SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — With the smell of California wildfires in the air, President Donald Trump on Monday ignored the scientific consensus that climate change is playing a central role in historic West Coast infernos and renewed his unfounded claim that poor forest management is mostly to blame.
The fires are threatening to become another front in Trump’s reelection bid, which is already facing hurdles because of the coronavirus pandemic, joblessness and social unrest. His Democratic challenger, Joe Biden, in his own speech on Monday said the destruction and mounting death toll across California, Oregon and Washington require stronger presidential leadership and labeled Trump a “climate arsonist.”

Trump traveled to Northern California to be briefed by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom and other state and federal officials. At one point, state Natural Resources Agency Secretary Wade Crowfoot urged the president to “recognize the changing climate and what it means to our forests.”

“If we ignore that science and sort of put our head in the sand and think it’s all about vegetation management, we’re not going to succeed together protecting Californians,” Crowfoot added.

Trump responded, “It will start getting cooler, just you watch.”

Crowfoot politely pushed back that he wished the science agreed with the president. Trump countered, “I don’t think science knows, actually.”
That striking moment came on a day of dueling campaign events, with Trump and Biden dramatically contrasting their outlooks on climate change—and the impact it has had on the record-setting fires ravaging the West Coast.

Biden lashed at Trump, saying the moment requires “leadership, not scapegoating” and that “it’s clear we are not safe in Donald Trump’s America.”

“This is another crisis, another crisis he won’t take responsibility for,” Biden said. He said that if voters give “a climate denier” another four years in the White House, “why would we be surprised that we have more of America ablaze?”

Trump, who was briefed during a stop near Sacramento before a campaign visit to Phoenix, had been mostly quiet as the catastrophe on the West Coast has unfolded over the past few weeks. He tweeted appreciation of firefighters and emergency responders on Friday, the first public comments he had made in weeks about the fires that have killed dozens, burned millions of acres and forced thousands from their homes.

The president arrived at at Sacramento McClellan Airport to the powerful scent of smoke from the fires burning some 90 miles away.

He contended anew that Democratic state leaders are to blame for failing to rake leaves and clear dead timber from forest floors. However, many of the blazes have roared through coastal chaparral and grasslands, not forest.

“When you have years of leaves, dried leaves on the ground, it just sets it up,” Trump said. “It’s really a fuel for a fire. So they have to do something about it.”

University of Colorado fire scientist Jennifer Balch called Trump’s deflecting blame on forest managers “infuriating.”

“It’s often hard to know what Trump means,” Balch added. “If by forest management he means clear-cutting, that’s absolutely the wrong solution to this problem. ... There’s no way we’re going to log our way out of this fire problem.”
Biden, who gave his climate speech in Delaware on Monday, released a $2 trillion plan in July to boost investment in clean energy and stop all climate-damaging emissions from U.S. power plants by 2035.

But as the wildfires rage, some climate activists have expressed frustration that Biden has not been more forceful on the issue. He has not embraced, for instance, some of the most progressive elements of the Green New Deal.

To that end, Biden in his address did not wade into political and policy disagreements among Democrats, progressive activists and even some Republicans who acknowledge the climate crisis. As he has before, Biden sought to frame his energy proposals as an immediate necessity and a long-term economic boon focusing more on new jobs and a cleaner economy that would offset any initial costs.

“Donald Trump’s climate denial may not have caused these fires and hurricanes,” Biden said. “But if he gets a second term, these hellish events will continue to become more common and more devastating and more deadly.”

Trump visited McClellan Park, a former U.S. Air Force Base about 10 miles outside Sacramento that is used by firefighters as a staging area for large aircraft used in combating blazes. Most of the largest firefighting aircraft have not been utilized in recent days due to heavy smoke limiting visibility.

Biden’s running mate, California Sen. Kamala Harris, will return to her home state on Tuesday to meet with emergency service personnel to be briefed on the state’s wildfires.

