

Western US wildfires point to worsening trends of global warming

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26 September 2020

The western United States remains ablaze, as wildfires continue to spread throughout the region, exacerbating the COVID-19 pandemic, the homelessness crisis and dire economic conditions as residents throughout the region remain displaced.

Since the beginning of 2020, California has seen approximately 3.6 million acres burn—a testament to the growing climate crisis. Currently, there are still 26 major wildfires wreaking havoc throughout California. Some 6,700 structures have been destroyed and 26 fatalities recorded since August 15, according to Cal Fire.

Meanwhile, the National Interagency Fire Center reports that Washington has seen over 600,000 acres burn and continues to face seven active wildfires. Oregon has seen the destruction of over one million acres since the start of 2020, and is currently battling nine active fires, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The alarming prevalence of record-breaking wildfires in the past few years comes as no surprise, given its direct link to climate change. Warming temperatures have brought on arid conditions, making the dry vegetation a perfect catalyst for fires.

More specifically, in California, the Santa Ana winds bring dry air into Southern California and, according to a 2015 study conducted by IOP Science, spread fires three times faster not only due to the drying of vegetation, but because these winds assist in spreading embers, potentially sparking additional fires.

In fact, according to a 2019 study conducted by the American Geophysical Union (AGU), since the early 1970s, California has seen yearly wildfires increase fivefold, with a sharp increase in destruction especially during the 2017 and 2018 fires seasons. The study found the increase to be attributed to warming temperatures and drying fuels, directly connected to man-made climate change.

Furthermore, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) produced data that demonstrates how California's average temperature taken during September has increased by roughly four degrees in the past

100 years. According to NOAA, the Northern Hemisphere had its warmest summer thus far, with August 2020 recorded as the second hottest August on record.

These conditions will only worsen in the coming years, due to the political establishment's lack of effective solutions to address the crisis.

Additionally, not only have these wildfires shown a spotlight on the growing climate catastrophe, they have also brought an added layer of health concerns to those affected.

Wildfires have contributed to dangerously poor air quality in cities throughout Washington, Oregon and California. The onslaught of smoke created by the fires has exacerbated conditions throughout the western region, having an especially hazardous effect on older residents, children and those with preexisting conditions, such as asthma and heart disease.

The World Health Organization reports that roughly 7 million people die annually due to air pollution. Hazardous air quality has also been found to significantly decrease life expectancy to those affected.

This is because the particulate matter in smoke can deeply penetrate the lungs and enter the bloodstream. Moreover, not only do wildfires affect the respiratory health of individuals while active; they have been found to have long-term health effects, according to a recent study published by the journal *Toxics*.

The study analyzed a group of 95 adults in Seeley Lake, Montana who had lived through summer wildfires in 2017. The study concluded that even one and two years after the wildfires, the number of people with below-normal lung function was significantly higher.

The devastating fire season intersects with the COVID-19 pandemic, which is already responsible for over 200,000 deaths and more than 7 million cases in the United States. With tens of thousands becoming infected and many dying weekly, the virus has continued to rapidly spread thanks to the vastly irresponsible reopening of schools and workplaces enforced by Democratic and Republican state leaders.

Now, its vast spread can only be exacerbated as people

continue to populate evacuation centers and shelters in significant numbers due to the destruction brought on by the wildfires in the west. Evacuees of the fires face the ultimate Catch-22: remain without shelter, or risk infection in crowded centers.

Also, as hospitals continue to be overwhelmed by the deluge of COVID-19 patients, the wildfires and their debilitating health effects have led to an increase in hospitalizations, adding stress to the medical infrastructure, and the need for necessary medical attention.

According to the *Guardian*, Northern California has seen a stark 12 percent increase in hospitalizations, with a 43 percent increase in cerebrovascular conditions, like strokes, which can be largely attributed to inflammation caused by air pollution.

In light of these conditions, rather than focusing on burning issues directly affecting the entire working class, such as the pandemic, climate change or the wildfires, Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden and Republican President Donald Trump have deliberately avoided all the basic issues confronting the vast majority of the population during the 2020 campaign.

For Trump's part, it took weeks for him to even speak about the wildfires. When he finally did feign concern and flew to California on September 14 for a quick photo-op, he dismissed experts' conclusion that climate change is a factor in the vast spread of wildfires throughout the region.

In fact, when pressed by Wade Crowfoot, head of California's Natural Resources Agency, to acknowledge the link between climate change and the wildfires, Trump completely dismissed the notion, instead stating that climate will eventually get "cooler" and placing the majority of the blame on forest management.

These statements, however, should come as no shock to those familiar with Trump's track record on climate change, or lack thereof.

Openly anti-science, Trump has publicly stated that he does not believe in climate science and its findings, despite the fact that his administration published the National Climate Assessment back in 2018. The report expressed the significance of climate change and gave a dire warning that "more frequent and intense extreme weather and climate-related events, as well as changes in average climate conditions, are expected to continue to damage infrastructure, ecosystems, and social systems that provide essential benefits to communities."

After its release, Trump completely dismissed the report, instead expressing skepticism on the findings.

He stated, "One of the problems that a lot of people like myself, we have very high levels of intelligence but we're not necessarily such believers. As to whether or not [climate

change is] man-made and whether or not the effects ... are there, I don't see it."

For his part, Biden has deceitfully painted himself to be a champion of climate advocacy, trying to differentiate himself from Trump by calling the president a "climate arsonist" and promising constituents that he will prioritize confronting climate change and its effects if elected to office.

When speaking to supporters in Delaware recently, Biden stated, "We need a president who respects science [and] who understands that the damage from climate change is already here. Unless we take urgent action, it'll soon be more catastrophic."

And what are Biden's proposed revolutionary solutions to the climate catastrophe? A \$2 trillion climate plan over four years that promises to drastically cut fossil fuel emissions and increase the use of clean energy.

Biden's campaign website alone is full of idealistic platitudes, promising to "stand up to the abuse of power by polluters who disproportionately harm communities of color and low-income communities" and to "build a strong, more resilient nation."

Biden has also been an open supporter of the supposedly "progressive" Green New Deal, with his website citing it as a "crucial framework" to take on the climate crisis. In reality though, the Green New Deal is a nonbinding resolution that makes those who endorse it come across as an advocate for green energy but relieving them of the burden to actually pursue any tangible solutions to combat the problem.

Biden's outspoken advocacy for combating climate change is a calculated, strategic effort to attract and capture working-class youth, a key demographic whose support he is struggling to gain. In reality though, his platform seeks to draw constituents in and buy into his false promises, while trying to cover up his record in supporting big business and Wall Street.

What is most preposterous about both candidates is that whatever specific strategy they support, their full commitment to nationalism and the capitalist system will inevitably fail to address an international issue such as climate change. Only the working class, united under a genuine socialist program, can pave the way to a viable future on the basis of a scientific plan that seeks to organize and utilize all human and natural resources for a healthy society.



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