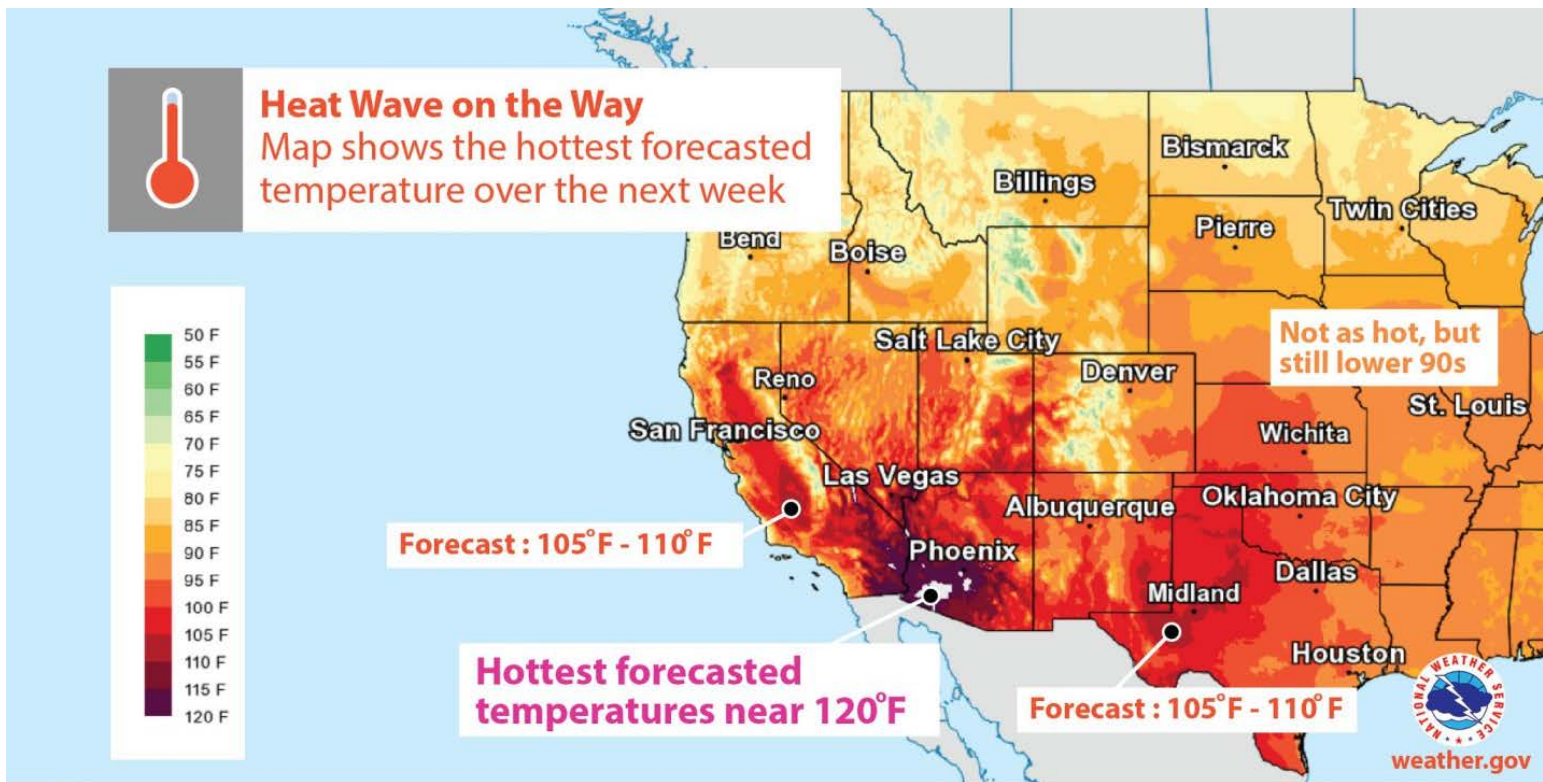




[BLOG] UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS



Heat Waves and Wildfires Signal Warnings about Climate Change (and Budget Cuts)

