

# WILDFIRES: WHY THEY'RE GETTING WORSE AND WHAT IT ACTUALLY MEANS

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**Bloom's Level:** Analyze

**Standard:**

MS-ESS2-4 — Weather and Climate

MS-ESS3-3 — Human Impacts on Earth Systems

TEKS §112.19(b)(10)(C) — Human Activity and Earth's Systems

STUDENT EDITION



Wildfires in dry forests burn faster and hotter when years of dead wood and brush have built up on the forest floor — a problem called fuel load.

# Wildfires: Why They're Getting Worse and What It Actually Means

## When Fire Becomes Something Different

Imagine waking up to an orange sky at noon.

The sun is blocked by smoke, ash is falling like snow, and the air smells like a campfire

— except the fire is 50 miles away. This is no longer a rare experience for millions of

Americans. Wildfires have always been part of Earth's natural systems, but something has shifted. The fires burning today are larger, faster, and more destructive than those of previous generations. To understand why, we need to break down the science, the policy, and the human decisions that have brought us to this point.



Wildfires in dry forests burn faster and hotter when years of dead wood and brush have built up on the forest floor — a problem called fuel load.

## The Fire Triangle: Breaking Down the Basics

Every fire — from a candle flame to a 1-million-acre wildfire — depends on three things working together: **fuel**, **heat**, and **oxygen**. Scientists call this the fire triangle. Remove any one side, and the fire cannot survive.

In a wildfire, these three elements interact with the landscape in powerful ways:

- **Fuel** includes dead trees, dry grass, shrubs, and leaf litter on the forest floor.
- **Heat** comes from lightning, human activity, or extreme temperatures that dry out vegetation.
- **Oxygen** is supplied by wind, which also spreads embers and accelerates the fire's movement.

When you examine how wildfires have changed, it becomes clear that all three sides of this triangle have intensified. Droughts are longer and more severe, temperatures

are higher, and — critically — the amount of fuel on the ground has grown dramatically.

### **Fuel Load: Decades of Buildup**

Here is where land management policy enters the picture. For most of the 20th century, the United States followed a strict **fire suppression policy**: put out every wildfire as quickly as possible. The goal seemed logical — protect forests and communities. But this approach had an unintended consequence.

In healthy forest ecosystems, small, frequent fires naturally clear out dead wood, dry brush, and overgrown vegetation. When those fires are suppressed year after year, that material — called **fuel load** — accumulates. Think of it like never cleaning out a fireplace. Eventually, the buildup becomes dangerous.

By the time scientists and policymakers recognized this problem, many forests in the American West had accumulated 50 to 100 years' worth of combustible material. When fires do ignite in these conditions, they burn hotter and spread faster than anything historical records had documented.

Compare this to Indigenous land management practices, which used **controlled burns** for thousands of years to keep fuel loads low and ecosystems healthy. Many fire scientists today argue that reintroducing these practices is one of the most effective tools available.

**Think about it:** How might wildfire history look different today if fire suppression policies had never been adopted? What tradeoffs would communities have faced?

### **Climate Science and the Drought Connection**

Fuel load explains part of the problem. Climate science explains the rest. Examine the data on Western U.S. wildfires over the past 50 years, and a clear pattern emerges: fire seasons are getting longer, and the fires themselves are getting bigger.

Drought is a key driver. When soil and vegetation dry out, plants become highly flammable. Scientists measure this using the **Palmer Drought Severity Index** and **fuel moisture content** — essentially, how much water is left in the vegetation. Lower moisture means higher fire risk.

Rising temperatures, driven by climate change, are extending drought conditions and reducing snowpack in mountain regions. Less snowpack means rivers and soils dry out earlier in the year. In some parts of California, Oregon, and Colorado, what used to be a summer "fire season" now runs nearly year-round.

This is exactly what MS-ESS2-4 asks us to examine: how Earth's systems — atmosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere — interact and influence each other. Wildfires are not isolated events. They are the result of interconnected systems responding to both natural variation and human activity.

**Examine the data:** If average temperatures in a region rise by 2°F and annual snowpack decreases by 25%, what would you predict happens to the length of fire season? What evidence from this article supports your prediction?

### **Smoke, Air Quality, and Human Health**

The effects of wildfires extend far beyond the fire line. Wildfire smoke contains **particulate matter (PM2.5)** — tiny particles small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs. When major fires burn, smoke can travel thousands of miles, affecting air quality in cities nowhere near the flames.

