

What is Causing Wildfires in California?



What is the state of California doing to minimize human-caused fires?

To mitigate wildfires across the state, wildfire prevention programs for fuel reduction, prescribed fire management, vegetation management, and wildfire prevention grants have been implemented. To mitigate human caused fires specifically, California has also created programs that educate citizens in target shooting safety, equipment use tips, landscape debris burning, and campfire safety.



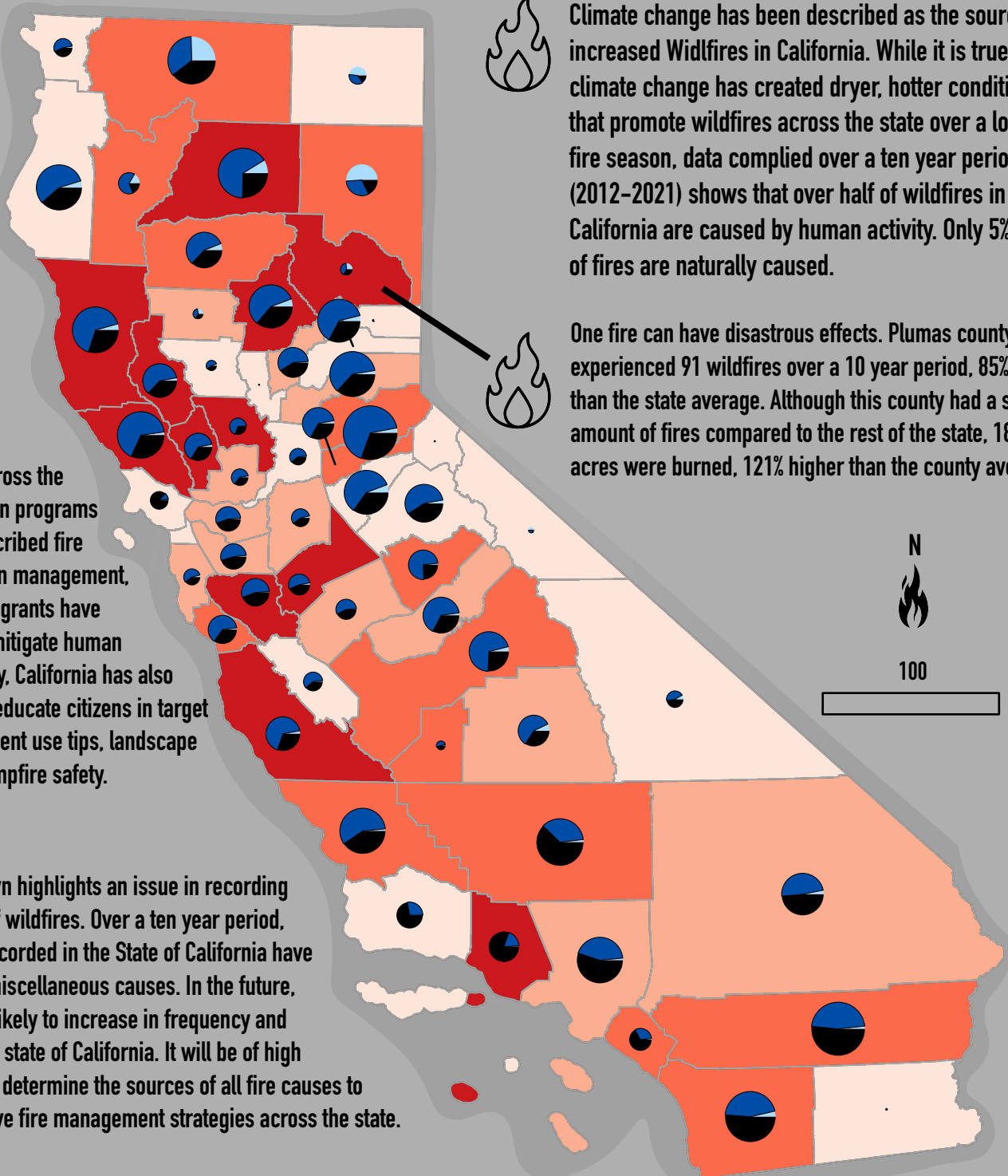
The data shown highlights an issue in recording the sources of wildfires. Over a ten year period, 40% of fires recorded in the State of California have unknown or miscellaneous causes. In the future, wildfires are likely to increase in frequency and severity in the state of California. It will be of high importance to determine the sources of all fire causes to inform effective fire management strategies across the state.



Climate change has been described as the source of increased Wildfires in California. While it is true that climate change has created dryer, hotter conditions that promote wildfires across the state over a longer fire season, data compiled over a ten year period (2012–2021) shows that over half of wildfires in California are caused by human activity. Only 5% of fires are naturally caused.

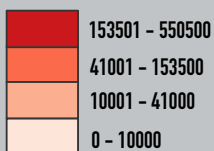


One fire can have disastrous effects. Plumas county only experienced 91 wildfires over a 10 year period, 85% lower than the state average. Although this county had a small amount of fires compared to the rest of the state, 189490 acres were burned, 121% higher than the county average.

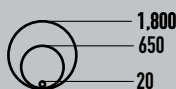


Over a Ten Year Period (2012–2021)

Number of Acres Burned



Total Number of Fires



Fire Cause



- Human Caused
- Naturally Caused
- Undetermined/ Miscellaneous Cause

Elizabeth Pringle Burkhalter
 December 12, 2023
 North America Lambert Conformal Conic
 Standard line adjusted to 120°W
 Sources: State of California Fire Statistics; Luo, L., Tang, Y., Zhong, S., Bian, X., & Heilman, W. E. (2013). Will future climate favor more erratic wildfires in the Western United States? *Journal of Applied Meteorology and Climatology*, 52(11), 2410–2417.
<https://doi.org/10.1175/jamc-d-12-0317.1>;
 *Noun Project Icons: fire by Aisyah, fire by Ridwan Hamdani