In 2015, Trump stated bluntly: “I’m not a believer in global warming, I’m not a believer in man-made global warming.” After the publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report concluded climate change would hurt the economy, Trump said he read it but didn’t believe it. In September 2019, he falsely slammed the Green New Deal as an effort that would lead to “No more cows. No more planes ... no more people, right?”
Climate scientists say rising heat and worsening droughts in California consistent with climate change have expanded what had been the state’s autumn wildfire season to year-round, sparking bigger, deadlier and more frequent fires.

All five of the state’s largest fires in history have raged in the past three years, including the deadliest fire, a 2018 blaze that killed 85 people when it swept through the town of Paradise on the slopes of the Sierra Nevada. Trump during his Monday visit awarded seven members of the California National Guard the Distinguished Flying Cross for the rescue of dozens of Californians during the 2018 Paradise fires.

An analysis out in August from Stanford climate and wildfire researcher Michael Goss and others found that a nearly 2-degree (1 Celsius) rise in autumn temperatures and 30 percent drop in rainfall has more than doubled the number of autumn days with extreme fire weather over the past 40 years.

All five of the state’s hottest days on record have struck since 2014, overlapping one of the state’s worst droughts on record.

The link “isn’t surprising. It’s born out by the observations. And the future is not looking any better,” Goss said in an interview.

Weissert reported from Wilmington, Del., Knickmeyer from Oklahoma City and Madhani from Chicago. Associated Press writers Bill Barrow in Atlanta and Juliet Williams in San Francisco contributed reporting.
BEAVERCREEK, Ore. (AP) — With crews battling wildfires that have killed at least 35 people, destroyed neighborhoods and enveloped the West Coast in smoke, another fight has emerged: leaders in the Democratic-led states and President Donald Trump have clashed over the role of climate change ahead of his visit Monday to California.

California, Oregon and Washington state have seen historic wildfires that have burned faster and farther than ever before. Numerous studies in recent years have linked bigger wildfires in the U.S. to global warming from the burning of coal, oil and gas.

The Democratic governors say the fires are a consequence of climate change, while the Trump administration has blamed poor forest management for the flames that have raced through the region and made the air in places like Portland, Oregon, Seattle and San Francisco some of the worst in the world.
Trump is headed to McClellan Park, a former air base just outside Sacramento, California, White House spokesman Judd Deere said. California Gov. Gavin Newsom’s office said he would be meeting with Trump.

The governors have been blunt: Washington Gov. Jay Inslee on Sunday called climate change “a blowtorch over our states in the West.”

“It is maddening right now that when we have this cosmic challenge to our communities, with the entire West Coast of the United States on fire, to have a president to deny that these are not just wildfires, these are climate fires,” Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said Sunday on ABC’s “This Week.”

As Newsom toured a ghostlike landscape destroyed by flames Friday, he called out the “ideological BS” of those who deny the danger.

“The debate is over around climate change. Just come to the state of California, observe it with your own eyes,” he said.

He noted that just in the last month, California had its hottest August, with world-record-setting heat in Death Valley. It had 14,000 dry lightning strikes that set off hundreds of fires, some that combined into creating five of the 10 largest fires in the state’s recorded history. And it had back-to-back heat waves.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said about 500,000 acres typically burn each year, but just in the past week, flames have swallowed over a million acres, pointing to long-term drought and recent wild weather swings in the state.

“This is truly the bellwether for climate change on the West Coast,” she said Sunday on CBS’ “Face the Nation.” “And this is a wake-up call for all of us that we have got to do everything in our power to tackle climate change.”

At a rally in Nevada, Trump blamed the way states have run the land, saying “it is about forest management.” White House adviser Peter Navarro echoed that Sunday on CNN’s “State of the Union,” saying that for many years in California, “particularly because of budget cutbacks, there was no inclination to manage our forests.”
Forest management, which includes tree thinning and brush clearing, is costly, labor-intensive work that is effective in reducing fuel for wildfires. Millions of dollars are spent on such reduction efforts every year in Western states though many argue more needs to be done. The efforts can also be undercut when homeowners in rural areas don’t undertake similar efforts on their own properties.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti accused Trump of perpetuating a lie that only forest management can curtail the massive fires seen in recent years. He pointed to drought and the need to reduce carbon emissions.

