

NEWS CLIPS

Published August 3, 2018



**Resource Conservation and Public
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Oxnard harbor water improves

City installs aerators to bring oxygen

Wendy Leung USA TODAY NETWORK

Ventura County Star 8/03/2018

More than a month after Channel Islands Harbor residents realized the water near their homes was turning brown and murky, some positive signs in the form of active fish have surfaced.

Thanks to a set of aerators installed by the city of Oxnard, bubbles have been percolating in certain spots at the Seabridge Public Marina.

“The biggest thing we noticed is fish jumping out of the bubbles,” said Sandra Burkhart, special districts manager for Oxnard. “It’s like a playground for them.”



Bubbles are seen at the water surface of Channel Islands Harbor after the installation of aeration devices. COURTESY OF CITY OF OXNARD

In the past month, water quality has been improving at the harbor, according to sampling conducted by the city. On July 26, workers installed six aerators in the northeast corner of the marina, where oxygen levels have been low. The aeration devices bring oxygen and circulation to the water. “The water itself looks so much cleaner,” Burkhart said. “No more debris and sheen.”

The aerators are part of a pilot program to see if oxygen levels will improve at the harbor. Funding for the aerators, approximately \$14,000, came from the Seabridge community facilities district. The city is considering installing two more at the back basin in Westport.

Around Father’s Day weekend, residents were reporting the water had turned brown, an odor was in the air and fish were at the surface struggling for air. Some people saw dead fish.

City officials tested the water and found it was safe for swimmers and boaters but the oxygen levels were low. It was an apparent case of algae bloom that many suspected was caused by the closure of a nearby power plant. When the facility owned by NRG

Energy Inc. was in operation, water pumps used to cool down the plant also circulated the nearby waterways.

The Oxnard City Council decided to hire a team of biologists to analyze the water sample data.

Last month, David Caron and Scott Johnson told harbor residents at a meeting that algae blooms are common along the Southern California coast. In Redondo Beach, Santa Cruz and other communities, the algae bloom got so massive that tons of fish died.

The main contributor to algae bloom is urbanization, Caron said. Pollution, storm drain runoff and other factors caused by humans are to blame.

Fish didn't die en masse in Oxnard but just because the water is now improving doesn't mean algae blooms won't come back, Caron said.

In fact, the brown water in Oxnard could be a precursor to a larger bloom later in the summer or a year down the line.

The city is looking into installing remote sensors to provide continuous information on water quality.

Officials have reduced the frequency of water sampling to once a week and reduced the number of locations to 12. Remote sensors would provide temperature, oxygen and other marine life data all hours of the day.

"The testing once a week is great, but water quality is dependent on low and high tide," Burkhart said. "If we're going out one time, drive away and two hours later something occurs, we wouldn't know about it."

Burkhart said sensors would help the city be prepared if the water quality worsens and there are early signs of another algae bloom.



A worker begins to install aerators at Channel Islands Harbor in Oxnard. Water quality started decreasing in June in an apparent algae bloom. COURTESY OF CITY OF OXNARD

'It was like nothing I've ever seen or heard of' 'One massive death machine'

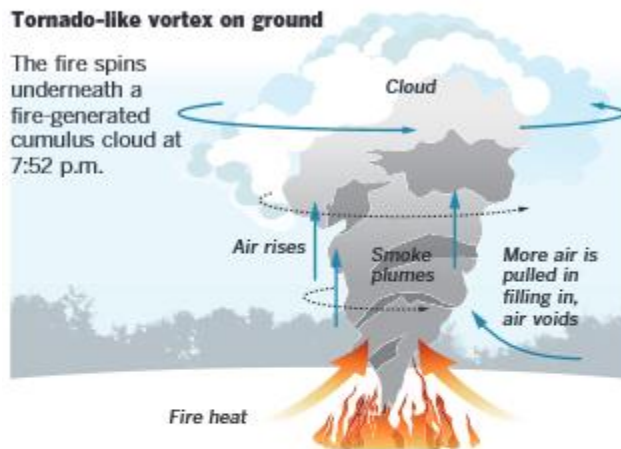
By Rong-Gong Lin II, Joseph Serna and Louis Sahagun LA Times 8/03/2018

Inside the Redding fire vortex

Radar analyzed by atmospheric sciences professor Neil Lareau shows the detection of a rapidly spinning fire vortex in northwest Redding between 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on July 26 as the Carr fire rapidly spread toward the city. The National Weather Service said winds from the fire whirl may have been in excess of 143 mph.

Tornado-like vortex on ground

The fire spins underneath a fire-generated cumulus cloud at 7:52 p.m.



Winds around the vortex

Intense wind coming toward the radar



Wind flowing away from the radar



The rapid eastward spread of the Carr fire



Neil Lareau, professor of atmospheric sciences, University of Nevada, Reno; Google Earth; Times reporting

Graphics reporting by RONG-GONG LIN II

LORENA INIGUEZ ELEBRER Los Angeles Times

REDDING — As authorities sifted the rubble from the fire that burned more than 1,000 residences in Shasta County, they were startled by what they encountered.

A soaring transmission tower was tipped over. Tiles were torn off the roofs of homes. Massive trees were uprooted. Vehicles were moved. In one spot, a fence post was bent around a tree with the bark on one side sheared off.

This was not typical wildfire damage. Rather, it was strong evidence of a giant, powerful, spinning vortex that accompanied the Carr fire on July 26. The tornado-like condition, lasting an hour and a half and fueled by extreme heat and intensely dry brush as California heats up to record levels, was captured in dramatic videos that have come to symbolize the destructive power of what is now California's sixth-most destructive fire.

It may take years before scientists come to a consensus on what to exactly call this vortex — a fire whirl, as named by the National Weather Service, or a fire tornado. Whatever it's called, it's exceptionally rare to see a well-documented fire-fueled vortex leap out of a wildfire and enter a populated area with such size, power and duration.

