



January 10, 2025

January 2025 Los Angeles County Wildfires

Introduction

Between January 7-10, 2025, eight wildfires—[Palisades](#), [Eaton](#), [Hurst](#), [Woodley](#), [Lidia](#), [Sunset](#), [Kenneth](#), and [Archer](#)—began in Los Angeles (LA) County, California, and adjacent counties, affecting private, state, and other nonfederal lands and the Angeles National Forest.

As of 7:00 pm EST on January 10, 2025, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection ([CAL FIRE](#)) reported that [nearly 36,000 acres](#) have burned in these wildfires, primarily from the Palisades and Eaton Fires. In addition, the fires have destroyed over 12,000 structures and [claimed the lives of at least 10 people](#), with [hundreds of thousands of people](#) under evacuation orders and evacuation warnings. LA County reports the availability of [seven evacuation shelters](#) and nine animal shelters.

Figure 1. Location of Los Angeles County Wildfires

As of January 10, 2025, at 1:00 pm



Source: Adapted by CRS from CAL FIRE Currently Active Incidents, <https://www.fire.ca.gov/>.

Notes: The Woodley Fire and the Sunset Fire are 100% contained. All others are active. The Archer Fire started after the map was prepared.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service (USDA Forest Service) and state and local authorities are fighting the fires under a unified command. The National Guard has been deployed. More than 1,400 firefighters responded during the fires’ first day. All fire departments in LA County were drawn down by the morning of January 8, meaning no additional local personnel or resources were available. Over 7,500 firefighters and emergency personnel are deployed on the fires, including from California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, and New Mexico.

As populations have grown in the [wildland-urban interface](#) (WUI), the risk of wildfires moving into denser, urban areas

has increased. Destructive fire seasons are [increasingly frequent in California](#), where nearly a third of homes are in the WUI. Grassland and shrubland fires burned [64% of homes](#) lost to wildfires between 1990 and 2020.

Complicating Factors

Several factors have complicated response efforts, primarily dangerous wind conditions. According to the National Weather Service, areas north and northwest of LA started experiencing a widespread windstorm on January 7, with 60-100 mph wind gusts and wind predicted through the following week. The phenomenon is known as [Santa Ana winds](#)—dry winds that flow east to west through mountain passages in southern California, typically from September through May. These winds, in combination with low humidity, spurred extreme fire weather conditions in the area. The winds hampered firefighting efforts by helping fires spread quickly and over long distances (e.g., through [spotting](#)), grounding firefighting aircraft, and spreading heavy smoke. Emergency evacuation and response to the fires were stymied by major road closures and, in some cases, limited road access. [Traffic impeded evacuations](#), causing many to abandon their vehicles, with bulldozers clearing abandoned vehicles for firefighting crews.

Firefighting has been further limited due to the [strain on municipal water supplies](#) and power loss. Fire suppression efforts quickly depleted water storage tanks, causing a loss of water pressure and drying upland fire hydrants. Domestic water deliveries continue, but ash contamination has also impacted [drinking water quality](#).

The fires currently threaten flood control systems and have burned some system facilities. This could present a [future safety hazard](#). Wildfires can remove vegetative cover, destabilize slopes, and inhibit the ability of soils to absorb water, which can exacerbate the risk of [post-fire floods and debris flows](#) in cases of heavy rain.

Federal and State Jurisdiction

The federal government is responsible for responding to [wildfires](#) that begin on federal lands. [States are generally responsible for wildfires that begin on nonfederal lands](#), as is the case for the [Palisades Fire](#). The federal government [supports](#) state wildfire response efforts in several ways, including mutual aid agreements, which authorize federal and state resource sharing. The agreements allow for a coordinated interagency response that [deploys resources](#) to areas of greatest critical need (e.g., [ongoing federal efforts](#) in LA County). Response activities are coordinated regionally through 10 [Geographic Area Coordination Centers](#) (GACCs) and nationally through the [National Interagency Fire Center](#) (NIFC).

In 2018, Congress directed the Forest Service to prepare a [Wildfire Hazard Severity Map](#) to prioritize fuels management needs ([16 U.S.C. §6501 note](#)). The majority of land in LA County is classified as having Very High, High, or Moderate wildfire hazard potential, placing the County at [very high risk](#). The County has a [Community Wildfire Protection Plan](#), as do several [cities in the County](#), and the County also has an [All-Hazards Mitigation Plan](#).

