

# Western US ravaged by catastrophic fires, record heat

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Fires are raging across the US west coast states and in the Canadian province of British Columbia, triggered by a combination of lightning storms, high winds and extreme heat.

On Monday, a wind-driven fire destroyed the community of Malden, Washington, home to 200 people. About 100 homes, nearly every house in the town, along with the downtown area, were consumed by flames. The fire station, post office, city hall, municipal library and other downtown structures were destroyed.

“The scale of this disaster really can’t be expressed in words,” Whitman County Sheriff Brett Myers said in a statement. “The fire will be extinguished, but a community has been changed for a lifetime. I just hope we don’t find the fire took more than homes and buildings. I pray everyone got out in time.” As of Tuesday, there were no reports of fatalities or injuries.

Elsewhere in Washington and the neighboring state of Oregon blackouts affected nearly 250,000 households, as trees, knocked down by the high winds, toppled electrical cables.

Washington Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz tweeted that “we’re still seeing new fire starts in every corner of the state.”

East of Oregon’s Willamette River Valley, a wildfire swept through the communities of Blue River and Vida on Monday. Hundreds were evacuated, 150 homes were burnt and at least one person was reported killed. Both communities were a “total loss,” according to a report by local news station KVAL.

Evacuations also took place east of Salem, the state capital, where residents were removed from many of the small communities in the foothills of the Cascade Range. The air above the city of Portland was covered by a thick layer of smoke and ash. Residents with

respiratory problems were strongly advised to stay in their homes.

As of Tuesday, the Doctor Creek wildfire in southeast British Columbia, not far from the Idaho-Montana border, had burned 7,937 hectares (19,613 acres) and was out of control. High winds and steep terrain make this wildfire difficult to control.

Further south, California is experiencing its most intense fire season on record this year. Over two million acres (800,000 hectares) of forests and fields have burnt. On Monday, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency for multiple counties.

In the Central Valley near the city of Fresno, Pacific Gas and Electric cut off power to more than 170,000 people. High heat and very dry conditions on the ground are feeding wildfires across the region, many of them out of control. Over 1,000 fires are burning in California, caused by a series of intense lightning storms. High heat and strong winds forced the Forest Service to close eight national forests.

Hikers and campers near Fresno were trapped by the fires and had to be rescued by helicopters. The Creek Fire in Huntington Lake, northwest of Fresno, is zero percent contained and is burning near a hydroelectric plant.

Meanwhile, to the west, the Dolan Fire, which is burning south of the coastal city of Big Sur, grew from 2,300 acres to 34,175 acres, according to the US Forest Service. It has yet to be fully contained.

In the vicinity of Los Angeles, the Forest Service announced the closure of several national forests threatened by the Bobcat Fire. The Bobcat and the El Dorado fires, in Southern California’s San Bernardino County, have each consumed more than 8,000 acres. Forest Service officials do not expect to fully contain the Bobcat fire until October 15.

The current devastation dwarfs California's previous record fire seasons of 2017 and 2018. The fires have become more numerous and destructive as a result of global warming. Increasingly, the fire season, formerly an autumn phenomenon, has extended into the summer, where it now combines with extreme heat, high wind conditions and drier vegetation. In addition, autumn rains begin later than average.

According to a study titled "Climate change is increasing the likelihood of extreme autumn wildfire conditions across California," published last month, "state-wide increases in autumn temperature (~1 °C) and decreases in autumn precipitation (~30 percent) over the past four decades have contributed to increases in aggregate fire weather indices (+20 percent)." The study gives strong evidence that continued global warming will "amplify the number of days with extreme fire weather." It calls for a global solution "consistent" with the United Nations Paris Agreement.

At the time, signatories of the 2015 Paris Agreement pledged to hold global warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Except for some cosmetic measures, this promise was never seriously kept. Since the agreement was signed, global temperatures have increased by more than 1.5°C. From the moment it was signed, the Paris Agreement became a dead letter. The formal repudiation of the agreement last November by President Donald Trump was the final nail in its coffin.

Across the world, any measure to reduce or resolve the climate change crisis that in any way threatens capitalist profits is rejected by the financial aristocracy and the fossil fuel industries, as California, the West Coast and the world head to a major environmental catastrophe.

Moreover, it is impossible to address or resolve a problem of international scope within the limited framework of national politics. All attempts by capitalist nations to implement a worldwide plan has failed to produce any result, as every country has sought to limit its own costs and obligations at the expense of others.

The West Coast fires and all the other effects of global warming are revolutionary questions. Their resolution requires the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by a world socialist society committed to human needs above profits.



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