It's believed to have lasted between 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on July 26 and struck some of the hardest-hit neighborhoods in Redding.

This kind of fire twister has been documented before, but only a handful "at this sort of scale," said Neil Lareau, assistant professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Nevada, Reno, who was among those comfortable calling it a fire tornado. "You're starting with a rare event to begin with, and for it to actually impact a populated area makes it even rarer."

The National Weather Service on Thursday said a preliminary estimate of maximum wind speeds in the vortex were in excess of 143 mph. That would make it equivalent to a twister with a rating of EF-3 out of a maximum of 5 on the Enhanced Fujita scale.

"Depending on the final number, this might actually be the strongest 'tornado' in California history, even if it wasn't formally a tornado," UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain said by email. There have been a couple of marginal EF-3 twisters in California's past, "but this fire whirl was almost certainly longer-lived, larger in spatial scope and perhaps even stronger from a wind speed perspective."

It's too early to say whether the vortex contributed to the deadly ferocity of this blaze, which killed six. But with climate change playing a factor as California enters a worsening era of wildland fires, last week's fire vortex adds a layer of unpredictability and danger.

"Not all big fires are going to result in these big fire whirls, even in a future that's much hotter and drier," Swain said. "This won't be the primary risk associated with wildfire ever. But under the right atmospheric conditions, all else being equal, the increasing intensity of fires themselves will play a role in producing these localized fire weather conditions that can be quite extreme."

Radar analyzed by Lareau clearly shows a spinning vortex in northwest Redding as the Carr fire rapidly expanded in the evening of July 26.

Lareau roughly estimated the vortex as being as perhaps 500 yards long in diameter at its base before possibly contracting. "It's covering blocks," he said.

“It was definitely a massive one, and that just speaks to how intense the heating was,” said National Weather Service meteorologist Mike Kochasic. “It created such a massive whirl that it looked like a tornado ... and it takes an impressive amount of heating and local wind swirling up to create something like that. It was quite a monster.”

It’s possible for fire vortexes to “move fairly quick out in front of the main line of the fire — it can spread a little bit quicker compared to the main fire,” Kochasic said.

Wind damage was also reported in areas untouched by flames.

A team of officials led by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection is looking into the vortex as part of its investigation of the blaze.

This vortex is dramatically different from the garden-variety whirls that have been more of a curiosity in past fires, which are more like dust devils in terms of scale, rising for perhaps two stories and lasting for less than 10 minutes.

Lareau’s radar data show that one of the worst-hit areas was on Quartz Hill Road, around a Y-shaped junction of electric transmission lines — a matter of hundreds of feet from where Melody Bledsoe, 70, and her great-grandchildren, Emily, 4, and James Roberts, 5, died as the fire swept through their home.

Half a mile west from the Bledsoes’ home is Lake Keswick Estates, where Justin Sanchez, 37, fled in the back of a pickup truck with irreplaceable photos lining its bed, as his father, Greg, 69, drove them away from what he called a fire tornado.

“Oh my gosh! Oh my God!” Sanchez wailed as he sought to record what he expected would be the last few moments of his neighborhood before his home burned. His phone camera captures a giant vertical, cone-shaped cloud — appearing with an orange glow at the base — spinning counterclockwise. Flames can be seen in the foreground.

“It was like the movie ‘Twister,’ ” Sanchez said in a telephone interview. “It was a massive, massive, huge tornado.... It was spinning so slow on the outside, but there were heavy, massive pieces of shrapnel just floating around with the fire.”

Sanchez said that earlier Thursday he could see the blaze, but it wasn’t traveling particularly fast. Then he heard his neighbor shout, “It just jumped the river! It’s headed our way!”

“Within a matter of 10 minutes there, once the ‘fire-nado’ started almost inching on our neighborhood, the winds had to have been 40 to 60 mph winds ... the sky got dark,” Sanchez. “I didn’t understand how a fire and tornado could combine into one massive death machine.”

He said he dashed into the house a couple of times to grab some photos, but the second time he came out, the fire had come probably within a football field away. Sanchez said the vortex traveled three to four miles in just 15 minutes.

A late gust was so intense that the last keepsakes he nabbed were blown out of his arms.

“I knew everything was going to become lost, and it was going to end up killing people on the way. It was nothing like I’ve ever seen or heard of in my life,” he said.

As Redding Police Chief Roger Moore evacuated residents from the River Ridge neighborhood east of the Sacramento River, he watched the growing flames and smoke plume approach the western bank of the Sacramento River, hop over it, grow, then come together as what he called a “plume tornado.”

Trees appeared to be levitating, and branches and sheet-metal roofs seemed to orbit the column, Moore said. Uprooted objects were launched into the air and ignited mid-flight. Vegetation and homes hundreds of feet from the column caught fire before the twister arrived, he said. It was as loud as a roaring jet engine.

“Wherever the center of the tornado went, it decimated it. You’re looking at this whole column of fire, and it’s just monstrous,” Moore said. The swirl of fire and smoke destroyed sections of the Stanford Manor community. “The only things left standing were the homes on the edges. Some would ignite; some would remain standing.

“I don’t know how fast that tornado was moving, but it was probably faster than a human can run,” Moore said.

Spinning vortexes of fire can be deadly, whether they’re called a fire tornado or a fire whirl. What’s common in both is that they are driven by an exceptional amount of heat being released into the air — heat probably fueled by record or near-record vegetation dryness caused by the state’s persistently high temperatures.

Other factors are important, though, said Craig Clements, an associate professor and director of Fire Weather Research Laboratory at San Jose State University.

“It’s really too early to tell what caused it, and there still needs to be a lot of scientific investigation.”

