



Wildfire Statistics

Wildfires are unplanned and unwanted fires, including lightning-caused fires, unauthorized human-caused fires, and escaped prescribed fire projects. States are responsible for responding to wildfires that begin on nonfederal (state, local, and private) lands, except for lands protected by federal agencies under cooperative agreements. The federal government is responsible for responding to wildfires that begin on federal lands. The Forest Service (FS)—within the U.S. Department of Agriculture—carries out wildfire management and response across the 193 million acres of the national forest system. The Department of the Interior (DOI) manages the wildfire response for more than 400 million acres of national parks, wildlife refuges and preserves, other public lands, and Indian reservations.

Wildfire statistics help to illustrate past U.S. wildfire activity. Nationwide data compiled by the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) indicate the number of wildfires has stayed about the same over the last 30 years, but the number of acres burned annually has increased (see **Figure 1**). Every year since 2000, an average of 74,000 wildfires burned an average 6.6 million acres. This is nearly double the average annual acreage burned in the 1990s (3.6 million acres), although a greater number of fires occurred annually (83,000 on average).

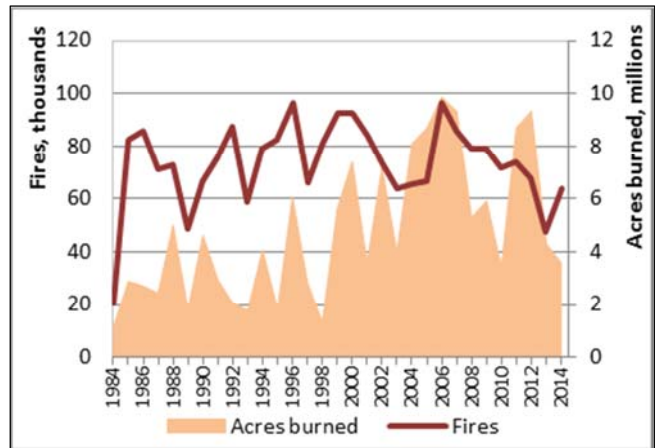
Table 1. Annual Wildfires and Acres Burned (2010-2014)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
No. of Fires (thousands)					
Federal	14.0	15.0	16.9	14.2	13.0
FS	6.8	6.7	7.1	7.1	6.8
DOI	6.9	7.9	9.6	6.7	6.1
Nonfederal	58.0	59.2	50.9	33.4	50.6
Total	72.0	74.1	67.8	47.6	63.6
Acres Burned (millions)					
Federal	1.68	3.44	7.24	3.08	2.2
FS	0.32	1.73	2.68	1.37	0.87
DOI	1.30	1.60	4.44	1.59	1.24
Nonfederal	1.74	5.28	2.09	1.23	1.4
Total	3.42	8.71	9.32	4.32	3.60

Source: National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC).

Notes: Federal includes fires that began on land managed by the Forest Service (FS), Department of the Interior (DOI), and other federal agencies. Nonfederal includes all other lands. Column totals may not add due to rounding.

Figure 1. Annual Wildfires and Acres Burned (1984-2014)



Source: NIFC.

Notes: Data reflect wildland fires and acres burned nationwide, including wildland fires on federal and nonfederal lands.

Over the last 10 years, nearly 6.9 million acres burned annually on average. The last 2 years have been below that average, with 3.6 million acres burned in 2014 and 4.3 million acres burned in 2013, the second- and third-fewest acres burned annually since 2005. (The least was 3.4 million acres in 2010).

The fires in 2013 and 2014 also burned fewer acres than those in 2011 (8.7 million acres) and 2012 (9.3 million acres), which represent the third- and fourth-largest amounts of acreage burned since 1960. The eight largest fire years since 1960 have occurred since 2000, ranging from more than 7 million acres burned to nearly 10 million acres burned.

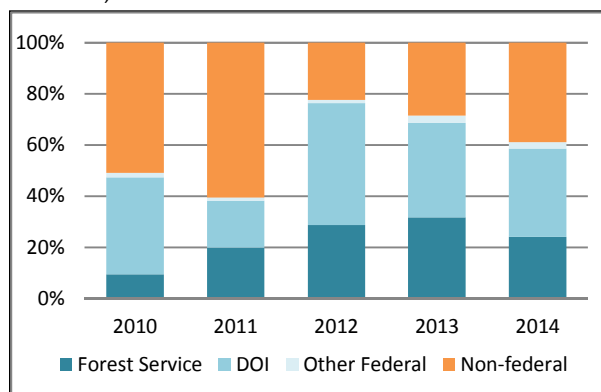
Figure 2. Top Ten Years with Largest Wildfire Acreage Burned Since 1960

2006: 9.87 million acres (96,385 fires)
2007: 9.33 million acres (85,705 fires)
2012: 9.33 million acres (67,774 fires)
2011: 8.71 million acres (74,126 fires)
2005: 8.69 million acres (66,753 fires)
2004: 8.10 million acres (65,461 fires)
2000: 7.39 million acres (92,250 fires)
2002: 7.18 million acres (73,457 fires)
1963: 7.12 million acres (764,183 fires)
1969: 6.69 million acres (113,351 fires)

Source: NIFC.