“Talk to a firefighter, if you think that climate change isn’t real,” the Democratic mayor said on CNN’s “State of the Union.”

It isn’t clear if global warming caused the dry, windy conditions that have fed the fires in the Pacific Northwest, but a warmer world can increase the likelihood of extreme events and contribute to their severity, said Greg Jones, a professor and research climatologist at Linfield University in McMinnville, Oregon.

Warnings of low moisture and strong winds could fan the flames in hard-hit southern Oregon to Northern California and last through Tuesday. Tens of thousands of people have fled their homes as the fast-moving flames turned neighborhoods to nothing but charred rubble and burned-out cars.

At least 10 people have been killed in Oregon. Officials have said more people are missing, and the number of fatalities is likely to rise, though they have not said how high the toll could go as they search. In California, 24 people have died, and one person was killed in Washington state.

Firefighter Steve McAdoo, who has run from one blaze to another in Oregon for six days, said his neighbors in rural areas outside Portland should clear trees near their homes because a week like they just survived could happen again.

“I would think the way the climate is changing, this may not be the last time,” he said.
In the small southern Oregon town of Talent, Dave Monroe came back to his burned home, partly hoping he’d find his three cats.

“We thought we’d get out of this summer with no fires,” he said. “There is something going on, that’s for sure, man. Every summer we’re burning up.”

Cline reported from Salem. Associated Press journalist Manuel Valdes in Talent contributed.

Sara Cline is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

The fires raging out West are unprecedented. They're also a mere preview of what climate change has in store.

By Drew Kann and Brandon Miller, CNN

Updated 1713 GMT (0113 HKT) September 11, 2020

(CNN) Entire towns have been burned to the ground.

Thousands have been forced to flee their homes.
And **apocalyptic scenes played out in San Francisco**, as the city was blanketeted in **smoke so thick it blocked out the sun**.

The scale of the fires burning in the Western US right now are unprecedented.

With their homes in ashes, residents share harrowing tales of survival after massive wildfires kill 15.

More than 3 million acres have burned in California alone, with **three of the five largest fires in state history still burning all at once**, along with huge swaths of Oregon and Washington. Still, much of the West is only now entering what is typically the most active part of the region's fire season.

To scientists, the fingerprints of global warming on these wildfires -- and so many other disasters, from **the fires that scorched Australia** to the hurricanes that have slammed the US -- are clear.
In this aerial view from a drone, a mobile home park destroyed by fire is shown on September 10, 2020 in Phoenix, Oregon. Hundreds of homes in the town have been lost due to wildfire.
And as devastating as they have been, far worse disasters could be on the horizon.
How bad it gets depends on what we as humans do to reduce heat-trapping gas emissions, said Michael Mann, the director of Penn State University's Earth System Science Center.
"By some measure, it's clear that 'dangerous climate change' has already arrived," Mann said in response to emailed questions from CNN. "It's a matter of how bad we're willing to let it get."

How climate change influences wildfires
Though the scale of destruction is hard to fathom, climate scientists say we should not be surprised.
"It's shocking to see the impacts, but not scientifically surprising," Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA and the National Center for Atmospheric Research told CNN on Tuesday. "This is in line with
essentially every prediction for what could happen this year and the trends we're seeing over years and decades."

A burned residence smolders during the Bear fire, part of the North Lightning Complex fires, in unincorporated Butte County, California on September 9, 2020.

Scientists have warned for years that fire seasons like this could come to pass, and that the more we humans heat up the planet, the more we are increasing the odds in favor of the hot, dry conditions conducive to fires. So far, the planet has warmed by a global average of roughly 1.2 degrees Celsius since the 1880s, with human activity responsible for the bulk of that increase.

This warming is clear in long-term temperature graphs for the state of California, such as this one below from the nonprofit environmental monitoring organization Berkeley Earth, which shows that August temperatures in the state have climbed steadily over the last 150 years.

This past August was the warmest on record for the state of California, according to NOAA, and each of the past six years were at
least 1 to 2 degrees Celsius (1.8 to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than the historical average.