The rising heat can reach speeds of up to 130 mph, Lareau said, send smoke up beyond its normal limit of about 15,000 feet and form its own fire-fueled cumulus cloud, rising to as high as 39,000 feet. The creation of the puffy cloud means that more heat is being dumped into the column of hot, rising air. That air is replaced by winds rushing in all around the chimney of rising air.

The lowest part of the vortex often takes an orange glow from combusting gases rising within its core, according to a 2012 study by the U.S. Forest Service.

Fire whirls can range from less than 4 feet to as large as 1.9 miles in diameter, the study said, and can be especially hazardous by increasing fire intensity, triggering spot fires from burning debris floating from the vortex, and causing an unpredictable mix in the speed and direction of the fire.

In 2008, a whirl caught firefighters by surprise in the remote Indians fire that burned in extremely dry chaparral in the Los Padres National Forest, causing serious injuries and forcing the deployment of fire shelters.

Lin reported from San Francisco, Serna from Los Angeles and Sahagun from Redding.

Looking Back to ...

When the citizens of Hidden Hills woke up one day and had no water, they knew they needed to do something. The community overcame many challenges with dedication, vigilance, perseverance and a sense of urgency to ensure this would not happen again. Through community meetings, bonds, loans and navigating power politics they founded Las Virgenes Municipal Water District in 1958. Water reliability was a concern even back then and that trend continues now and into the future.



Hidden Hills - 1950s

Las Virgenes Reservoir - 1972



Before Three Springs neighborhood



Filling Las Virgenes Reservoir - 1970s



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Las Virgenes Reservoir - 2017



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Aug/Sept 2018 | Beyond the Acorn

Sides squabble at Lake Lindero HOA

Protest erupts, board and management company at impasse

By [The Acorn Staff](#) | on August 02, 2018

By Stephanie Bertholdo



NOT HERE—Residents want the management company to step down. STEPHANIE BERTHOLDO/Acorn Newspapers

The Lake Lindero Homeowners Association board of directors and Golf Projects Lindero, the HOA management company for almost 25 years, stood at loggerheads this week over a wide range of issues dating back to 2017 when a 50-year-old sluice gate inside the lake's dam had to be repaired at homeowner expense.

On July 28, several dozen homeowners picketed the community golf course and swimming pool at Lake Lindero Drive in Agoura Hills demanding that David Smith, the GPL owner who leases and runs the property, step down as the HOA manager.

The approximate \$300,000 gate repair and lake dredging project came on the heels of a 2016 complaint filed by several homeowners who alerted state water officials that GPL might be depleting Lake Lindero water levels by diverting supplies from the reservoir to irrigate an adjacent nine-hole golf course.

While the California Department of Water Resources determined that the complaint was unfounded—and that the golf course possessed riparian rights to the water—officials did say that the lake was not complying with its 1965 operating license that requires all inflows to the reservoir be released downstream during the dry summer months of June through September.



DEEP TROUBLE—A diver and his assistant, standing atop Lake Lindero dam in 2017, prepare for work. A dispute over repairs to the dam led homeowners to demand that the HOA manager, Golf Projects Lindero, be terminated. GPL says it has a valid contract allowing it to stay. Acorn file photo

A mechanical sluice gate that allows the lake water to be released on demand was later installed inside the dam at Lake Lindero Drive and Canwood Street, but to pay for the repair completed earlier this year, each of the association's 459 homeowners was hit with a \$675 emergency assessment—the first of its kind in the HOA's long history. Homeowners were miffed.

The state Water Resources Control Board, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board and the Los Angeles County Public Works Department were among the half-dozen government agencies involved with making sure the lake and dam came into compliance.

Who pays?

Earlier HOA boards had saved more than \$800,000 for a previous lake dredging project in 2012, but when faced with repairing the broken dam in 2017, the association realized its savings were depleted and that the emergency assessment would be required.

Chris Barone, president of a new HOA board of directors that took over in April, said the gate repair was Smith's responsibility, not the homeowners'.

"It was his job under the contract," Barone said.

Charging that Smith breached his contract, the board has subsequently withheld a reported \$120,000 in payments owed to GPL. The Barone board was sued last month for nonpayment, records show, and a possible court battle looms.

“(Smith) was relieved of his duties two weeks ago and he insists on staying,” Barone said at last Saturday’s protest in which residents brandished signs asking Smith to pack up and leave.

GPL leases and manages the Lindero Country Club golf course, lake, tennis courts, swimming pool and other common areas from the HOA under terms that began in 1994 and extend until 2050. For now, the company remains under contract and Smith is adamant about staying.

“There are no grounds to terminate the agreement. The board has no right to relieve GPL of its duties,” Smith said in a statement to The Acorn. “GPL has complied with all its obligations under the 1994 Lease and Management Agreement. In fact, the club has become an asset to the 459 homeowners, as property values continue to increase.”

But Barone said GPL has violated its contract by wrongly charging homeowners for the gate repair and not properly maintaining the lake and other common areas.

Harriet Cohen, a 20-year Lake Lindero homeowner, said at the protest that HOA boards have legal authority to change management companies if they are not fulfilling their responsibilities.

Barone added that the HOA board that preceded the current board is complicit because it failed to complete a reserve study that would have alerted the need for the repair at the dam.

The repair should not have been classified as an emergency, Barone and his supporters say, and the \$675 assessment this year should be rendered illegal and returned to the homeowners.

Former HOA president Terry Miller worries that the current board is causing further chaos by jettisoning a management company that is known for taking a troubled Lake Lindero association in the early 1990s and turning it around.

“In 1992, the association had less than \$1,000 in its operating account and was on the brink of bankruptcy,” Miller said. “The country club and common areas had fallen into a state of disrepair. GPL has invested more than \$9 million in both capital improvements and structural renovations to the association’s common areas.”

Miller said the new HOA leadership has not offered a workable, alternative plan, and is likely to lead the association into further financial difficulty.