In 2014, 60% of the nationwide acreage burned by wildfires was on federal lands (2.2 million acres; see **Table 1**). The other 40% of the acreage burned occurred on state, local, or privately owned lands, but it also accounted for most of the fires (50,570). Of the federal acreage burned nationwide in 2014, 56% (1.24 million acres) burned on DOI land and 40% (0.87 million acres) burned on FS land (see **Figure 3**).

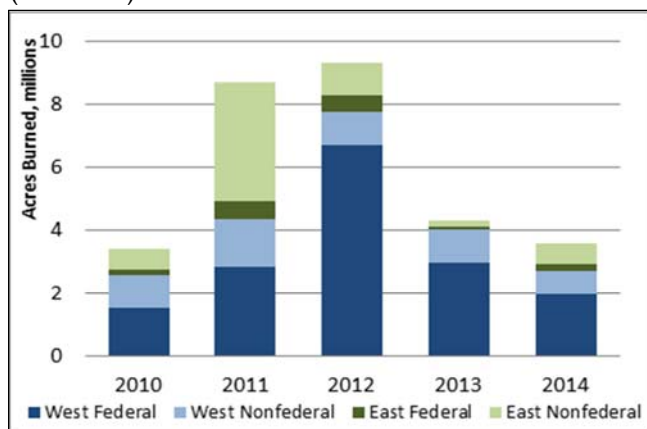
Figure 3. Percentage of Acreage Burned by Landowner (2010-2013)



Source: NIFC.

More wildfires occur in the East (including the central states), but more acreage burns in the West (including Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming). In 2014, 42,000 fires burned fewer than 1 million acres in the East, compared with 20,000 wildfires that burned nearly 3 million acres in the West (see **Table 1**). In the East (where there is less federal acreage), most of the fires occur on nonfederal lands, while in the West most of the fires occur on federal lands (see **Figure 4**). In 2014, there were slightly fewer than 10,000 fires across nearly 2 million acres of western federal land. In the East, there were more than 3,000 fires across 197,000 acres of federal land.

Figure 4. Acreage Burned by Region and Landowner (2010-2014)



Source: NIFC.

Notes: West = Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. East = all other states, including Puerto Rico.

Wildfire Damages

Wildfires can have a devastating impact, especially for those communities affected by wildfire activity. Therefore, statistics showing the level of destruction a wildfire causes can be useful. Some more easily quantifiable measures include acres burned, lives lost (firefighters and civilians), structures destroyed, and suppression costs for a specific wildfire. There is no single source for this type of destruction data. Multiple federal and state organizations collect different data. Therefore, the data can usually be found, but in a piecemeal fashion. Firefighter personnel data for the FS and DOI, firefighter fatalities, and structures burned are provided in **Table 2**.

Table 2. FS and DOI Personnel and Loss Statistics (FY2011-FY2014)

	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014
Personnel				
FS Firefighters	10,480	10,480	10,000	10,000
DOI Firefighters	3,664	3,447	3,450	3,450
Losses				
Firefighter Fatalities	12	15	34	10
Structures Burned	5,246	4,244	2,135	1,953

Source: Agency budget justifications and agency emails. Firefighter fatalities data from the NIFC’s Historical Wildland Firefighter Fatality Reports and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group’s Fatalities, Entrapments and Serious Accident Summary Safety Grams. Structures burned year-end totals from the *NIFC Wildland Fire Summary and Statistics Annual Report 2014*.

Notes: Firefighter fatalities and structures burned reflect calendar-year data. Structures include primary residences, commercial buildings, outbuildings, and seasonal dwellings.

Conflagrations

Only a small fraction of wildfires become catastrophic, and a small percentage of fires accounts for the vast majority of the acres burned. For example, only about 1% of wildfires become conflagrations—raging, destructive fires—but predicting which fires will “blow up” into conflagrations is challenging and depends on a multitude of factors, such as weather and geography. In 2014, only 1% of the wildfires were classified as large or significant (666). Nine of those fires exceeded 40,000 acres in size; four exceeded 100,000 acres. Of the more than 1 million wildfires that have occurred since 2000, approximately 150 exceeded 100,000 acres and 12 exceeded 500,000 acres.

CRS Reports

CRS Report R43077, *Wildfire Management: Federal Funding and Related Statistics*.

CRS Report R44082, *Wildfire Spending: Background, Issues, and Legislation in the 114th Congress*

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