In California's smoke-filled horizon, it's become hard to breathe "That couple of degrees of [average] warming over decades ... you don't notice it as much, but it's still there lurking in the background, sucking extra moisture out of the vegetation and the soil," Swain said.

According to the National Climate Assessment, a major "state-of-science" review of climate change and its projected impacts on the US, additional warming of about 1.4 degrees Celsius (2.5 degrees Fahrenheit) can be expected over the next few decades regardless of future emissions.

By the second half of the century, the uncertainty range for the amount of warming grows tremendously, as so much will depend on potential cut backs in carbon emissions in the near future.

The future depends on 'what we choose to do'

Lockdowns and shelter-in-place orders during the Covid-19 pandemic did result in the largest drop in greenhouse gas emissions in recorded human history.
But scientists **expect the reductions will be temporary**, and the policies that brought emissions down -- i.e. forcing people to stay home -- are not sustainable.

Global temperatures could exceed crucial 1.5 Celsius target in the next five years And despite the brief dip in heat-trapping gas emissions, atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations are still the highest they've been in at least 800,000 years. Scientists say the impacts of climate change are growing worse before our very eyes. "If you're in California, or on the Gulf Coast, or in Puerto Rico, Texas, the Carolinas, or Iowa, you've seen the devastating consequences of climate change already," Mann said.

Still, he says there is time left to flatten the curve of global warming impacts, but the longer we wait, the steeper that curve gets. "So much depends on what we choose to do," Mann said. "If we keep planetary warming below 1.5 Celsius, which is still possible given concerted climate action, we can keep climate change impacts within our adaptive capacity. If we don't, we will likely exceed it."
Trump renews climate fight in visit to fire-ravaged West Coast

Analysis by Maeve Reston, CNN

Updated 1911 GMT (0311 HKT) September 14, 2020

(CNN) For weeks, President Donald Trump was largely silent on the wildfires that have charred more than 3.3 million acres in California, triggered Oregon officials to prepare for a potential "mass fatality incident," and created apocalyptic orange skies and clouds raining ash that have drifted across cities throughout the West Coast.

But on Monday, Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden both addressed the fires, from opposite coasts, and in so doing, highlighted the chasm between the two on the issue.

In California, Trump did not acknowledge the climate crisis facing the country and the world and instead continued talking about the need for forest management. When a state official warned of the dangers of ignoring science and putting "our head in the sand and thinking that it's all about forest management," Trump responded by telling the official: "It'll start getting cooler. You just watch."

"I wish science agreed with you," the official told him.
"I don't think science knows, actually," Trump said. Earlier, in Delaware, Biden slammed the President for his repeated climate denial and said the nation couldn't afford a second term of Trump not making serious efforts to address the issue.

"The West is literally on fire and he blames the people whose homes and communities are burning," Biden said. "He says, quote, 'You've gotta clean your floors, you gotta clean your forest.' "

"Donald Trump's climate denial may not have caused these fires and record floods and record hurricanes, but if he gets a second term these hellish events will continue to become more common, more devastating and more deadly," he added.

Trump ignores science at dangerous indoor rally
As the nation shifted its attention to those scenes of devastation last week, Trump tweeted about the fires for the first time in weeks on Friday night, thanking the more than 28,000 firefighters and first responders fighting the blazes. On his Monday visit to McClellan Park, California, he'll meet with local and federal fire and emergency officials in a part of the country that has contended with record-breaking temperatures and soaring levels of air pollution.

Over the Labor Day weekend, the agency that monitors air quality in Southern California recorded the highest level of ozone pollution in nearly
30 years. On Sunday, the Los Angeles Times reported that four cities on the West Coast -- Portland, Oregon; Los Angeles; San Francisco and Seattle -- ranked among the 10 most polluted cities in the world because of the fires.

The confluence of events led California's Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom to declare Friday that the debate over climate change is over: "We are in the midst of a climate emergency. We are in the midst of a climate crisis. We are experiencing weather conditions the likes of which we've never experienced in our lifetime," a visibly agitated Newsom said Friday after surveying burned areas of the North Complex fire. "This is a climate damn emergency. This is real. And it's happening -- this is the perfect storm. It is happening in unprecedented ways year in, year out."