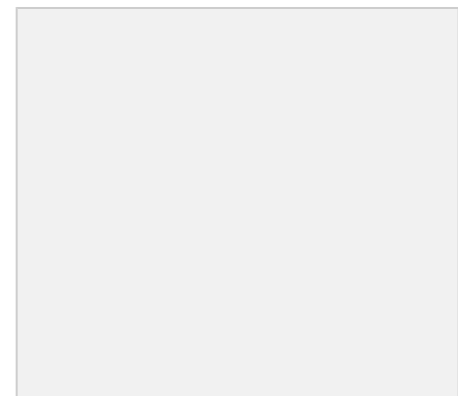
RACHEL CLEETUS, LEAD ECONOMIST AND CLIMATE POLICY MANAGER | JUNE 19, 2017, 3:39 PM EDT

Tweet



Southern California and the Southwest US are experiencing a significant heat wave this week. More than [29 million people in California](#) alone are under an excessive heat warning or heat advisory.

If you live in areas affected by this heat wave, please follow health advisories to stay cool, stay hydrated, and stay safe.





This post is a part of a series on
[Understanding the Budget](#)

And watch for wildfire advisories while you're at it.

Heat waves are dangerous

Extreme heat can cause heat exhaustion, heat stroke, or even death. Symptoms to watch for include dizziness, headaches, nausea, muscle cramps, and loss of consciousness. Be especially vigilant for children, the elderly, those with pre-existing health conditions, those who work or play outdoors, and your pets. (For more on how to stay safe in extreme heat, refer to [guidance from the CDC](#).)

Unfortunately, **climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of heat waves**. [According to the EPA](#):

“Nationwide, unusually hot summer days (highs) have become more common over the last few decades. The occurrence of unusually hot summer nights (lows) has increased at an even faster rate. This trend indicates less “cooling off” at night.”

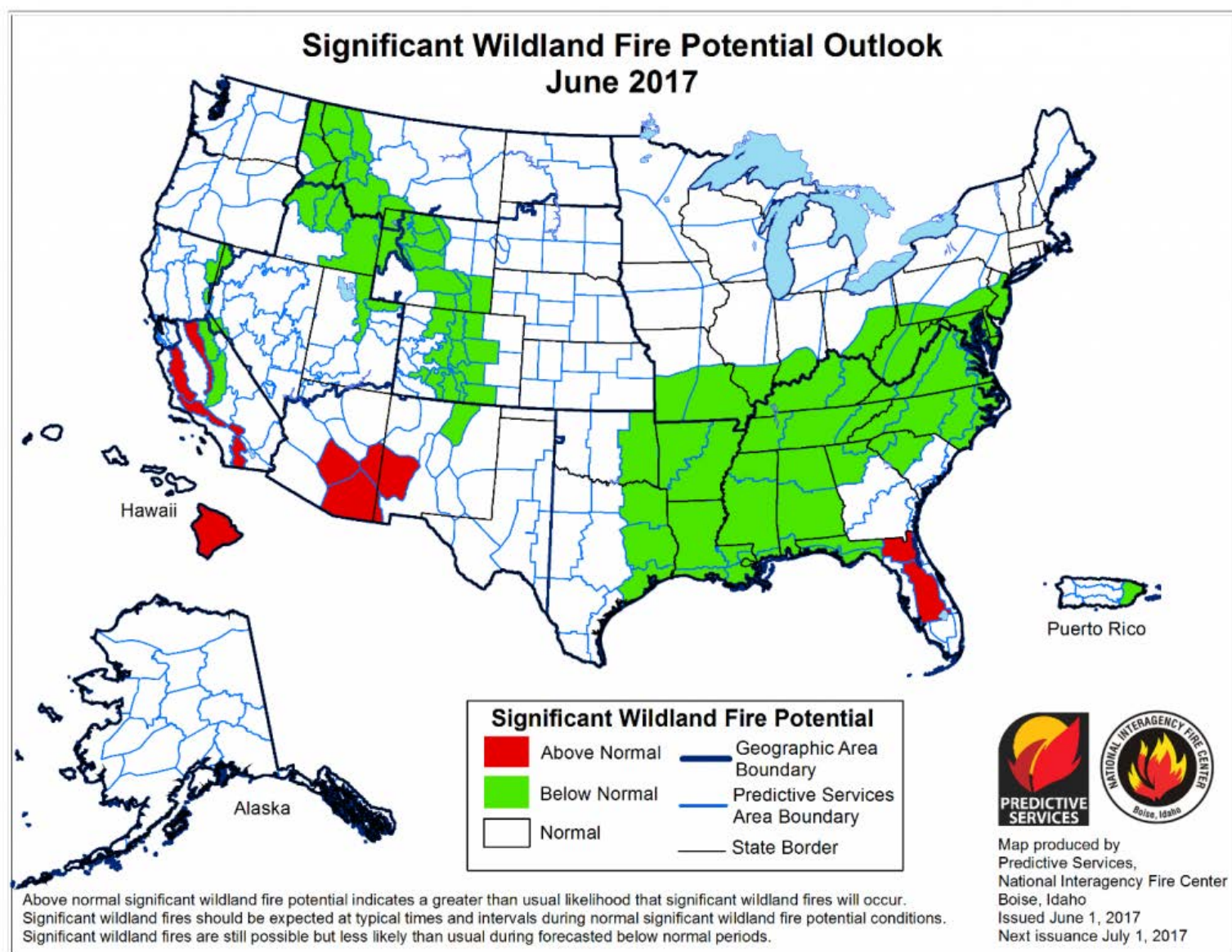
Furthermore, heat waves that [arrive earlier in the summer can have worse health impacts](#) because people's bodies have had less time to adjust to the warm weather. And the longer a heat wave lasts, the more severe the [cumulative effects](#) can be.