In 2020, smoke from West Coast wildfires reached New York City. In 2023, Canadian wildfires turned skies orange across the northeastern United States. Differentiate between short-term and long-term exposure: short-term exposure causes eye irritation and breathing difficulty, while long-term exposure is linked to serious respiratory and cardiovascular conditions.

### **The Economic and Human Cost**

Organize the costs of wildfires into two categories: **direct** and **indirect**. Direct costs include firefighting expenses (the U.S. now spends over \$3 billion annually), property destruction, and emergency response. Indirect costs include lost tourism, reduced property values, healthcare costs from smoke exposure, and the displacement of entire communities.

The **Camp Fire** of 2018 in Paradise, California, destroyed nearly 19,000 structures and killed 85 people — making it the deadliest wildfire in California history. It also

illustrates a growing challenge: as more people build homes in the **wildland-urban interface (WUI)**, the zone where developed land meets wild vegetation, more lives and structures are at risk.

**Consider this:** Which category of wildfire cost — direct or indirect — do you think is harder for communities to recover from? Use evidence from the article to support your reasoning.

### **Connecting the Picture**

Wildfires are not simply a weather problem, a forest management problem, or a climate problem. They are all three, working together. When you examine the evidence — rising temperatures, accumulated fuel loads, expanding human development, and longer droughts — a coherent and urgent picture emerges.

Understanding this system means recognizing that solutions must also be interconnected: smarter land management, updated building codes, climate action, and community preparedness. The science is clear. The question now is what we choose to do with it.

## LESSON OBJECTIVE

In this lesson, you will examine how Earth's interconnected systems — including the atmosphere, biosphere, and hydrosphere — contribute to the increasing severity of wildfires. You will analyze data and evidence related to climate change, land management decisions, and human activity to identify patterns and explain why wildfires are becoming larger and more destructive. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to break down the causes and consequences of wildfires and evaluate how human choices interact with natural systems.



Comparing a forest managed with controlled burns to one with decades of fuel buildup helps explain why some wildfires are far more destructive than others.

**Standard:** MS-ESS2-4 — Weather and Climate; MS-ESS3-3 — Human Impacts on Earth Systems; TEKS §112.19(b)(10)(C) — Human Activity and Earth's Systems

**Bloom's Level:** Analyze

**Bloom's Goal:** Students will analyze how climate data, fuel load accumulation, and human land-use decisions interact within Earth's systems to explain the increasing frequency and severity of wildfires.

**Explanation:** At the Analyze level, students move beyond recalling facts to breaking down complex information and identifying relationships between components. This lesson asks students to examine multiple data sources and causal factors — such as drought indices, fire suppression history, and temperature trends — and determine how these elements work together to produce observable patterns in wildfire behavior.

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Read each question carefully, use evidence from the article to support your thinking, and write a complete response in your own words.

1. The article describes how decades of fire suppression policy led to dangerous fuel load buildup in Western forests. Analyze how this human decision interacted with natural Earth systems — such as climate and drought — to make modern wildfires more destructive than historical ones.

Think about: Consider how the fire triangle connects to both the fuel load problem and climate conditions. How do human choices and natural systems work together to create a bigger problem than either would cause alone?

2. Using data and evidence from the article, analyze the relationship between rising temperatures, decreasing snowpack, and the length of wildfire season. What pattern do you see, and what does it suggest about how Earth's systems are connected?

Think about: Think about how the atmosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere interact. How does a change in one system — like temperature — trigger changes in others, and how do those changes eventually affect fire risk?

3. The article separates wildfire costs into direct and indirect categories. Analyze which type of cost poses a greater long-term challenge for communities in the wildland-urban interface, and explain how human activity has contributed to increasing both types of costs.

Think about: Consider not just the immediate damage from a fire, but what happens to a community in the months and years after. How does the decision to build homes near wild vegetation connect to the scale of both direct and indirect costs?

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**DATA TABLE & ANALYSIS**

Study the data table below, which compares wildfire conditions and impacts across several major U.S. wildfire events and regional trends. Use the data and what you learned in the article to answer the three analysis questions that follow. Write complete sentences and use specific evidence from the table to support your answers.

