

Wildfires in the West – Fast Facts

The federal government [spent \\$11.9 billion suppressing wildfires from 2016-2020](#)--a 37% increase from 2011-2015 (\$8.6 billion).

The Forest Service's new [10-year plan](#) across the Western United States will treat 50 million acres--through a combination of thinning and managed low-fires--to reduce combustible plant materials to restore forest health, resilience, and natural fire dynamics.

- [More than 2.8 million acres](#) in Arizona, including in four northern forests and the greater Prescott area.
- [3.5 million acres](#) across Colorado's Front Range.
- [800,000 acres](#) across northwest Montana's Kootenai Complex.
- These treatments will be planned with community input and will protect old growth, roadless and other high conservation forests.

The historic Bipartisan Infrastructure Law set aside funding for the first 2 years to implement this plan. Congress needs to pass additional major climate investments to make the 10-year fire mitigation plan a reality.

The Wildfire Surge

In 2021, [more than 58,900 wildfires burned 7.1 million acres of land](#) across the United States--a 17% increase in just two years. That compares to just 18,229 wildfires and over 1.3 million acres lost in 1983, when official record-keeping began--223% more wildfires affecting 436% more acres of land.

Wildfires are posing a growing threat to public health in many parts of the U.S. [In the years 2016-2019, individuals in the U.S. experienced a 19% increase in the number of days they were exposed to high wildfire risk compared to 2001-2004.](#) These fire dynamics are driven by a combination of climate change and, ironically, a policy of near total fire suppression for many decades leading to the dangerous buildup of dry fuels.

Combined with population growth in fire prone ecosystems, the risks to human life and property are greater now than ever before. The solution is to restore a more balanced fire dynamic in the West by protecting communities and reducing the quantity of combustible wood through techniques that include prescribed fires and strategic cutting of trees.

- In 2021, [1,773 wildfires in Arizona](#) burned 524,428 million acres of land.
- In 2021, [1,017 wildfires in Colorado](#) burned 48,195 million acres of land.
- In 2021, [2,573 wildfires in Montana](#) burned 747,678 million acres of land.
- In 2021, [565 wildfires in Nevada](#) burned 123,427 million acres of land.

Property Destruction

17,904 structures were burned in wildfires in 2020, compared to 12,306 in 2017-- [an increase of 45% in just three years](#).

Property at Risk

[An estimated 4.5 million Western homes and properties](#) are endangered by wildfires, including:

- More than 242,000 in Arizona--[1 in every 11 of property](#) in the state.
- Almost 374,000 in Colorado--a remarkable [17% of all properties](#) in the state.
- Nearly 138,000 in Montana--a remarkable [29% of all properties](#) in the state.
- More than 67,000 in Nevada--1 of every 17 properties in the state.

Staggering Costs

Insured losses to wildfires were [an estimated \\$7-\\$13 billion](#) in 2020.

Public Opinion

A majority of Americans say [climate change is either the primary cause \(15%\) or a major factor \(41%\)](#) behind the recent wildfires in the western United States (Monmouth, Sept. 2021).

62% of adults are more concerned that government will not go far enough in [limiting new construction in areas at high risk](#) from wildfires, major storms, and floods. (Pew Research Center, 2021)

85% of adults say it's very important or somewhat important to [enact stricter building standards](#) to better withstand wildfires, major storms and floods. (Pew Research Center, 2021)

A [poll of adults in eight Mountain West states](#) (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, WY) showed that:

- [90 percent call wildfires a serious problem](#) in their state, with 60 percent describing it as extremely or very serious. (91% in AZ, 98% in CO, 90% in MT, 79% in NV)
- 71 percent say wildfires are more of a problem than ten years ago. ([68% in AZ](#), [74% in CO](#), [71% in MT](#), [68% in NV](#))
- More than 1 in 4 have [adjusted their recreation plans](#) because of changes in climate like fires, less snow, or less water.
- There is [strong support](#) for actions to address wildfire risk:
 - Increasing efforts to remove overgrown brush and selected or dead trees on public lands. (94% support, including 68% who strongly support it)

- Increase the use of controlled burns when and where doing so will safely reduce the amount of fuel for fires. (91% support, including 61% who strongly support it)
- Require landowners in fire prone areas to remove trees and brush close to their home so that fires are less likely to affect it. (79% support, including 50% who strongly support it)
- Updating zoning and building codes for new homes and development near forests or other fire-prone areas so homes are farther from or can better withstand fires. (80% support, including 49% who strongly support it)

EDF Action 2021 Polling

- 78% of respondents are concerned about extreme heat while 70% are concerned with wildfires. And respondents reconcile the wide-ranging and harmful impacts fires and heat have on the environment (fires 78% and heat 74%), health (fire 78% and heat 73%) and air quality (fire 81% and heat 70%).
- Bipartisan majorities support a wide array of measures to prevent catastrophic fires, including:
 - Increasing funding for the U.S. Forest Service that would specifically be designated for preventing catastrophic wildfires (82%).
 - Removing vegetation at risk of starting wildfires, such as dead trees, and selling or recycling it to generate revenue for restoration efforts (81%).
 - Expanding energy efficiency programs to reduce the strain on electricity, gas and water systems and our citizen's wallets (78%).
 - Adopting stronger pollution limits for vehicles and power plants to increase air quality (72%).
 - Implementing policy and technical solutions that even the burden among citizens during power outage crisis (71%).
- Around four in five respondents say it's important for the federal government (79%), state government (83%), local government (81%) and private landowners (80%) to invest in better forest management to build forest resilience.
- A majority of respondents want candidates running for the U.S. Senate to support aggressive action to address wildfires (56%) and extreme heat (54%).
- Around three quarters of respondents believe it's important for lawmakers at the federal (76%), state (79%) and local (76%) levels to pass legislation to address the underlying climate-related factors causing drought.

Explore the national polling memo [here](#). The poll also oversampled in [Arizona](#), [Colorado](#) and [Idaho](#).