

Advertisement

IDOL CHATTER USA TODAY .com

That was DREADFUL!

You did your thing DAWG!

I'm your BIGGEST fan!

Click here to read the blog!

ALL IDOL, ALL THE TIME



PRINT THIS

Powered by **Clickability**

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Global warming could worsen California wildfires

LAKE ARROWHEAD, Calif. (AP) — Drought- and beetle-ravaged trees in this mountain community stick up like matchsticks in the San Bernardino National Forest, bypassed by the fires still smoldering, but left like kindling for the next big blaze.

Welcome to the future.

Fires that charred nearly three-quarters of a million acres could presage increasingly severe fire danger as global warming weakens more forests through disease and drought, experts warn.

"You're really going to increase the chances of and prevalence of fire," said Susan Ustin, a professor of environmental and resource science at the University of California, Davis.

Warmer, windier weather and longer, drier summers would mean higher firefighting costs and greater loss of lives and property, according to researchers at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the U.S. Forest Service.

Both the number of out-of-control fires and the acreage burned are likely to increase — more than doubling losses in some regions, they say in a study set for publication in the scientific journal Climatic Change.

While the study examined Northern California, "the concern for Southern California would be much higher," because that region is drier for longer periods, said researcher Evan Mills of the Lawrence Berkeley lab.

Windier weather could bring to Northern California a variation of the desert Santa Ana winds that whipped the Southern California blazes into firestorms, said co-author Margaret Torn, also a Lawrence Berkeley researcher.

The researchers project at least a 50% increase in out-of-control fires in the south San Francisco Bay area and a 125% increase in the Sierra Nevada foothills, with a more than 40% increase in the area burned. The state's northern coast saw no significant change under the computer model and conditions used in the study.

The researchers say the projections use conservative forecasts that don't take into account expected factors like increased lightning strikes and the spread of volatile grasslands into areas now dominated by less flammable fuel. Even potentially wetter winters simply mean more growth, providing additional fuel for summer fires.

"Fires may be hotter, move faster, and be more difficult to contain under future climate conditions," Robert Wilkinson of the University of California, Santa Barbara, School of Environmental Science and Management, said in a federal report on the impact of climate change on California. "Extreme temperatures compound the fire risk when other conditions, such as dry fuel and wind, are

Advertisement

The largest high-speed wireless broadband network in the U.S.*

BROADBANDACCESS BUILT-IN

SPECIAL OFFER

BROADBANDACCESS PC CARD

LEARN MORE

► DETAILS

*BROADBANDACCESS IS AVAILABLE IN 181 MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREAS COVERING OVER 148 MILLION PEOPLE, AND IS EXPANDING COAST TO COAST. BROADBANDACCESS IS AVAILABLE IN 72 PRIMARY AIRPORTS IN THE U.S.

present."

Where fires once burned without doing much damage to property, Californians have now built homes and entire subdivisions — a problem starkly illustrated by the Southern California blazes.

There are plenty of lessons to be learned, said California Resources Secretary Mary Nichols, who will leave office after this week as Gov. Gray Davis' administration gives way to that of Gov.-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger.

"Certainly in the future we cannot allow construction quite so close to the (fire) zone, and we should create larger buffers" such as the irrigated greenbelt that helped keep fire from Los Angeles County's Stevenson Ranch while other communities were in flames, Nichols said.

Forests need to be cleared of the undergrowth that fed the flames, and the remaining dead, standing trees that still dot the San Bernardino Mountains must be removed, she said.

But that debate has pitted Democrat Davis against the Republican Bush administration, which has sought to allow logging of larger trees to pay for the removal of smaller unmarketable brush and chaparral. The result has been regulatory and legislative impasse.

State lawmakers are requiring the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to begin charging rural homeowners for the cost of fire protection, as the state battles its massive budget deficit.


Nichols suggested the state should consider additional "user fees" on development in fire-prone areas. As it is, taxpayers across the nation pay to fight California's wildfires and to reimburse homeowners for their losses.

"If the true cost of fire protection were built into the cost of construction, it would not be as easy or as cheap as it has been to build in the foothills," Nichols said. "I think that would be a good thing."

Copyright 2005 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/weather/news/2003-11-12-warming-wildfires_x.htm

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.