrunners have thus far said nothing about the latest wave of fires devastating the state. Democrat Gavin Newsom's campaign website contains no mention of the heat wave or the fires as of Sunday and the same can be said of his main Republican opponent John Cox.

The series of fires at the Camp Pendleton Marine Base north of San Diego received comparably little media attention over the weekend. The Marine Corps website currently lists the base's fire danger as category "Red-Extreme," referring to fires that are "practically impossible to extinguish and usually continue until danger rating conditions improve or fire conditions burn themselves out."

Dozens of acres have burned through the base training grounds over the weekend and according to Camp Pendleton emergency services officials, an average of 185 wildland fires break out across the 125,000-acre military installation each year.

Camp Pendleton is a planned site for a tent encampment that would house more than 47,000

immigrants under the Trump administration's zero tolerance immigration policy.

With the Brown administration's recent deployment of National Guard troops to the California-Mexico border, it is clear that California Democrats and Republicans alike plan to play an active role in bringing immigrants to such modern-day concentration camps.



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