



Predicting
Future
Wildfires



Science
You Can
Use!

Predicting Future Wildfires

Why Should You Care About Future Wildfires?

Wildfires burn high into tree crowns and destroy large areas of forest. Wildfires are sometimes started by people, and these fires can cause major economic and ecological damage. As the climate changes, different precipitation patterns and rising average temperatures may increase the occurrence of wildfires. As more people move into or near forested areas across the Southern United States, the potential damage from wildfires may increase. Although more forested acreage is destroyed by Western wildfires, more homes and other buildings are damaged or destroyed by Southern wildfires.

Did You Know?

Many wildland fires are ecologically beneficial and are even necessary for certain ecosystems to remain healthy. These beneficial fires burn close to the ground and rarely kill large trees. Forest managers also purposefully use fire as a tool to keep some ecosystems healthy. These ecosystems are called fire-dependent ecosystems, because fire is necessary for their sustainability.

What Are Scientists Doing to Help?

Scientists create computer models to predict wildfire potential under a range of potential climate futures. Using different projections of temperature and precipitation, scientists predict where and when wildfires are most likely to occur. Scientists predict that in the South slightly more wildfires will occur in the future. The scientists also predict that the wildfire season will be longer, extending from spring, through summer, and into the fall months. Using computer models and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), scientists create maps showing areas that will be more susceptible to wildfires. These areas, then, can be managed especially to lower the chances of wildfire.

Take Action!

Always use care with fire. When you are outdoors, never leave a fire unattended, and make sure the fire is completely out before leaving it. Visit <http://www.smokeybear.com/be-smart-outdoors.asp> to learn more.

Visit <http://www.firewise.org> for information about making your home safe from wildfires.

Read "Fire and Water" in the *Natural Inquirer* Southern United States edition, <http://www.naturalinquirer.org>.



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