**Experiment:** This data set compares key wildfire-related variables across selected years and regions in the western United States, drawing on information from the lesson article about wildfire causes and impacts. The variables include fuel load buildup, average temperature change, fire season length, structures destroyed, and estimated annual firefighting costs. These data points illustrate how climate, land management, and human development interact to shape wildfire severity.

Year / Region (N/A)	Fuel Load Buildup (years of accumulation)	Average Temperature Increase (°F above historical baseline)	Fire Season Length (months per year)	Structures Destroyed (number of structures)	Annual Firefighting Cost (USD billions)
1970s / Western U.S.	20-30	0.5	3-4	~2,000	0.3
1990s / Western U.S.	40-60	1.0	4-5	~6,500	0.9
2000s / Western U.S.	60-80	1.5	5-6	~11,000	1.8
2018 / Paradise, CA (Camp Fire)	80-100	2.0	Nearly year-round	18,804	3.0+
2020 / West Coast (CA, OR, WA)	80-100	2.2	Nearly year-round	~17,000	3.0+

Year / Region (N/A)	Fuel Load Buildup (years of accumulation)	Average Temperature Increase (°F above historical baseline)	Fire Season Length (months per year)	Structures Destroyed (number of structures)	Annual Firefighting Cost (USD (billions))
2023 / Northeastern U.S. (smoke impact)	N/A	2.0	Nearly year-round	N/A	3.0+

1. Analyze the relationship between fuel load buildup and structures destroyed across the decades shown in the table. What pattern do you observe, and what does this suggest about the role of fire suppression policy in increasing wildfire destruction?

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2. Compare the fire season length in the 1970s to the fire season length in the 2018 and 2020 rows. Using data from the table and information from the article, explain what combination of factors most likely caused this change.

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3. The annual firefighting cost increased from approximately \$0.3 billion in the 1970s to over \$3 billion by 2018. Using the table and the article, analyze whether spending more money on firefighting alone is likely to solve the wildfire crisis. What other interconnected factors must also be addressed?

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## HYPOTHESIS BUILDER

Use the information from the article to complete each component of a scientific hypothesis. First, identify the independent and dependent variables. Then, construct a full hypothesis using the If/Then/ Because format. Write your answers in complete sentences where indicated.

Scientists studying wildfire patterns in the American West have noticed that regions with higher accumulated fuel loads — dead wood, dry brush, and leaf litter built up over decades of fire suppression — tend to experience more intense and faster-spreading wildfires. A research team wants to investigate whether the amount of fuel load on a forest floor directly affects the intensity of a wildfire. They plan to compare fire behavior in forest plots with low, medium, and high fuel loads under the same temperature and wind conditions.

### Independent Variable

What is the one factor the researchers are deliberately changing between the forest plots? Identify this variable and explain what it represents in the experiment.

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### Dependent Variable

What outcome are the researchers measuring to see how it responds to the change? Identify this variable and explain how it would be observed or recorded.

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**If**

Write the 'If' part of your hypothesis by stating what condition or change is being tested. Begin with the word 'If' and reference the independent variable.

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**Then**

Write the 'Then' part of your hypothesis by predicting what will happen to the dependent variable as a result. Begin with the word 'then' and describe the expected outcome.

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**Because**

Write the 'Because' part of your hypothesis by explaining the scientific reasoning behind your prediction. Use evidence or concepts from the article, such as the fire triangle, fuel load, or drought conditions, to support your reasoning.

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## CLAIM-EVIDENCE-REASONING (CER)

Read the phenomenon below carefully. Then complete each component of the Claim-Evidence-Reasoning (CER) framework by responding to the guiding prompt for that component. Your responses should be grounded in scientific concepts and data from the article.

**Phenomenon:** Over the past 50 years, wildfires in the western United States have grown significantly larger and more destructive. Scientists have observed that fire seasons are now longer, fires burn hotter, and smoke from major fires regularly travels thousands of miles, affecting air quality across the entire country. In 2020 and 2023, wildfire smoke from the West Coast and Canada turned skies orange as far away as New York City.

### Claim

Based on the phenomenon described above, make a scientific claim that explains why wildfires in the western United States have become larger and more destructive over the past several decades. Your claim should identify the key cause-and-effect relationship without yet providing evidence or explanation.

**Evidence**

Provide at least two specific pieces of scientific data or factual information from the article that support your claim. Your evidence should include measurable or observable details, such as statistics, named events, or documented scientific measurements related to fuel load, climate conditions, or fire behavior.

