

California's Climate Policy Gets Burned

Wildfires in one year erased a decade and a half of greenhouse gas declines.

By [The Editorial Board](#)

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Two decades of greenhouse gas emission reductions in California went up in smoke in 2020—literally. So finds a new study on Golden State wildfire emissions that highlights the folly of Sacramento's climate priorities.

University of California researchers calculated that wildfire emissions in 2020 alone were two times higher than the state's greenhouse gas reductions from 2003 to 2019. That's in a single year. Incredibly, wildfires in 2020 were the state's second largest source of CO₂ emissions after transportation and generated double the greenhouse gases of all the state's power plants.

While vegetation will regrow and suck carbon out of the air, the study says "this is unlikely to occur on the time scale necessary to meet near and medium-term emission targets needed to avert passing the 1.5 degree C threshold" by 2050. So thanks to California, the world is doomed. Or so liberals say if the 1.5 degree warming threshold that is supposed to signal climate Armageddon is exceeded.

The study says higher temperatures and drier conditions have exacerbated wildfires in recent years. Maybe, but as the study also notes, much of the blame goes to "decades of fire suppression and underinvestment in preventive measures such as mechanical clearing or prescribed burns."

"Wildfire emissions have not received nearly the same level of societal investment or attention as emissions from other sectors," the authors note. The state focuses on a futile effort to stop temperatures from rising instead of doing what is achievable and mitigating the impact from whatever warming does occur.

California has spent tens of billions of dollars on electric vehicles, renewable power, biofuels and even methane digesters for dairy farms. But only after several horrific wildfire seasons that caused tens of billions of dollars in economic damage—not to mention smoky skies that harm public health—did Democrats substantially boost spending on wildfire prevention.

While utilities rushed to meet state renewable energy mandates—one reason California's electric rates are double those in neighboring states—tree-trimming and burying power lines were a low priority. Some of the state's most destructive wildfires were caused by utility power lines and equipment.

Democrats in Sacramento seem incapable of political self-reflection. But it's deeply ironic that their monomaniacal focus on cutting greenhouse gases emissions has resulted in more greenhouse gas emissions.



A firefighter monitors a backfire, flames lit by fire crews to burn off vegetation, while battling the Mosquito Fire in the Volcanoville community of El Dorado County, Calif., Sept. 9. PHOTO: NOAH BERGER/ASSOCIATED