“To date, the (new) board is leading the association into litigation, which will negatively impact home values, make selling homes more difficult and likely result in increased homeowners assessments,” Miller said.

One Realtor who asked to remain confidential told The Acorn he had a Lindero home fall out of escrow recently due to the buyer's concern about HOA litigation.

"If the dispute with GPL is not resolved, this will be the first time in 24 years the members will be responsible to pay for all the expenses required to operate the association, country club operations and future capital maintenance expenditures. Where are these funds going to come from to pay for these costs?"

Other supporters of GPL say that one \$675 emergency assessment is a small price to pay for a quarter-century of club amenities and community benefits.

All homeowners, meanwhile, nervously await the outcome.

"It's been really difficult, really stressful," said Yvette St. Onge, a longtime Lindero resident.

Homeowner Robert Williams said he has faith the HOA board can negotiate the difficult times ahead. "People need to be patient and let the new board do their job," he wrote on the Nextdoor social media blog. "This is not a 100-yard dash, this is a marathon for the board," Williams said.

"GPL's sincere hope is that this dispute will be resolved amicably as litigation will impact the 459 homeowners, their home values, 40-plus employees and the entire community who recreate at the club," Smith said.

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Looking Back to Move Forward

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Opinion

Water plan approval is arrogant

Ventura County Star 8/01/2018

The way environmental activists in California's Delta region tell it, there is no part of government in this state more arrogant than the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

The huge MWD, supplier of water to the majority of the state's populace, is certainly acting the part as it pushes for a project Gov. Brown is trying to make an irreversible fait accompli before he leaves office at the end of this year.

The so-called "California WaterFix" or Twin Tunnels project would bring Northern California river water to San Joaquin Valley farms and urban Southern California via gigantic culverts running around and through the delta of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers east of San Francisco Bay.

No one claims the project would produce much more water than now comes from the same rivers. But Brown and other supporters assert it would make supplies steadier and more reliable.

His administration and other project backers only lately renamed this the WaterFix because that sounds more positive than tunnels. But environmentalists led by the group Restore the Delta see it not as a fix, but a problem that could deprive the Delta and its fish of much of the fresh water they now get.

After substantial lobbying by Brown, the MWD's governing board — without a public vote — this summer committed millions of its customers to pay a large share of the project's costs.

About the only recourse customers might have would be voting out many of the myriad city council members and county supervisors who make up that board. This is highly unlikely, so added water charges for millions of customers are pretty much assured.

It's much the same in the San Jose-based Santa Clara Valley Water District, whose much smaller board voted narrowly to help pay the multi-billion-dollar cost. Agricultural water districts in the San Joaquin Valley that stand to benefit most were reluctant to make similar commitments.

The moves by the urban water districts were the embodiment of arrogance by public officials, because they were taken with little input from the customers who will actually pay. No sooner were those votes over than the water districts and the state formed a partnership for designing and building the tunnels.

The only time anything like the WaterFix plan got a full public hearing came 36 years ago, after Brown and state legislators authorized building the so-called Peripheral

Canal to bring water south around the Delta via a large ditch. A statewide referendum rejected that plan by a resounding margin. It became political anathema for decades, but the idea plainly stuck in Brown's mind. The WaterFix amounts to an updated, more expensive version of the ditch Brown backed long ago.

Then there is the move by a Southern California Republican congressman to cement the project via federal law. Rep. Ken Calvert of Corona in May quietly slipped language into a proposed budget bill to ban legal challenges to the tunnels — a move that could instantly end more than two dozen current lawsuits by local governments, water districts, recreational and environmental groups and tribal governments. To Brown's credit, his administration now opposes that bill, but it is very much alive in Congress.

Said Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, executive director of Restore the Delta, "Tunnels proponents are attempting to rewrite the rules of the game so they can't lose."

It's high time for some major public and consumer protests over the manner in which Brown and his allies are rushing the tunnels into reality without permission of the people who will pay for them.

Email Thomas Elias at tdelias@aol.com.



Tom Elias

Guest columnist

A blistering connection Drier land fuels hotter wildfires

The link between heat and tinder-dry vegetation can't be ignored, experts say.



A FIREFIGHTING helicopter drops water near Redding, where the Carr fire erupted last week amid triple-digit temperatures. (Hector Amezcua Sacramento Bee)

By Rong-Gong Lin II and Ruben Vives
LA Times 7/31/2018

REDDING — The northern Sacramento Valley was well on its way to recording the hottest July on record when the Carr fire swept into town Thursday.

It was 113 degrees, and months of above-average temperatures had left the land bone-dry and ready to explode. Within a few hours, hundreds of structures were lost and six people killed.

The destruction adds to California's worst wildfire year on record — dozens dead since October, with more than 10,000 structures lost from San Diego to Redding.

There are many reasons for the grim totals, but experts say one common denominator connects the disastrous fires: California is facing extreme heat, the likes of which it has never seen in the modern historical record .

“The temperatures have just been almost inexorably warmer all the time,” said UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain, and fires “burn more intensely if the fuels are extremely dry.”

In the past, there has been some reluctance among scientists to cite climate change as a major factor in California's worsening wildfires. Human-caused ignitions and homes being built ever closer to forests have played a large role. But the connection between

rising temperatures in California and tinder-dry vegetation is becoming impossible to ignore, according to experts who study climate and wildfires.

“The regional temperatures in the western U.S. have increased by 2 degrees since the 1970s,” said Jennifer Balch, director of Earth Lab at the University of Colorado, Boulder. “You’re seeing the effect of climate change.”

Neil Lareau, assistant professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Nevada, Reno, said unusual warmth is now routine, and that heat “leads to drying things out quicker.”

Vegetation can have various degrees of dryness — a wet log in the woods could smolder before puttering out, while tinder-dry chaparral on a 110-degree day could explode when ignited, Swain said. Extremely flammable vegetation can create a particularly intense fire with the potential to grow much faster — leaving less time for firefighters to get a handle on a blaze and for people to escape.

