



Extreme Weather Sparks LA's Most Expensive Wildfire Ever

Description

On a seemingly serene Tuesday morning at approximately 10 am, Los Angeles enjoyed a moment of calm.

However, within the span of fewer than 24 hours, a staggering 2,925 acres of the [Pacific Palisades ignited](#), marking the most catastrophic wildfire Southern California has witnessed since 2011.

Compounding the crisis, three additional fires erupted in the vicinity, with one, known as the Eaton Fire, consuming over 2,000 acres.

As of Wednesday morning, the Los Angeles Fire Department reported that [firefighters](#) had failed to contain any of the blazes, leading to the destruction of more than 1,000 structures and the tragic loss of at least two lives, with the potential for exacerbation in the hours ahead.

[Wildfires are a familiar plight in California](#), yet this particular incident raises alarms due to several alarming factors.

An “urban firestorm” facing potential record losses



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High winds propelled the flames across California. (AP Photo/Ethan Swope)

Notably, few [brush fires in California's history](#) have occurred in such densely populated urban areas.

UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain referred to it as an “urban firestorm” while reviewing live footage of the ongoing Eaton Fire. Historical context reveals that the 1991 Tunnel Fire, which ravaged over 1,500 acres of Oakland, is dwarfed by the current blazes and is notable for its extensive loss of life and property.

Swain and his colleagues have posited that the Palisades Fire may emerge as the costliest wildfire disaster recorded in the United States, primarily due to the significant number of upscale structures involved. “We are likely witnessing what may become the most expensive wildfire disaster in California, if not national history,” he asserted.

A historic windstorm accelerates the spread



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The affected homes represent some of the world's most valuable real estate. (AP Photo/Eugene Garcia)

Additionally, a powerful windstorm besieged the region from Tuesday into Wednesday morning, with gusts reaching up to 90 miles per hour, according to the National Weather Service.

In a mere two-and-a-half hours overnight, the size of the Palisades Fire more than doubled, hampered further by winds so fierce that aircraft tasked with water and retardant drops were grounded.

This phenomenon—a perilous amalgamation of fierce winds and arid, expansive territories—encourages fires that advance more swiftly than emergency responders can react. Douglas Kelley, a wildfire expert at the UK's Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, noted the unprecedented speed of the fire's growth, which exceeded expectations.

A recent [study](#) published in *Science* revealed that while only around 3% of US wildfires from 2001 to 2020 were categorized as "fast fires," they accounted for the majority of damage and suppression costs.

The exacerbated conditions of this wildfire outbreak are vitally interconnected with the evolving [climate crisis](#).



A weather phenomenon creates optimal fire conditions

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The remains of a grand staircase in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood. (AP Photo/Ethan Swope)

Recent winters in Southern California have brought considerable rainfall, yet a lack of precipitation in recent months has rendered the flourishing vegetation highly susceptible to fire.

This cycle of dry and wet conditions, which Swain terms “hydroclimate whiplash,” leads to extreme enhanced fire risk, as evidenced by the destructive Camp Fire of 2018.

The emergence of such extreme weather events and intensified wildfires presents a profound challenge for the region.

This article was originally published by [Business Insider](#).

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Date Created



2025/01/09

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