On the other side of the world, India has already experienced a [serious early heat wave in April](#), and [recent research](#) shows that even a small increase in global average temperature (which is very likely with climate change) is projected to cause a huge increase in heat-related deaths there.

Hotter, drier conditions also raise risks of wildfires

The wildfire season in the Southwest is also underway. Many of the same areas experiencing this week's heat wave—including parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and California—are also forecast to have an above-normal wildfire risk this month (see map).

That's no coincidence: in many parts of the world **hotter, drier conditions** are also **contributing to growing risks of wildfires**.



Arizona currently has **more than 12 active wildfires** and the state has already seen **dozens of fires** this year. California has also seen a number of wildfires over the past month; officials warn that the risk continues to be high. Ironically, winter precipitation in these states has helped provide more fuel for fires, stimulating the growth of brush and other vegetation that is now drying out in the hot temperatures.

Halfway across the world, [Portugal is experiencing terrible wildfires](#), where more than 60 people tragically lost their lives this past weekend after getting trapped by raging fires. The country is, of course, focused on the emergency response and is in a state of mourning. Unfortunately, Portugal has been experiencing bad wildfires seasons year-on-year. Earlier this year, [Chile](#) also experienced devastating wildfires.

Drought and extreme heat are important contributing factors in all these cases, and frequently faulty forest and land management policies are also implicated.

Managing the risks of wildfires

Wildfires are inevitably a consequence of several factors, including the weather, winds, and the condition of forests and underbrush, plus the proximate causes such as lighting or human activities. [Here in the US](#) and [many parts of the world](#), [climate change](#) is making hotter, drier conditions more likely and worsening the risks of wildfire.

Development in wildfire-prone areas also exposes more people and property to the risks of harmful impacts. The smoke from wildfires can also impose harmful health impacts on people living hundreds of miles away—[recent research](#) shows that the air pollution from wildfires is [significantly higher](#) than previously understood.

To manage wildfire risks and impacts, we will have to work on solutions on all these fronts.

Cutting the Forest Service budget is a bad idea

Given what we know about these growing wildfire risks and the need to take robust action to protect people and healthy forests, the Trump administration's proposed cuts to the US Forest Service budget are a particularly bad idea. For instance, the president's FY 2018 budget proposes to cut funding for forest health management by about \$9 million relative to FY2017 (more specifically, relative to the FY 2017 annualized Continuing Resolution level), which would reduce the resources available to cope with disease and pest outbreaks that kill trees. The hazardous fuels management budget would take a hit of \$20 million—meaning that there would be less

money to manage or thin forests to reduce wildfire risks near where people live. The budget also proposes to cut funding for volunteer fire departments.