“What that means is the fire has to do less work to ignite the vegetation right next to it. And it can spread faster, and it releases energy more quickly,” Lareau said.

The Carr fire is the most destructive of 17 major blazes burning amid the current hot conditions. Fires in Mendocino County, in the San Jacinto Mountains and near Yosemite National Park exploded in the last few days, eating through dry wildlands. Authorities said they hope to gain more control over the Carr fire as temperatures cool off this week.

Swain said California is seeing more fires spreading much faster than what was customary. “It’s just that much easier for fires to escape initial control,” he said.

An ominous warning sign before each of the major fires of the last year — including last fall’s catastrophic Santa Rosa blaze — was alerts about record or near-record dryness in the vegetation, Swain said.

The effect of temperature — and how dry the vegetation is — can matter more than how much rain or snow fell the previous winter.

Northern California saw its wettest winter on record in 2016-17, followed by its warmest summer. That led to extremely dry vegetation by the fall — just before the devastating Santa Rosa fire hit, Swain said.

“Temperature can clearly out-influence the precipitation,” he said.

Hot, dry conditions and aridity of vegetation are translating to increased wildfire risk worldwide, said John Abatzoglou, associate professor of geography at the University of Idaho.

Abatzoglou was the lead author of a recent study that concluded human-caused climate change was responsible for more than half of the increase in dry vegetation in the western United States since the 1970s — which doubled the area of forest charred

since 1984. The influence of human-caused climate change on the extreme dryness of vegetation “is projected to increasingly promote wildfire potential across western U.S. forests in the coming decades, and pose threats to ecosystems, the carbon budget, human health and fire suppression budgets,” Abatzoglou wrote in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Making matters worse, nighttime temperatures generally are not dropping as low as they once did, meaning the chance of a blaze weakening overnight is reduced. California’s average summer minimum temperature was at a record high last year at 61.9 degrees, up from 56.5 degrees from the first year on record in 1895.

“Some of these fires burn into the overnight hours — that’s typically the time of day fires calm down and firefighters get a better handle on these things,” Abatzoglou said.

By many measures, literally and figuratively, California has been burning up.

As the Carr fire rapidly expanded, the Redding area was experiencing record-tying temperatures. In Southern California in October and November — in the middle of a punishing spate of wildfires — the average temperature was the hottest in more than 120 years of record keeping. San Francisco hit its all-time heat record in September, with a downtown reading of 106; in July, temperature records shattered throughout Southern California, with Burbank hitting 114 and Van Nuys 117.

Redding’s temperature of 113 on Thursday wasn’t unheard of for that time of year, but Swain said it was the accumulation of intense heat over the previous months that added to the problem.

The resulting dry vegetation was a key factor in the Carr fire, Swain said. There was no wind preceding the blaze in Redding — no Santa Anas or Diablos whipping it up. Instead, the exceptionally dry vegetation produced intense heat that shot hot air up to 39,000 feet into the sky at speeds of up to 130 mph, Lareau said. That air was replaced by air moving in at the base of the fire, in a movement that appeared like a tornado.

“This fire vortex, this pretty terrifying tornado-like feature, and I don’t say that lightly ... was made possible by the extreme heat produced by this fire,” Swain said. “To see that in the brush- and mixed-forest region immediately adjacent to a city of 100,000 people in California was pretty extraordinary.”

Such “fire whirls,” also known as plume-dominated fires, are particularly dangerous because the direction of the blaze is far more difficult to predict and embers can spread far away. It’s believed to be a factor in the number of lives lost in the fire, including firefighters. The Carr fire jumped the Sacramento River, which in a typical blaze would be seen as a natural barrier.

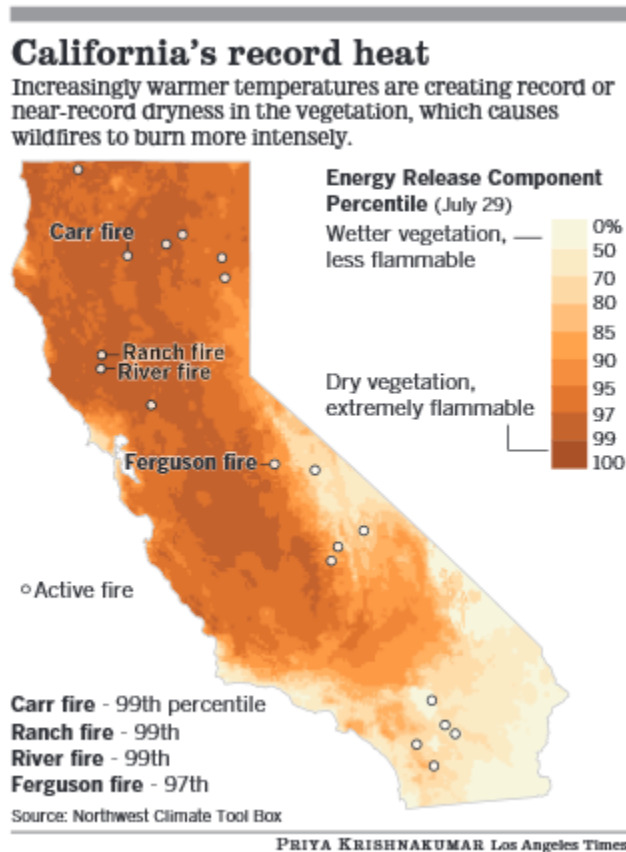
“The fire has much more of a mind of its own when it has more of these dynamics,” Lareau said.

It's virtually unheard of for a fire whirl to last as long as the one in Redding did — it started about 7 p.m. Thursday and lasted for about an hour and a half. "It's remarkable in size, strength, duration and depth," he said.