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**Reasoning**

Explain how your evidence connects to your claim using scientific concepts from the article. How do the interactions between Earth's systems — including the atmosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere — and human land management decisions work together to produce the pattern of increasingly severe wildfires? Use scientific vocabulary such as fuel load, drought, particulate matter, or fire triangle in your explanation.

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## INDEPENDENT / DEPENDENT VARIABLE ANALYSIS

Read the scenario below carefully. Then, for each component of experimental design, write a response that identifies and explains that element of the investigation. Use evidence and scientific reasoning in your answers.

**Scenario:** A team of environmental scientists wants to investigate how fuel moisture content affects wildfire spread rate. They select 12 identical test plots in a controlled outdoor research facility, each containing the same type and amount of dry grass and shrub vegetation. The scientists adjust the moisture content of the vegetation in each plot to one of four levels — 5%, 15%, 25%, or 35% moisture — by either drying samples in a controlled chamber or misting them with measured amounts of water. They then ignite each plot under identical wind speed, temperature, and oxygen conditions and record how quickly the fire spreads across each plot in meters per minute. The experiment is repeated three times for each moisture level to ensure reliable results.

### Independent Variable

What is the one factor the scientists are deliberately changing across the test plots? Identify it and explain why it qualifies as the independent variable in this investigation.

**Dependent Variable**

What outcome are the scientists measuring to determine the effect of their manipulation? Identify it and explain how it responds to changes in the independent variable.

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**Control Variables**

What factors must be kept the same across all test plots to ensure a fair investigation? Identify at least three control variables and explain why controlling them is important.

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**Operationalized Definition**

How are the scientists precisely measuring or defining the key variables in this experiment? Write an operationalized definition for both the independent variable and the dependent variable as they are used in this investigation.

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COMPARE & CONTRAST

Compare and contrast the two subjects below across three dimensions. For each dimension, read the guiding question carefully and write a response that analyzes how the two subjects are similar and/or different. Use evidence from the article to support your answers.

Comparing: 20th-Century Fire Suppression Policy vs. Indigenous Controlled Burn Practices

1. Effect on Fuel Load

How did each approach affect the amount of combustible material — dead wood, dry brush, and vegetation — that accumulated in forests over time?

2. Intended Goal vs. Actual Outcome

What was the primary goal of each approach, and how did the long-term outcomes compare to those original intentions?

**3. Relationship to Ecosystem Health**

How did each approach interact with the natural processes of forest ecosystems, and what does that suggest about each method's sustainability?

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**MULTIPLE CHOICE**

Read each question carefully and select the best answer from the choices provided. Each question has only one correct answer.

1. A scientist compares wildfire data from 1970 to 2020 and notices that fire seasons have grown longer and fires have grown larger. Which combination of factors best explains this pattern?
  - A. Decreased lightning strikes and increased rainfall across the Western United States
  - B. Rising temperatures, extended droughts, and accumulated fuel loads from decades of fire suppression
  - C. Reduced human activity in forests and the natural expansion of fire-resistant tree species
  - D. Increased snowpack in mountain regions and earlier spring melts releasing more moisture
2. The United States followed a fire suppression policy for most of the 20th century. Analyzing the long-term consequences of this policy, what was its most significant unintended effect on wildfire risk?
  - A. It caused forests to grow too slowly, reducing the amount of available oxygen for fires
  - B. It eliminated the use of controlled burns, which made forests permanently fire-resistant
  - C. It allowed dead wood, dry brush, and other combustible material to accumulate over decades, increasing fuel loads
  - D. It reduced the number of lightning strikes by altering local weather patterns near forests

3. Scientists use fuel moisture content to assess wildfire risk. If fuel moisture content in a region drops significantly during a drought, what conclusion can be drawn about fire behavior in that region?

- A. Fires will burn more slowly because dry vegetation produces less heat
- B. Fires will be easier to suppress because dry air reduces wind speed
- C. Fires will be less likely to start because dry conditions reduce lightning activity
- D. Fires will ignite more easily and spread faster because vegetation is highly flammable

4. The article describes how Earth's atmosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere interact to influence wildfire conditions. Which statement best analyzes how reduced snowpack connects these three systems?