Trump is expected to meet with Newsom Monday at a "wildfire briefing," according to White House spokesperson Judd Deere. But West Coast leaders don't expect an acknowledgement of the climate crisis from the commander-in-chief during his visit to McClellan Park Monday. During an emergency operations briefing in Lake Charles, Louisiana, late last month, Trump shrugged off a question about whether storms like Hurricane Laura were becoming more frequent because of climate change: "Who knows," he said, adding that he'd been told the area's biggest storm was in the 1800s. "There's no way of really understanding that or knowing that."

At his rally in Minden, Nevada, Saturday night, Trump said Americans' "hearts are with all of the communities in the West battling devastating wildfires," but signaled that he will continue to blame "forest management" for the fires.
CNN holds elected officials and candidates accountable by pointing out what's true and what's not. Here's a look at our recent fact checks.

Ignoring the fact that human activity has led to the warming of the planet, creating record droughts and the dry, hot conditions that often serve as catalysts for forest fires, Trump insisted as recently as August that he’d told California officials "to clean your floors; you've got to clean your forests," suggesting that leaves and broken trees were responsible for the fires.

"I spoke to the folks in Oregon, Washington they're really -- they've never had anything like this," Trump said in Nevada Saturday night. "But you know it is about forest management. Please remember the words — very simple — forest management. Please remember. It's about forest management. And other things, but forest management," a claim he repeated Sunday night at his first indoor rally in nearly three months.

Beyond the fact that scientists have rejected the notion that negligent forest management is the central cause of many of the recent fires, it's worth nothing that the federal government manages more than half of California's forestland.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti scoffed at the President's "forest management" explanation for the fires during an interview with CNN's Jake Tapper on "State of the Union" Sunday.

"He's going to come out here and probably tell us, 'I'm going to send you rakes, instead of more help.' We need actual help, material help, not based on our party affiliation or how we voted," Garcetti said. "This is not about just forest management or raking — anybody who lives here in California is insulted by that, quite frankly. And he keeps perpetrating this lie."

Garcetti also suggested the President responds more quickly to natural disasters in red states than in blue states.
"I wish that we would get as much attention, not based on an electoral map, but just purely on being Americans and the need for leadership to be from the White House for all of America," Garcetti said, "whether it’s twin hurricanes on the Gulf Coast or fires here on the West Coast."

The White House has defended the President’s response to the Western wildfires, noting that last month Trump approved an emergency declaration for California and has approved some three dozen fire management grants for other western states, which the White House said provide a 75% federal cost share for the mitigation, management and control of fires.

A White House spokesman said Trump supports a "locally-executed, state-managed, and federally supported emergency response."

White House trade adviser Peter Navarro also rejected Garcetti’s assertion that the speed of the federal response has been affected by whether state residents live in red or blue states: "That's offensive," Navarro told Tapper on Sunday, citing the Trump administration’s aid to blue states during the pandemic as evidence.

"If you look at what President Trump did, for example, for the city and state of New York, it was an incredible transfer of resources up there, ships, PPE. Everything that New York wanted, they got," Navarro said. "So, please, Mr. Garcetti, take care of Los Angeles better than you are doing."

The political fight over the fires is likely to only heat up this week as it permeates the presidential race.

The policy gulf between Biden and Trump on the climate crisis is one of the most striking contrasts of the campaign -- one that surely will come up in the presidential debates that begin later this month. Anger about Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris climate accord, a landmark
agreement to reduce emissions of planet-warming gases, has been a galvanizing force for young progressive voters who oppose the President.

Ballots have already gone out or are on their way to voters in some states, and the contrast between the two candidates in the midst of this climate crisis may be yet another reason some voters cast their ballots early.

This story has been updated with comments from Trump and Biden on Monday.

CNN's Joe Johns contributed to this report.

US West Coast fires: Row over climate change's role as Trump visits
Democratic politicians on the US West Coast have accused President Donald Trump of being in denial about climate change's role in the huge wildfires there, as he visits California.

Blazes in California, Oregon and Washington state have burned almost 2m hectares (5m acres) of land and killed at least 35 people since early August.