The fire whirl was so intense that it appeared to blow down large trees and strip tiles off roofs in areas untouched by fire damage.

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the state's wildfire season is now 78 days longer than it was more than a generation ago.

"You don't get a record hot July by accident right now. It's just the whole background state of the climate is hotter. The entire Earth is hotter than it used to be," Lareau said.



Times staff writers Lin reported from San Francisco and Vives from Redding.



JOSH EDELSON AFP/Getty Images

THE STATE is having its worst wildfire year on record as warmer temperatures and extremely dry land help fires burn more intensely, climate experts say.

EDITORIALS

When fire season lasts all year

LA Times 7/31/2018

It's not just nature doing its thing. Wildfires, climate change and our own actions are all connected.

The devastating Carr fire in Northern California continues to ravage the countryside, nearing or even surpassing 100,000 acres, destroying at least 874 buildings and, even more tragically, killing six people with an additional seven people unaccounted for. To the southeast, two men — one a firefighter and the other a bulldozer operator — died fighting the 57,000-acre Ferguson fire near Yosemite National Park. There were 15 other fires raging elsewhere in California, including two fresh fires forcing evacuations in Mendocino and Lake counties. And it's not just California that's burning. As of Monday morning, at least 90 large fires were reported nationwide, all in the West except for a blaze in Florida.

Such fires are nothing new in this part of the country. But the fire season this year has begun much earlier than usual, and while scientists warn that specific weather conditions cannot be tied directly to climate change, these are just the sorts of impacts we have been warned to expect from a warming planet.

In fact, prolonged drought is a major factor in the current fires. Years of drought, broken by a rainy 2016-2017 winter followed by an unusually dry winter last year, have left the

countryside covered with dead or dormant plants. In the mountains, drought damage has been augmented by bark beetle infestations that have left more than 100 million trees dead on their roots in California alone. All of that material is kindling and fuel for an errant spark or a bolt of lightning. And if heavy rains come in the aftermath of a fire, the charred landscape becomes the setting for deadly mudslides like those that flowed through Mendocino earlier this year.

The loss of life has been heartbreaking. Three of the Carr fire victims were 70-year-old Melody Bledsoe and two great-grandchildren who perished near Redding as a wall of flames sped through their neighborhood. In the Sierra Nevada, 33-year-old Brian Hughes, a “hotshot” firefighter, died when he was struck by a falling tree as he and colleagues raced to set a backfire to stanch the Ferguson blaze. Firefighters found another unidentified body Sunday in the ashes of a different home near Redding, and it seems likely that more remains will be found elsewhere in the days to come.

Few areas of the state are immune from wildfires, and no Californian watching the smoke and rising death counts can shake the sense that there but for the grace of the prevailing winds go I. We know what we’re supposed to do: Maintain brush-free areas around homes in fire-prone areas, have an escape plan, resist the urge for heroics and flee when authorities say so. But as the world continues to burn fossil fuels and climate change becomes more pronounced, we have to recognize that this isn’t nature just doing its thing. We have endangered ourselves, a reality we must recognize and rectify as quickly and forcefully as possible.

Part of the responsibility falls on state and local officials, who must deal with the rising cost of fire prevention and suppression. State lawmakers recently began hammering out a more balanced approach to assigning liability when power lines cause a fire. Under current law, homeowners can collect from utilities even if the utilities were not negligent. With the state’s fiery future, that’s likely to lead to financial ruin for the power companies. Local planners and developers can also do more to consider wildfire risks as they make land-use decisions, and we need to adopt policies that make it easier to develop urban areas more densely.

But such moves only help address the aftermath of the wildfires and mudslides. To get at the root of the problem we must more radically reduce our dependence on fossil fuels for energy and transportation. The Trump administration’s “burn, burn, burn” approach to fossil fuel is no help on that front. The evidence of the horrible effects is right before the nation’s eyes, yet the administration is looking at ways to undo California’s efforts to reduce carbon emissions from motor vehicles.

At the moment, there is mourning to be done over the lives lost in the current conflagrations, and there are fires to be contained as well as damage to be assessed and dealt with. But we also must not lose sight of the fact that we can mitigate some of the dangers we face in the future by acting now. We just need the political will to do so.

Calleguas project set for space in Oak Park

Mike Harris USA TODAY NETWORK
Ventura County Star 7/30/2018

The Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District has conveyed less than an acre of open space in Oak Park to the Calleguas Municipal Water District on which to build a “critical” pump and pressure regulating station.

The district’s board unanimously approved the conveyance, in exchange for \$100,000 from Calleguas, at its July 19 meeting attended by a number of residents concerned about the project.

“We are very pleased that the Rancho Simi board took the action that it did,” Eric Bergh, Calleguas’ manager of resources, said Wednesday.

“Our board’s acceptance of the property conveyance is contingent upon Calleguas completing the CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) documentation and we’re preparing an EIR (environmental impact report) on the overall project, which includes various pipelines and the pump station itself combined,” he said. “So, that will be forthcoming over late summer into early fall.”

Calleguas says the project is a “critical local water supply project.”

Rancho Simi board member Elaine Freeman said Wednesday that many residents with concerns about the project attended the board’s meeting at the Oak Park Community Center, but seemed to have their doubts assuaged by Calleguas’ “very thorough” presentation.

Their concerns included noise, traffic and access, Freeman said.

“But I think after they heard the presentation, they felt a lot more comfortable with what was proposed and the effort that went into deciding that was the best site,” she said.

The project is within a portion of the district’s Wistful Vista Open Space along Lindero Canyon Road just north of the Los Angeles/Ventura county line.

Bergh said there “will be further public review as required under CEQA and community meetings and a public hearing on the EIR, so all is not done yet.”

Calleguas representatives met in January with the district’s board, the Oak Park Recreation and Park Planning Committee and the Oak Park Municipal Advisory Committee to solicit input on the proposed Las Virgenes-Calleguas interconnection pump and pressure regulating station.