- A. Less snowpack increases atmospheric oxygen levels, which directly fuels larger fires
- B. Less snowpack means rivers and soils dry out earlier, reducing vegetation moisture and extending fire season
- C. Less snowpack causes temperatures to drop in summer, which reduces the risk of drought conditions
- D. Less snowpack increases cloud cover, which blocks sunlight and lowers surface temperatures

5. Indigenous communities used controlled burns for thousands of years before European settlement. Analyzing this practice in the context of the fire triangle, which side of the fire triangle did controlled burns most directly manage?

- A. Oxygen, by reducing wind speeds across forested areas
- B. Heat, by lowering average temperatures in forest ecosystems
- C. Fuel, by regularly clearing out dead wood, dry brush, and accumulated vegetation
- D. All three sides equally, by eliminating fire from the landscape entirely

6. In 2020, wildfire smoke from the West Coast reached New York City. What does this evidence suggest about the relationship between wildfires and human health beyond the immediate fire zone?

- A. Wildfires only pose health risks to people living within 10 miles of the fire line
- B. Particulate matter from wildfire smoke can travel thousands of miles, affecting air quality and health in distant regions
- C. Wildfire smoke improves air quality in distant cities by replacing industrial pollutants
- D. The health effects of wildfire smoke are limited to short-term eye irritation and disappear within hours

7. The article distinguishes between direct and indirect costs of wildfires. Which of the following is an example of an indirect cost that would be most difficult to measure immediately after a wildfire?

- A. The number of structures destroyed by the fire
- B. The amount of money spent on firefighting aircraft and personnel
- C. Long-term healthcare costs for residents exposed to smoke over several months
- D. The number of emergency response vehicles deployed to the fire

8. The wildland-urban interface (WUI) is described as a zone where developed land meets wild vegetation. Analyzing the data on the Camp Fire of 2018, what conclusion can be drawn about the risk of expanding development into the WUI?

- A. Development in the WUI reduces wildfire risk because buildings replace flammable vegetation
- B. Development in the WUI has no effect on wildfire risk as long as fire suppression resources are available
- C. As more people build in the WUI, more lives and structures are exposed to wildfire danger, increasing potential losses
- D. Development in the WUI improves firefighter access, which consistently reduces the size and impact of wildfires

**9.** A student claims that wildfires are purely a climate problem and that land management decisions have little effect on fire behavior. Which evidence from the article best challenges this claim?

- A.** Wildfire smoke contains PM2.5 particles that can travel thousands of miles from the fire
- B.** Decades of fire suppression allowed fuel loads to build up, making fires burn hotter and spread faster regardless of temperature
- C.** Rising temperatures have extended drought conditions and reduced snowpack in mountain regions
- D.** The U.S. now spends over \$3 billion annually on firefighting expenses

**10.** Based on the article's analysis of interconnected systems, which approach to reducing wildfire risk best reflects an understanding of how multiple factors work together?

- A.** Focusing only on building more firebreaks along the edges of forests to stop fire from spreading
- B.** Relying entirely on improved firefighting technology to suppress fires more quickly when they start
- C.** Combining smarter land management, updated building codes, climate action, and community preparedness
- D.** Eliminating all human development near forests to remove the human contribution to wildfire ignition

**TRUE / FALSE**

Read each statement carefully. Write T if the statement is true or F if the statement is false based on what you have learned about wildfires, climate, and human impacts on Earth's systems.

1. The fire triangle consists of fuel, heat, and oxygen, and removing any one of these three elements will prevent or stop a fire from burning.

True  False

2. The United States fire suppression policy of the 20th century successfully reduced long-term wildfire risk by eliminating fuel buildup in forests.

True  False

3. Indigenous land management practices used controlled burns for thousands of years, which helped keep fuel loads low and forest ecosystems healthier.

True  False

4. Lower fuel moisture content in vegetation means a lower risk of wildfire ignition and spread.

True  False

5. Rising temperatures caused by climate change are contributing to longer droughts and reduced snowpack, which extends fire seasons in the western United States.

True  False

6. Wildfire smoke contains particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) that is large enough to be filtered out by the nose and throat before reaching the lungs.

True  False

7. Wildfires are the result of interconnected Earth systems — including the atmosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere — responding to both natural variation and human activity.

- True  False

8. The wildland-urban interface (WUI) refers to zones where developed land meets wild vegetation, and expanding development in these areas increases risk to lives and structures.