Washington's governor called climate change a "blowtorch over our states".

Climate change sceptic Mr Trump blames the crisis on poor forest management.

- A really simple guide to climate change
- Is Trump right about the cause of US wildfires?

The president repeated that argument as he met Californian officials involved in the battle against the wildfires at a stop in McClellan Park near Sacramento, in the centre of the state.

Dismissing one official's plea to not "ignore the science", Mr Trump said: "It'll start getting cooler, you just watch... I don't think science knows actually."

Earlier on Monday, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden accused Mr Trump of being a "climate arsonist" and told an event in Delaware that four more years of his opponent in the White House would see "more of America ablaze".

What's the latest on the ground?

Authorities in California, where 24 people have died since 15 August, report that firefighters are working to contain 29 major wildfires across the state.

They warned that the strong southerly winds and low humidity forecast for Monday could bring an elevated fire risk, and potentially have an impact on the North Complex Fire, which has scorched 106,000 hectares and is only 26% contained.
The US National Weather Service also issued a "red flag warning" for other areas of the West Coast, including Jackson County, Oregon, where the Almeda Fire has destroyed hundreds of homes.

The Oregon Office of Emergency Management said on Sunday that firefighters in the state were struggling to contain more than 30 active wildfires - the largest of which was more than 89km (55 miles) wide.
At least 10 people have been killed in Oregon in the past week. Officials have said dozens of people are missing and warned that the death toll could rise. One person has died in Washington, where there were five large fires on Sunday.

**What are the politicians saying?**

Speaking at a meeting with Mr Trump on Monday, California Governor Gavin Newsom acknowledged that "we have not done justice on our forest management", but he said that more than half of the land in California was under federal, not state control.

But he echoed his own statement from Friday that the fires showed the debate about climate change was "over".

"The hots are getting hotter, the dries are getting drier," he said. "We submit the science is in and observed evidence is self-evident: that climate change is real and that is exacerbating this."

Oregon Governor Kate Brown has said her state is facing "the perfect firestorm". "We saw incredible winds. We saw very cold, hot temperatures. And, of course, we have a landscape that has seen 30 years of drought," she told CBS on Sunday. "This is truly the bellwether for climate change on the West Coast. And this is a wake-up call for all of us that we have got to do everything in our power to tackle climate change."

- In pictures: Oregon fires force thousands to flee
- Smoke from California wildfires turns skies orange
- False claims about Oregon fires spread online
- A really simple guide to climate change

Washington Governor Jay Inslee described the situation as "apocalyptic".
"It is maddening right now that, when we have this cosmic challenge to our communities, with the entire West Coast of the United States on fire, to have a president to deny that these are not just wildfires, these are climate fires," he told ABC.

At an election campaign event in Nevada on Saturday, President Trump said he was praying for everyone throughout the West Coast affected by the wildfires. But he insisted the blazes were "about forest management", which includes tree thinning and brush clearing.

"They never had anything like this," he said. "Please remember the words, very simple, forest management."

Mr Trump has previously called climate change "mythical", "non-existent", or "an expensive hoax" - but has also described it as a "serious subject". He has decided to pull the US out of the Paris climate agreement, which committed the US and 187 other countries to keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2C (3.6F) above pre-industrial levels.

What role is climate change playing? BBC environment correspondent Matt McGrath says that while natural factors such as strong winds have helped the spread of the West Coast fires, the underlying heating of the climate from human activities is making these conflagrations bigger and more explosive.
Nine of the world's 10 warmest years on record have occurred since 2005, and the UN warned this week that the five years from 2016 until this year will very likely be the hottest such period yet recorded. Both Oregon and California have warmed by more than 1°C since 1900.

The sustained warmth has seen six of the 20 largest fires on record in California all occur this year. In Oregon, the spate of fires burned almost twice the amount of average annual losses in a week.

In California, a prolonged drought over the past decade has killed millions of trees, turning them into potent fuel for the fires. Mountain regions that are normally cooler and wetter have dried out more rapidly in the summer, adding to the potential fuel load.