At the time, Calleguas offered to provide improvements — a trailhead parking lot, a graded trail, and a bridge over Lindero Creek — in exchange for the necessary right-of-way to construct the facility, Wayne Nakaoka, the district’s interim manager and its planning and maintenance director, wrote in a staff report.

Based on the input it received, Calleguas modified its design so the proposed pump station will be almost entirely underground, with its only visible surface features being access hatches and air vents, Nakaoka wrote.

The Oak Park Recreation and Park Planning Committee accepted the modified design by a majority vote in May. The Oak Park Municipal Advisory Committee accepted the project in June.

The Oak Park Recreation and Park Planning Committee recommended the district accept monetary compensation from Calleguas in exchange for the granting of the necessary right-of-way. Calleguas is offering the district \$100,000 for the conveyance, Nakaoka wrote.

Committee member Harry Medved voted against the project, saying in an interview July 17 that he continues to have issues with it, including the \$100,000 Calleguas is offering.

“I think the price may be too low,” he said. “They’re getting a very good deal if it goes for \$100,000.”

But whatever the price, Medved said, he’d like to make sure “that the money stays with Oak Park and that future projects in Oak Park benefit.”

Freeman said they will.

“Money raised in Oak Park goes to Oak Park,” she said. “That’s the policy and the way our budget is.”

She stressed that the district won’t be paid the \$100,000 until after Calleguas does “all the environmental impact reports and the studies. So, we’re not going to get that now. It will be later.”

Bergh said he doesn’t expect construction of the project to begin until late 2019.

Wastewater fund outlook brightens

S&P sees strong financial performance

Wendy Leung USA TODAY NETWORK

Ventura County Star 7/30/2018

Credit agency Standard & Poor's has revised the negative financial outlook for Oxnard's wastewater revenue bonds to positive.

The revision is based on increased revenues collected after the wastewater rate increases last year.

"The positive outlook reflects our expectation that the wastewater system will likely post at least sufficient financial performance going forward and that further rate increases will not be deferred or delayed," according to the recently released report.

Although the outlook has changed, the Better Business Bureau rating of the wastewater bonds, which is just above junk status, remains. But having a positive financial outlook means S& P could change the credit rating, even by a couple of notches, if strong financial performance continues.

An upgraded credit rating would help the city's borrowing costs.

"An increase in our wastewater bond rating would be a great step forward after years of problems," said Jesus Nava, Oxnard's assistant city manager, in a statement. "It will show our residents and bondholders that we are correcting the situation, making improvements and investing in the future."

Shortly after the November election last year, the credit rating agency revised the outlook of the city's general fund and wastewater fund to negative. The move was a response to the passage of Measure M, a repeal of wastewater rates headed by Aaron Starr.

The negative revision was an indication that the Better Business Bureau wastewater rating could be downgraded, which would trigger a termination of the city's variable-rate interest bonds and lead to even more borrowing. S& P and other banking agencies were keeping a close eye on how the city would challenge Measure M.

Starr was sued by the city, which claimed Measure M was unlawful and prohibited the city from making bond payments and necessary treatment plant upgrades. Earlier this month, a judge finalized his ruling in the lawsuit and sided with Starr.

Because a judge ruled Measure M was lawful, the city could be forced to refund customers \$5.2 million in rates collected in a six-month period. Despite this potential liability, S& P believes the city has the ability to pay residents back.

"It is unclear at this point whether the city will be required to make refund payments to affected customers or if the refunds can take the form of credits against future billings," according to the report. "However, based on recent audited and unaudited

cash and investment balances, we believe that the system has the capacity to make these refunds without adversely affecting credit quality at the current rating level.”

In a separate lawsuit filed by Starr, the city is accused of unlawfully taking revenue from utilities to fund street improvements and public safety. That lawsuit, which has not gone to trial, was referenced in S& P’s latest report focused on the wastewater fund.

“We understand that the city is also engaged in litigation regarding an infrastructure use fee that the city’s utilities — including the wastewater system — annually pay to the city’s general fund,” according to the report. “If the plaintiff prevails in the litigation, the city’s general fund could potentially be required to refund about \$21 million to the wastewater system, which could possibly be retained by the wastewater system and used for other eligible purposes or could possibly be rebated to ratepayers if required by the court. Although the outcome of this litigation is uncertain, we view it as likely either credit neutral to credit positive.”



Standard & Poor’s has revised the rating on Oxnard’s wastewater revenue bonds from negative to positive. CHUCK KIRMAN/THE STAR

Back story

Wildfires raging in Europe

Continuing heat wave leaves forests and countrysides 'extremely dry'



DIMITRIS MATRAKIDIS kisses his sister Maria as flowers are placed at the point where a 6-month-old baby died after a forest fire in Mati, a suburb of Athens. Fires have killed more than 80 people in Greece. (Yannis Kolesidis EPA/Shutterstock)

By Melissa Etehad
LA Times 7/29/2018

As a scorching heat wave engulfs large parts of Europe this summer, fires have torn through dozens of countries across the European Union.

From Germany to France to Sweden, countries in Western Europe are set for another intense heat wave this week with temperatures soaring above 90 degrees, weather forecasters said.

The risk of forest fires remains high as above normal heat is expected to continue into August. Some parts of eastern Germany have not had rain since April, according to weather forecasters.

As firefighters continue to battle treacherous blazes that have killed scores of people, here's a look at what some European countries face as wildfires continue to scorch large swaths of land:

Greece

More than 80 people died in a wildfire that swept through the seaside coastal town of Mati. Authorities suspect the cause of the fire was arson.

“The country is going through an unspeakable tragedy,” Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said on July 24.

The fire was the deadliest in a decade. About 200 firefighters were battling the blaze in Mati. Confused tourists and residents were forced to flee to the sea to escape the fast-moving blaze. Amid the chaos, some people got trapped on dead-end roads or cliffs and weren’t able to get away.