- True  False

9. Indirect costs of wildfires, such as firefighting expenses and emergency response, are easier to measure and recover from than direct costs like lost tourism and long-term healthcare expenses.

- True  False

10. Analyzing patterns in wildfire data over the past 50 years shows that fire seasons in the western United States are becoming longer and individual fires are growing larger.

- True  False

## VOCABULARY

Study each term and its definition below. These words are key to understanding wildfires, Earth's systems, and human impacts on the environment. As you read and analyze the lesson, look for how each term connects to the bigger picture of why wildfires are getting worse.

### Fire Triangle

A model showing that every fire requires three elements — fuel, heat, and oxygen — and that removing any one of them will stop the fire from burning.

Explain in your own words:

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### Fuel Load

The total amount of combustible material, such as dead wood, dry grass, and brush, that has built up in a forest or landscape and can feed a wildfire.

Explain in your own words:

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### Fire Suppression

A land management policy that aims to put out every wildfire as quickly as possible, which over time caused dangerous levels of fuel to accumulate in forests.

Explain in your own words:

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### **Controlled Burns**

Intentionally set, carefully managed fires used to clear out excess fuel load and keep ecosystems healthy, a practice used by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years.

Explain in your own words:

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### **Palmer Drought Severity Index**

A scientific measurement tool used to track how severe drought conditions are in a region by analyzing soil moisture and precipitation data over time.

Explain in your own words:

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### **Fuel Moisture Content**

A measure of how much water remains in vegetation, where lower moisture levels indicate drier plants that are much more likely to catch fire and burn rapidly.

Explain in your own words:

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### **Particulate Matter (PM2.5)**

Extremely tiny particles found in wildfire smoke that are small enough to travel deep into the lungs and cause serious short-term and long-term health problems.

Explain in your own words:

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**Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)**

The zone where human development and buildings meet wild, vegetated land, creating areas where wildfires pose a particularly high risk to lives and structures.

Explain in your own words:

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**Drought**

An extended period of abnormally low rainfall that dries out soil and vegetation, making landscapes significantly more vulnerable to igniting and spreading wildfires.

Explain in your own words:

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**Snowpack**

The accumulated layers of snow in mountain regions that slowly melt to supply rivers and soil with water, and whose reduction due to rising temperatures worsens drought and fire risk.

Explain in your own words:

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**EXIT TICKET**

Answer both questions below in 1-2 sentences each. Use evidence from the article to support your thinking.

1. Analyze how fire suppression policies and rising temperatures each contribute to making modern wildfires more severe. How do these two factors work together to increase wildfire risk?

2. The article describes wildfires as the result of interconnected Earth systems. Identify at least two of those systems and explain how a change in one affects the others to increase wildfire danger.



