



California Wildfire/Drought Talking Points

JULY 2021

- California and the American West are experiencing an enhanced threat from wildfire and drought.
- Climate change has exacerbated these impacts and prompted government leaders, individual communities, and industry to adapt – working proactively and collectively to find solutions.
- California remains a safe destination with an abundance of experiences to enjoy year-round.
- Wildfires and drought conditions are unlikely to have material impacts on most of those experiences.
- Even though these conditions exist across multiple western states, the impacts in California will continue to receive an outsized share of media attention, primarily because of its large population centers and concentration of national media outlets.

West Coast Fire Season

- West Coast wildfire season may begin as early as July when temperatures rise, and continue through December, depending on rain levels, which vary across the state's many climates.
- In 2021 in California, noteworthy fires with some impact on tourism began in late June, but were controlled quickly.
- A media narrative of impending danger and disruption from wildfires because of dry conditions has begun and is likely to overlay all coverage without regard to the severity and duration of individual fire events.
- The annual average of acreage lost, evacuations, structures burned and, tragically, lives lost, has increased over the past five years.
- It has prompted government leaders to allocate more resources to both preventing fires through forest management and fighting fires more quickly after ignition.
- The just-approved California state budget includes record-setting expenditures: \$2 billion for emergency wildfire preparedness, \$4.5 billion to reduce the causes and impacts of climate change, and \$5 billion for drought support.

- Fires may occur across the state, and predominantly break out in remote, forested areas away from population centers. It is not uncommon for multiple fires to be burning simultaneously, with little to no disruption of most residents' daily lives.
- Fires play a critical role in the lifecycle of a forest, naturally reseeding trees, diversifying the landscape and supporting new plant and wildlife that depend on burned areas to regenerate and thrive. Wildfires are to forests what rain is to the rainforest.
- Fire season typically includes occasional public safety power shutoffs to reduce the risk of additional fires.
- When fires are burning, air quality can suffer in communities that are not directly affected by fires.
- It is unusual for California wildfires to result in damage to tourism infrastructure – leaving the visitor experience largely intact.
- While media coverage of fires often results in consumer perception that affected areas are heavily devastated, communities typically reopen for business immediately upon fire containment.

California leads in climate change policy

- California is the fifth-largest economy in the world – long seen as a global leader in environmental best practices, including climate change policy.
- No destination is better positioned culturally and politically to take action that will ameliorate environmental degradation that contributes to wildfires.
- Near term, California and the U.S. Forest Service [have agreed](#) to roughly double the acreage they thin through controlled burns and other techniques.
- Long term, state leaders are poised to stiffen goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that are already toughest in the nation.
- Travel consumers already have accepted California as a leader: Two-thirds of global travelers identify California as “a place that cares about the environment and our natural resources,” according to a 2019 global brand health study.

Traveling during active fires

Visit California's Responsible Travel Code asks everyone to do their part in preserving California and to ensure the safety of themselves, California communities and visitors. This includes practicing extreme caution during dry conditions and following all laws regarding open fires, as well as having an emergency plan and following any evacuation orders.

- Before traveling, visitors should:
 - Research areas on their itinerary– it may be possible to easily reroute a trip to a nearby California destination in the case of interruption by fire-related effects

- Consult local weather and air-quality forecasts in the destination they plan to visit, as well as looking for any alerts (Red Flag Warnings, Fire Weather Watch) and possible closures (roads, parks, forests)
- Check local government websites to sign up for emergency alerts and download the Cal Fire app to refer to while in the state.
- Travelers with trips planned to an area affected by active fires should:
 - Contact lodging providers for the latest on-the-ground information, including whether evacuations, closures or preventative power shutoffs are possible, or whether rooms are needed for evacuees from surrounding affected communities
 - Speak to their airline about canceling or rescheduling flights. Typically flights run as usual unless air quality is severely impacted.
- Travelers in a destination affected by fires should:
 - Understand the local community's evacuation plan.
 - Keep a half-tank of gas in their vehicles and some emergency provisions on hand.
 - Be mindful of poor air quality's effects and consider staying indoors and reducing physical activity if smoke has made the air unhealthy. People experiencing health effects from a smoky environment may benefit from using a tight-fitting N95 or P100 particulate respirator to reduce exposure.
- Visitors who are planning a trip to an affected region can check VisitCalifornia.com and WestCoastTravelFacts.org for more information, including real-time air-quality resources.

Natural Drought Cycle

- Drought in the arid western part of the United States is a normal event that happens periodically but has been exacerbated by climate change.
- Drought is likely to affect several Western states, but California could become the centerpiece for media coverage because of its scale and volume of major media outlets reporting from here.
- Severe drought could affect the American west, including California, for several years.
- The impact on the travel experience itself is minimal. The vast majority of the state's tourism sector is unaffected by water shortages.
- The impacts are generally localized.
 - Freshwater lakes and rivers may have insufficient water for some forms of recreation, such as boating.
 - Drinking water in wildland campgrounds and parks may be restricted, prompting greater use of bottled water.
- Even with impacts on outdoor recreation, California remains a safe tourism destination with a wide variety of visitor experiences, including those on 840 miles of the state's coastline.
- California's tourism industry is working together to reduce water consumption so that the state has the resources it needs for our visitors, both now and in the future.

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- During the last drought in the early part of the 2010s, research undertaken by Visit California within key markets (Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and the United States) indicated the drought did not affect visitor purchasing decisions. The majority of respondents in all markets said they were not aware of the drought or that it did not affect their travel plans.
- An increasing number of California courses use reclaimed wastewater for irrigation.
- Refilling residential swimming pools could be restricted during severe drought, but it is rare for such action to include public or commercial pools.
- [Multiple studies](#) have shown that a swimming pool uses about the same amount of water as a lawn of the same size – even less over time.
- Likewise, an average hotel room uses less water in a day than the average used in a residential dwelling unit – even in hotels that include restaurants.