

## Climate at a Glance: U.S. Wildfires

### **Bullet-Point Summary:**

- Wildfires are far less frequent and severe than was the case throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Occasional upticks in current wildfire activity still result in far less land burnt than was the case throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Even the worst recent wildfire years burned only 1/5<sup>th</sup> to 1/2 as much land as typical wildfire years during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Drought is the key climate factor for wildfires. As shown in [Climate at a Glance: Drought](#), the United States in recent decades is benefiting from strikingly small amounts of drought.

**Short Summary:** Wildfires, especially in arid parts of the United States, have always been a natural part of the environment and likely always will. Global warming did not create wildfires. In fact, wildfires have become less frequent and less severe in recent decades.

The U.S. National Interagency Fire Center reports data on U.S. wildfires back as far as 1926. The Fire Center data show the numbers of acres burned is far less now than it was throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 100 years of global warming ago. See Figure 1, below. Current acres burned run about 1/4<sup>th</sup> to 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the record values which occurred in the 1930s. At that time, the peak wildfire burn was over 52 million acres. In the decade since 2010, the peaks have been 10 million acres or less.

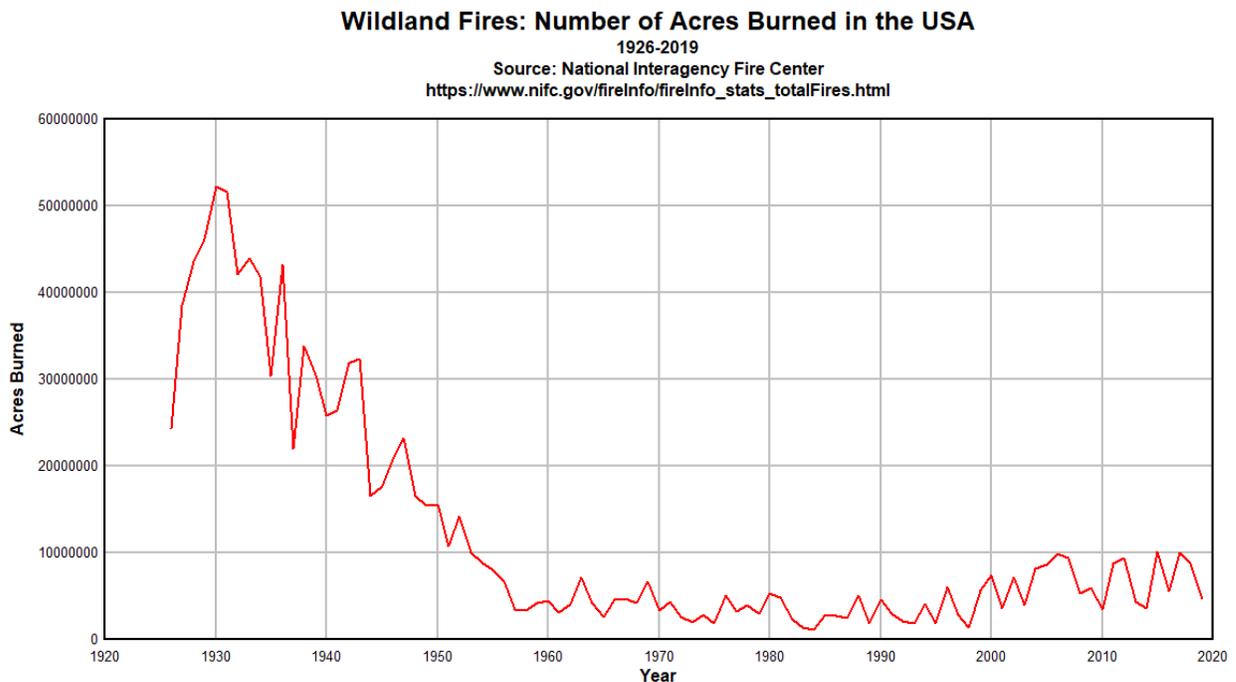


Figure 1: Total wildfire acreage burned by year in the United States, 1926 to 2019. Data from [https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo\\_stats\\_totalFires.html](https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_stats_totalFires.html) Graph by meteorologist Anthony Watts

Climate alarmists sometimes cite a very small upwards trend since 1983 to suggest that climate change has been making wildfires worse in the USA. However, that is cherry-picking a very minor trend compared to the complete picture.

**Further reading:**

1. *Average acres burned per wildfire in the United States, 1983 to 2017*. Our World In Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/acres-burned-per-wildfire-usa>

---

Climate At A Glance is a Project of [The Heartland Institute](#)

© Copyright - The Heartland Institute [think@heartland.org](mailto:think@heartland.org)