

BAY AREA CLIMATE NEWS FROM CRI

November 2017

THE BIG PICTURE

[Burning Question: Can California Prevent the Next Wildfire?](#)

In the wake of the North Bay fires, Glen Martin talks with Berkeley's Scott Stephens and Joe McBride about land use, fire-safe regulations, climate change and more in this insightful [piece](#) for California Magazine. Could a California Fire Commission, modeled after our Coastal Commission, be part of the answer in this fast-changing fire climate?

[Research: Wildfires Getting Worse Due to Climate Change](#)

Ground-breaking [research](#) published last year (PNAS) that quantifies, for the first time, the huge impact of

climate change on western wildfires. Looking at eight measures of “aridity,” the authors calculate that hotter, drier conditions nearly doubled acreage burned 1984-2015 compared to what would have burned without climate change. Or, as a CalFire spokesman recently put it, “These fires right now are just going through the dry vegetation like it’s nothing. The trend is definitely more fires, hotter, more volatile.”

[Record Summer Heat in the West "Trumps" Our Wet Winter](#)

The Atlantic [reports](#) on how our hot-hot summer has impacted fires from California to British Columbia, reducing the fire-dampening effects of our wet-wet winter (which also added fuel!). Before the North Bay firestorm, British Columbia set a record with 2.86 million acres burned, two dozen named fires scorched Oregon and Washington, Montana had its 3rd worst fire season on record, and the largest brushfire in history raged in Los Angeles.

[In-Depth: “Land on Fire — The New Reality of Wildfire in the West” \(book\)](#)

Gary Ferguson’s new [book](#) explores the present and future of western wildfires and outlines big solutions to (new) risk reduction. “The massive fire seasons of recent years make it clear we need to think hard about the future of our forests. This comprehensive

books offers some conversation starters for how we might reimagine our relationship with the woods.” — Bill McKibben

THE BAY AREA AND FIRE

Is It Climate Change or Development? How About BOTH?

Moser and Ekstrom’s synthesis [report](#) (CEC) on Bay Area climate impacts has a short but powerful take on this question. Two quotes from pg. 24:

“Under climate change scenarios, projections indicate that the Bay Area will be at risk to endure some of the highest increases in property damage (in terms of economic value) relative to the rest of the state. However, the distribution of how and to what degree wildfire risk increases in the region will largely be driven by changes in land use and development.”

“While population growth and development scenarios account for far more variability in Bay Area residential wildfire risks than do climate scenarios, the most extreme increases in residential fire risks result from the combination of high-growth/high-sprawl/extreme

climate change scenarios.”

[North Bay Fires Hit Low Income Residents and Workers](#)

KQED’s [California Report](#), the [Marin I-J](#), [Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity](#) and other media ran excellent stories on how low-income individuals and families are suffering from job losses, a further squeeze on affordable housing, etc. “The fires have impacted both lower-income and wealthy residents — razing million-dollar homes and trailer parks alike. But for families living paycheck to paycheck who are left unemployed and homeless, it will be extremely difficult to recover.”

[It’s Not Just the Fire, It’s the Smoke](#)

The North Bay Fires produced unprecedented levels of air pollution — PM2.5 to be specific — provoking a Bay Area public health emergency. Wired’s excellent [story](#) focuses on the Bay Area, but provides great background on fire & health impacts, including why smoke can become a bigger problem in cities than in the open countryside that may actually be burning.

[Donate to North Bay Fire Relief](#)

OK, you missed the big benefit concert in SF that raised \$17 million, but you can still donate to

the [Tipping Point Emergency Relief Fund](#) where 100% of funds received go to low income families and vulnerable communities in the North Bay fire zone.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION ??????

[California Wildfires Can Make Forests Polluters Not Carbon Sinks](#)

As CRI reported last year, a big CARB-funded [study](#) by Berkeley's John Battles and Patrick Gonzalez (NPS) found that wildfires and deforestation made California's forests, from 2000-10, a net *emitter* of GHGs, not a carbon sink. Our growing forests, which grab and hold huge amounts of carbon, are being outpaced by carbon losses from large fires on a relatively small land area. See the [Climate Central story](#) on Battles and Gonzalez.

CRI's project for the Coastal Conservancy, — "[Land Acquisition and Ecosystem Carbon in California](#)" — includes a substantial research task on the critical importance of California's forests in sequestering carbon. Watch the recorded project [webinar](#) (the forest section starts at the 13:00 mark) or read the final project report [here](#).

CRI (AND FRIENDS) IN THE NEWS

Best cities for climate change?

<http://www.businessinsider.com/region-states-us-best-survive-climate-change-2017-9>

<http://www.businessinsider.com/best-us-cities-escape-climate-change-2017-9>

<http://www.businessinsider.com/best-us-cities-escape-climate-change-map-2017-9>

Sac Bee on California adaptation

<http://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article182090366.html>

VIDEO OF THE MONTH

[12-min VIDEO: Unacceptable Risk: Firefighters on the Front Line of Climate Change](#)

Firefighters in the West are [speaking out and organizing](#) around the increased risk they face from climate change-fueled forest fires. “On a day to day basis, we’re being surprised. And in this business, surprise is what kills people.” — Don Whittemore, a career firefighter and fire expert in Colorado.

Unacceptable Risk records the experiences of Whittemore and other firefighters who are repeatedly responding to record-breaking wildfires.