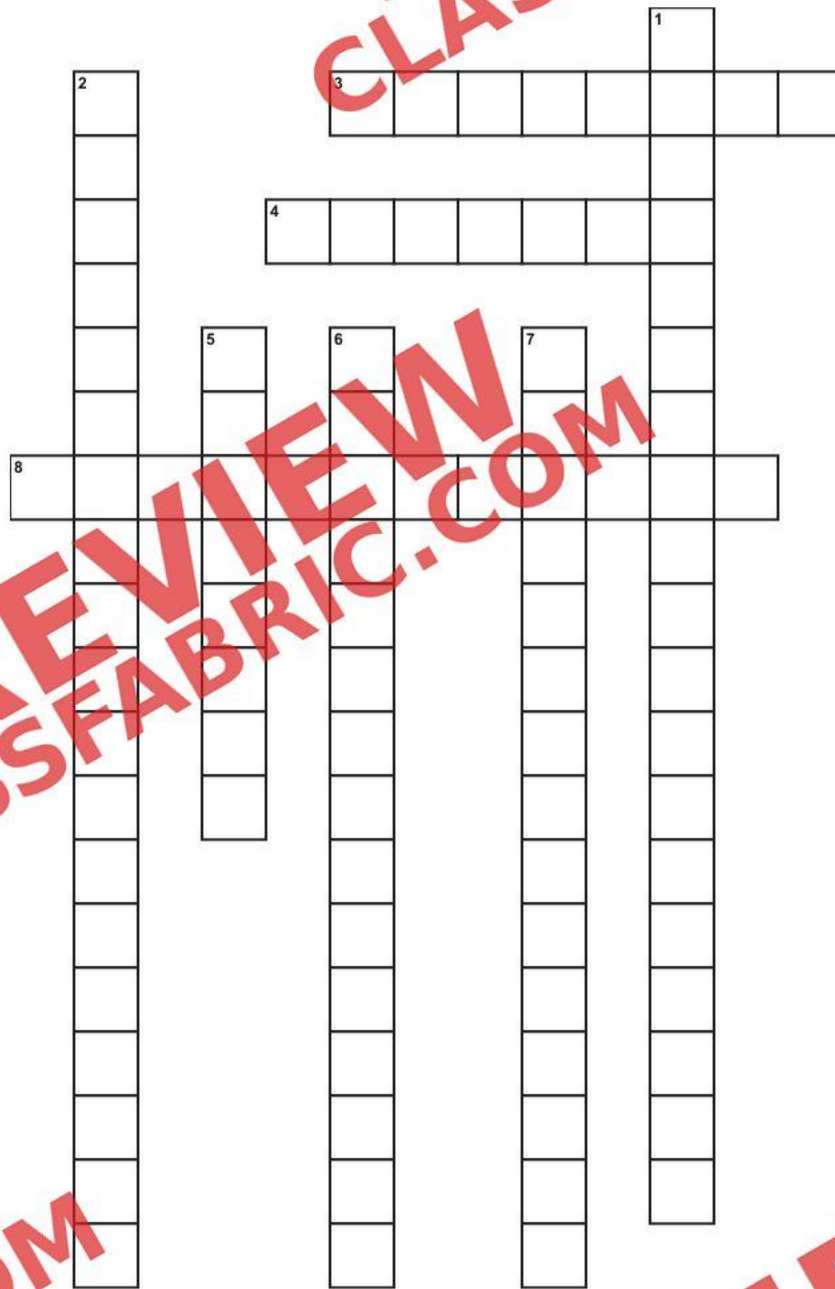
Wildfires in dry forests burn faster and hotter when years of dead wood and brush have built up on the forest floor — a problem called fuel load.



Comparing a forest managed with controlled burns to one with decades of fuel buildup helps explain why some wildfires are far more destructive than others.

# Wildfires: Why They're Getting Worse and What It Actually Means

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



# Wildfires: Why They're Getting Worse and What It Actually Means

## CROSSWORD PUZZLE

### ACROSS

3. The accumulated layers of snow in mountain regions that slowly melt to supply rivers and soil with water, and whose reduction due to rising temperatures worsens drought and fire risk.
4. An extended period of abnormally low rainfall that dries out soil and vegetation, making landscapes significantly more vulnerable to igniting and spreading wildfires.
8. A model showing that every fire requires three elements — fuel, heat, and oxygen — and that removing any one of them will stop the fire from burning.

### DOWN

1. Extremely tiny particles found in wildfire smoke that are small enough to travel deep into the lungs and cause serious short-term and long-term health problems.
2. A measure of how much water remains in vegetation, where lower moisture levels indicate drier plants that are much more likely to catch fire and burn rapidly.
5. The total amount of combustible material, such as dead wood, dry grass, and brush, that has built up in a forest or landscape and can feed a wildfire.
6. A land management policy that aims to put out every wildfire as quickly as possible, which over time caused dangerous levels of fuel to accumulate in forests.
7. Intentionally set, carefully managed fires used to clear out excess fuel load and keep ecosystems healthy, a practice used by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years.

# Wildfires: Why They're Getting Worse and What It Actually Means

## WORD SEARCH

T O Z R U Z E L Q N C B G H A M K E I J B G G S X  
E P O Q I Y E K M U Z X E D A K V U U Q Z F E N X  
U A N Y I L D C R O D Z B V X X Z P J F W A S O C  
M R F U K J Y A D D T N O O Y E Y H R O O O I W A  
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P E W D E L C Z O P K E F I C B N S B X W H D J M  
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M K D X T K X V C O Q G J V P U F U E L L O A D D  
A R T H X L F K N N M P M H M U A F H N F A H B U

### FIND THESE WORDS

Fire Suppression  
Controlled Burns

Particulate Matter (PM2.5)  
Snowpack

Fuel Moisture Content  
Drought

Fuel Load  
Fire Triangle