Last week [Tom Tidwell](#), Chief of the USDA Forest Service, [testified about the budget](#) before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. At the hearing, there was bipartisan push-back to these cuts. [Senator Murkowski \(R-Alaska\)](#) said:

“While some of the agency’s recommended budget cuts are worth considering, others, like the proposed cuts to recreation programs, are concerning. Some could impact critical forest management activities, like firefighting and hazardous fuels reduction. And some appear to contradict other proposals in the budget, so we will need to review all of these very carefully, as we work on our budget for the next fiscal year.”

And [Senator Cantwell \(D-WA\)](#) said:

“President Trump’s proposal reduces funding for fighting wildfires. This budget proposes a decrease of almost \$300 million for fighting wildfires and another decrease of \$50 million for preventing wildfires.”

A way forward on wildfire and climate policy?

Senators Murkowski and Cantwell have a long history of working together to find solutions for [improving forest management and fixing wildfire budgeting](#).

I hope Congress will reject the harmful budget cuts proposed by the Trump administration, and [step up and pass legislation](#) to address these critical issues as soon as possible. People who live in wildfire-prone areas—whether in California, Arizona, [Alaska](#), or [Georgia](#)—cannot afford further delays or back-sliding.

We also have to continue to work with the global community to limit the heat-trapping emissions that are driving climate change and worsening the risks of deadly heat waves and wildfires worldwide—despite the Trump administration’s stance on the Paris Climate Agreement.

Tweet



Posted in: [Global Warming](#) [Tags: Forest Service](#), [heat wave](#), [Understanding the Budget](#), [Wildfire](#)

Support from UCS members make work like this possible. [Will you join us?](#) Help UCS advance independent science for a healthy environment and a safer world.

Hide Comments

Comment Policy

UCS welcomes comments that foster civil conversation and debate. To help maintain a healthy, respectful discussion, please focus comments on the issues, topics, and facts at hand, and refrain from personal attacks. Posts that are commercial, self-promotional, obscene, rude, or disruptive will be removed.

Please note that comments are open for two weeks following each blog post. UCS respects your privacy and will not display, lend, or sell your email address for any reason.

Support Our Work

DONATE

Stay Informed



[READ RACHEL'S POSTS >](#)

[MEET OUR OTHER BLOGGERS >](#)

[TOPICS]

[Biofuel](#)

[Energy](#)

[Food and Agriculture](#)

[Global Warming](#)

[Nuclear Power](#)

[Nuclear Weapons](#)

[Science and Democracy](#)

[Science Communication](#)

[Scientific Integrity](#)

[Tropical Forests](#)

[Vehicles](#)

[Water](#)

[MOST POPULAR]

[Bringing Down the House: A Hostile Takeover of Science-Based Policymaking by Trump Appointees](#)

BY ANDREW ROSENBERG | POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 20, 2017

[Science Triumphs Over Disinformation in Initial Flame Retardant Victory](#)

BY GENNA REED | POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2017

[President Trump is About to Give a Speech That Directly Undermines Science](#)

BY YOGIN KOTHARI | POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2017

[What Is Grid Modernization—and What's the Role of Electric Vehicles?](#)

BY PETER O'CONNOR | POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2017

[Rebuilding Puerto Rico's Devastated Electricity System](#)

BY JUAN DECLET-BARRETO | POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2017

About Us

[UCS Leadership & Experts](#)

[Funding & Financials](#)

[History & Accomplishments](#)

[Jobs & Internships](#)

[News](#)

Center for Science and Democracy

Issues

[Clean Energy](#)

[Clean Vehicles](#)

[Food & Agriculture](#)

[Global Warming](#)

[Nuclear Power](#)

[Nuclear Weapons](#)

Action Center

Science Network

Our Blogs

[The Equation](#)

[All Things Nuclear](#)

Our Podcast

[Got Science?](#)

Publications

Reports & Analysis

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Ways to Give

[Donate](#)

[Give Monthly](#)

[Planned Gifts](#)

How to Help

[Become a Member](#)

[Take Action](#)

[Subscribe](#)