Fires raise fight over climate change before Trump’s visit

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and SARA CLINE

2 hours ago
BEAVERCREEK, Ore. (AP) — With crews battling wildfires that have killed at least 35 people, destroyed neighborhoods and enveloped the West Coast in smoke, another fight has emerged: leaders in the Democratic-led states and President Donald Trump have clashed over the role of climate change ahead of his visit Monday to California.

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The scale of the fires burning in the Western US right now are unprecedented.

With their homes in ashes, residents share harrowing tales of survival after massive wildfires kill 15.

More than 3 million acres have burned in California alone, with **three of the five largest fires in state history still burning all at once**, along with huge swaths of Oregon and Washington. Still, much of the West is only now entering what is typically the most active part of the region’s fire season.

To scientists, the fingerprints of global warming on these wildfires -- and so many other disasters, from **the fires that scorched Australia** to the hurricanes that have slammed the US -- are clear.
In this aerial view from a drone, a mobile home park destroyed by fire is shown on September 10, 2020 in Phoenix, Oregon. Hundreds of homes in the town have been lost due to wildfire.

And as devastating as they have been, far worse disasters could be on the horizon.

How bad it gets depends on what we as humans do to reduce heat-trapping gas emissions, said Michael Mann, the director of Penn State University's Earth System Science Center.

"By some measure, it's clear that 'dangerous climate change' has already arrived," Mann said in response to emailed questions from CNN. "It's a matter of how bad we're willing to let it get."

**How climate change influences wildfires**

Though the scale of destruction is hard to fathom, climate scientists say we should not be surprised.

"It's shocking to see the impacts, but not scientifically surprising," Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA and the National Center for Atmospheric Research told CNN on Tuesday. "This is in line with
essentially every prediction for what could happen this year and the trends we’re seeing over years and decades."

Scientists have warned for years that fire seasons like this could come to pass, and that the more we humans heat up the planet, the more we are increasing the odds in favor of the hot, dry conditions conducive to fires.

So far, the planet has warmed by a global average of roughly 1.2 degrees Celsius since the 1880s, with human activity responsible for the bulk of that increase.

This warming is clear in long-term temperature graphs for the state of California, such as this one below from the nonprofit environmental monitoring organization Berkeley Earth, which shows that August temperatures in the state have climbed steadily over the last 150 years.

This past August was the warmest on record for the state of California, according to NOAA, and each of the past six years were at least 1 to 2 degrees Celsius (1.8 to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than the historical average.

In California’s smoke-filled horizon, it’s become hard to breathe
"That couple of degrees of [average] warming over decades ... you don't notice it as much, but it's still there lurking in the background, sucking extra moisture out of the vegetation and the soil," Swain said.

According to the National Climate Assessment, a major "state-of-science" review of climate change and its projected impacts on the US, additional warming of about 1.4 degrees Celsius (2.5 degrees Fahrenheit) can be expected over the next few decades regardless of future emissions.

By the second half of the century, the uncertainty range for the amount of warming grows tremendously, as so much will depend on potential cut backs in carbon emissions in the near future.

**The future depends on 'what we choose to do'**

Lockdowns and shelter-in-place orders during the Covid-19 pandemic did result in the largest drop in greenhouse gas emissions in recorded human history.

But scientists expect the reductions will be temporary, and the policies that brought emissions down -- i.e. forcing people to stay home -- are not sustainable.
Global temperatures could exceed crucial 1.5 Celsius target in the next five years. And despite the brief dip in heat-trapping gas emissions, atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations are still the highest they've been in at least 800,000 years.

Scientists say the impacts of climate change are growing worse before our very eyes.

"If you're in California, or on the Gulf Coast, or in Puerto Rico, Texas, the Carolinas, or Iowa, you've seen the devastating consequences of climate change already," Mann said.

Still, he says there is time left to flatten the curve of global warming impacts, but the longer we wait, the steeper that curve gets.

"So much depends on what we choose to do," Mann said. "If we keep planetary warming below 1.5 Celsius, which is still possible given concerted climate action, we can keep climate change impacts within our adaptive capacity. If we don't, we will likely exceed it."