The [Governor of California declared a State of Emergency](#) for LA County and Ventura County on January 7, 2025. This provides the Governor with powers authorized by the California [Emergency Services Act](#) and may authorize the [Governor’s Office of Emergency Services](#) to provide financial relief under the [California Disaster Assistance Act](#) for emergency actions, restoration of public facilities and infrastructure, and hazard mitigation.

Disaster Response and Recovery

The state of California initially requested [Fire Management Assistance Grant \(FMAG\)](#) declarations for the [Palisades](#), [Eaton](#), and [Hurst](#) Fires, which were all approved because the fires were burning out of control and threatened to become a major disaster. Once issued, the FMAGs allowed the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide funding for [eligible work and costs](#), including [emergency protective measures](#) and [firefighting activities](#), such as the provision of equipment, supplies, and personnel. The FMAG declarations also authorized temporary forms of assistance, including emergency sheltering and medical care, but not permanent forms of assistance to repair and rebuild homes.

Subsequent to the FMAG declarations, on January 8, 2025, the President issued a [Major Disaster declaration](#) for the [California wildfires and straight-line winds](#) under the [Stafford Act](#), which provides a broader range of [assistance to LA County](#), including [Public Assistance \(PA\)](#) to nonfederal governments and eligible nonprofits for the costs of eligible fire suppression, emergency assistance, and repairing eligible buildings and infrastructure. On January 9, 2025, the President [announced](#) that the federal government would cover 100% (vs. 75%) of the eligible costs of debris removal and emergency protective measures for 180 days; [Individual Assistance \(IA\)](#) to individuals and households for temporary housing, uninsured and underinsured home repairs, and other losses; and [Hazard Mitigation Grant Program \(HMGP\)](#) funding to reduce future disaster losses.

Response and Recovery Considerations

Insurance

Wildfires are typically included as a covered peril in [homeowners insurance](#) written by private insurance companies, which are regulated by individual states. Flooding and [debris flows](#) are not covered by standard homeowners policies, but must be purchased as a separate policy, most commonly from the [National Flood Insurance Program \(NFIP\)](#). Under certain conditions, the NFIP may cover [damage due to mudflows](#), but not other debris flows.

Due to the severity of [recent wildfires](#) and the magnitude of [insurance losses](#), insurance companies have begun to [increase premiums](#) or [retreat from offering policies](#) in high-risk areas in California. This may leave households unable to find insurance other than from the state-created insurer of last resort, known as the [California FAIR Plan](#), which offers less complete coverage than private companies and has [close to \\$6 billion in potential exposure](#) to areas affected by the fires. [State Farm dropped coverage for 69% of its insurance policies in the Pacific Palisades area](#), and the number of policies in the FAIR plan in Pacific Palisades [increased by 85% in the past year](#). On January 10, the California State Insurance Commissioner issued a [one-year moratorium on policy non-renewals and cancellations](#) in areas within the perimeters or adjoining zip codes of the Palisades and Eaton Fires, regardless of whether they suffered a loss.

The LA County wildfires have affected [some of the most valuable real estate in the United States](#) and are expected to be the most costly wildfires in U.S. history, with [insured losses potentially exceeding \\$20 billion](#).

Debris Removal

The L.A. County wildfires may present particular difficulties related to the hazardousness and scale of [post-fire debris](#). Recent wildfires that affected urban areas in [California](#), [Colorado](#), and [Hawaii](#) have required extensive debris removal efforts lasting many months (up to approximately one year), delaying survivors’ reentry and the commencement of recovery efforts. Some costs associated with debris removal may be funded through [FEMA Public Assistance \(PA\)](#), and, in severe cases, FEMA may authorize reimbursement for debris removal on private property. FEMA may also issue “[mission assignments](#)” to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other federal personnel to conduct debris removal efforts when affected jurisdictions are unable to perform or contract the work.

Wildfire Smoke—Hazards, Losses, and Assistance

Survivors may face hurdles coping with [public health threats](#), mental health impacts, and damages attributed to wildfire smoke. Survivors whose property was damaged but not destroyed may struggle to document “hidden” smoke damage in order to secure assistance from public entities or [private insurers](#). The [Federation of American Scientists](#) and the [Government Accountability Office](#) have recently recommended reforms to the federal government’s coordination of response to the public health impacts of wildfire smoke, some of which remain open.

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