Tsipras declared three days of national mourning to honor those who died.

Sweden

As an unusual heat wave continues to engulf Sweden, with temperatures reaching above 90 degrees just north of the Arctic Circle, at least 40 wildfires are burning across the country — home to more than 9 million people and an amazing array of wildlife.

Some fires were sparked by thunderstorms, officials said, with an estimated 62,000 acres burned so far.

Italian planes and Norwegian helicopters have been fighting the fast-moving flames, according to local media, and more help from other European countries, including France and Germany, is on the way.

Strong winds will continue to push the fire, creating challenges for firefighters, according to weather forecasters with the European Forest Fire Information System.

No deaths or injuries have been reported, but officials warned thousands of people to be vigilant and stay indoors because of poor air quality caused by smoke and ash, local media reported.

Finland

Firefighters are still battling several wildfires in Finland as meteorologists with the Finnish Meteorological Institute warn that there’s a high risk more blazes could ignite in the southern and central regions, where there was a brief reprieve because of rain and subsiding winds. Over the next five days, dry, warm weather — with the chance of winds — is forecast.

Fires have scorched forested areas in Lapland, a northern province near the border with Russia.

Dozens of people were evacuated from summer cottages in the south, according to local media.

Norway

Firefighters have been battling wildfires in various parts of Norway since May. The fires, now mostly under control, became deadly when in late July, a firefighter died battling a blaze in southern Norway. Earlier this year, the country experienced record heat.

Dry terrain in the Scandinavian country created ample fuel for the fires.

“It is extremely dry in the countryside and the forest fire index is sky-high,” Mathias Drange, the head of the firefighting response unit, told local media in May. “In this case the alarm was fortunately raised in good time so we have a good chance of controlling the fire.”

Although fires have been contained, the Norwegian Meteorological Institute’s website said there was “very high” risk of forest fire in various parts of the country.

Latvia

Wildfires have scorched more than 1,600 acres since July 17, according to the European Forest Fire Information System.

Officials requested foreign assistance about a week later to fight the large forest fires. The extreme heat has made it difficult for firefighters to put out the fires and the weather outlook looks grim.

Warm weather is expected to continue, according to officials, and resources to battle the flames are stretched thin.

“Most of the affected areas are not accessible by ground capabilities and aerial firefighting is the only option,” according to a recent North Atlantic Treaty Organization news release.

GORGEOUS GARDENS

Inspired by a coastal trail



A DROUGHT-TOLERANT landscape in Malibu is modeled after Legacy Park. (Scott Flor)

By Lisa Boone
LA Times 7/31/2018

For East Coast transplant Scott Flor, lush green lawns recall his Pennsylvania home.

“I like grass,” Flor admits. “I even enjoy mowing the lawn. My sons played a lot of soccer and football on our lawn in Malibu.”

When his two sons grew up, however, and they no longer needed the lawn surrounding the half-acre property he and wife Kelly purchased 21 years ago, it was time to remove the grass.

“We wanted to be good citizens,” Scott says of their decision two years ago, during the drought. “I cut way back on the watering, and the grass started to die. It looked terrible.”

The couple hired someone to remove the lawn in front and back and called in CrossRoads Mulch, a company that installs protective covering on playgrounds and along freeways, to cover the empty landscape while they decided what to plant.

The couple did not consult with a designer. They didn’t even have a master plan. Instead, they looked to their Malibu community for inspiration.

“We started the landscape as a process,” Scott says. “Otherwise, it would have been overwhelming. We wanted to make the landscape look like Legacy Park in Malibu. It has a coastal bluffs trail with different types of flora. It’s what you would see if you were walking along a California trail. That’s what I wanted for our backyard.”

In the backyard, Scott created a meadow by scattering a coastal mix of California native seeds from the Theodore Payne Foundation that includes *Camissoniopsis cheiranthifolia* or beach suncups, *Eschscholzia californica* var. *maritima* or coastal California poppy, *Leptosiphon grandiflorus* or large flowered linanthus, *Lupinus bicolor* or miniature lupine and *Lupinus succulentus* or arroyo lupine.

“I spent 15 bucks and just threw them out and raked them into the soil,” Scott says. “It is just gorgeous, and it comes back every year.”

The couple also planted drought-tolerant African daisies, hardy succulents and jade plants, agave and aloes. Colorful orange nasturtiums, Scott says, “just popped up.”

“I’m a big proponent of buying small one or five gallon plants,” he adds. “The plants grow really fast.”

He estimates he spent about \$8,000 on the makeover, including about \$1,000 for a path. “I thought all the costs for removing the lawn would offset the turf removal rebate [\$9,000], but it didn’t.”

That’s OK with Scott, who misses the grass, but saves roughly \$200 a month on water and enjoys the butterflies and birds that are drawn to the new landscape. He also enjoys the changing view. “It’s fun to look out and know you have created something that will last forever.”

A Free Family Adventure!

Take a water recycling tour Saturday, August 11

When you send water down the drain, we go to work, safely returning it to the environment. You'll learn how we fulfill that mission.

On this free bus tour, you'll visit our Tapia Water Reclamation and Rancho Las Virgenes Composting Facilities, as well as learn more about our precious water resources.



**Saturday, August 11, 2018
from 8:45 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

Space is limited, pre-registration is required (walk-ins cannot be accommodated).

A complimentary continental breakfast and light lunch will be provided.

Register online at: LVMWD.com/QuarterlyTours

Moderate walking and stairs are part of the tour. For safety, please wear close-toed walking shoes.

Please bring a refillable water bottle.

Reservation preference is given to customers of Las Virgenes Municipal Water District and Triunfo Sanitation District.

Children under 18 must be accompanied by a responsible adult.



Presented by
Las Virgenes Triunfo Joint Powers Authority