

Los Angeles is burning, as warnings for years were ignored.

Environmentalism insanity and financialization of the economy has driven California into catastrophe.

By Patrick Ruckert

January 24, 2025

The spectacular inferno now engulfing Los Angeles is a disaster that many for years have warned would occur. The blame, lies not so much with the current incompetent leadership of the state of California and the mayor of Los Angeles, but of decades of environmentalism insanity and the transformation of the nation's economy from an industrial and productive powerhouse into a gambling casino of the financialization of virtually every sector of the economy.

The warning of what will occur one day was apparent in 2018 as a fire that burned out of control for days destroyed large areas of Malibu, next door to Pacific Palisades, the center of the largest of the fires presently burning, and is also on fire once again.

State and local authorities knew, or should have known, that it would be just a matter of time before something even bigger would erupt and devastate even much larger areas. Yet, business as usual continued. Now, in 2025, they got it.

The big lie is that the inferno was caused by climate change, and that such “natural disasters” are inevitable, and we just have to learn to live with them. What is not natural is not preparing for such phenomenon as hurricanes, floods and fires, and even worse, dismantling the capabilities required to do so, as we have seen in California.

With the fires now covering over 50,000 acres of some of the most expensive real estate in the country, destroying more than 16,000 homes, so far, and at least 24 people dead, estimates of the financial damage forecast that it will be over \$200 billion. And more fires are erupting daily, including in San Diego, now.

Over the last two weeks between 50,000 and 100,000 people have been or are under evacuation orders as containment of the two bigger of the five fires now burning has still not been complete.



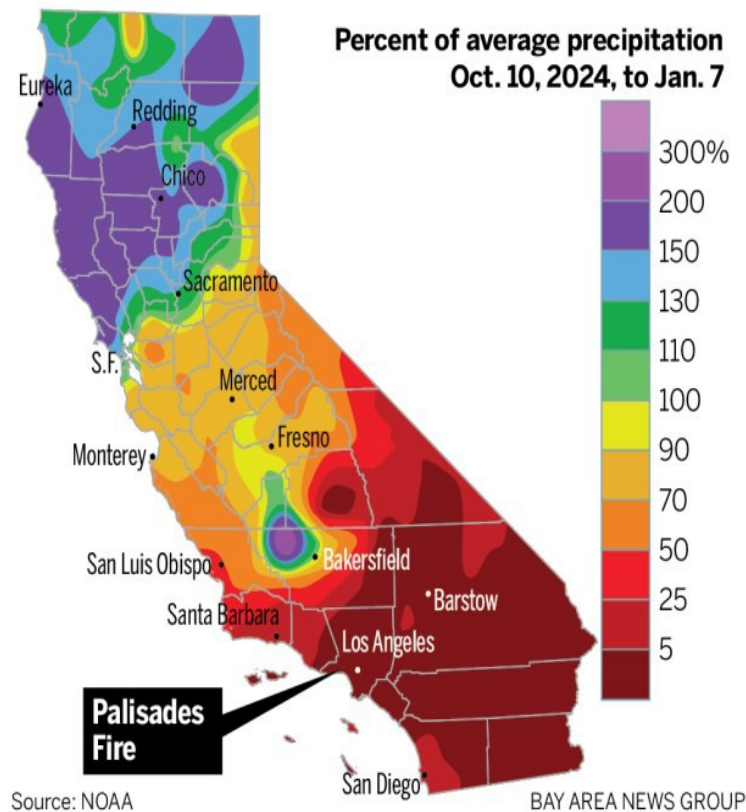
Pacific Palisades fire as seen from a flight leaving LAX two weeks ago.

Driving the fires are a combination of two deadly weather phenomenon. First is nearly a full year of almost no precipitation in southern California. (the city of Los Angeles has received less than two tenths of an inch of rain in the past seven months). The result is that the chaparral ecosystem, that dominates the plant growth in the hills of Los Angeles, has dried out to the extent that just a spark will unleash an unstoppable fire.

The other element is the annual Santa Ana winds, that have been part of the region for thousands of years, which have been clocked at up to 100 miles per hour over the last weeks. These hurricane-force winds further dry out the brush that await only that spark. These winds come from the deserts east of southern California, and as they come over the Sierra Madre mountains they pick up speed, and are an annual danger for the entire region.

RAINFALL DISCREPANCY FUELS THE FIRES

The difference in rainfall between Northern and Southern California over the past 90 days has been dramatic.



Los Angeles Wildfire Disaster: A Failure of Leadership

The video below begins to address the failure of leadership that made a long expected disaster a reality.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztOuCAut6pI>

While many commentators are putting the responsibility for what could have been avoided on the mayor of Los Angeles, Karen Bass, and Governor Gavin Newsom, most of them miss the forest for the trees, which we address below. Their incompetence, including the mayor cutting the LA fire budget by \$17.16 million late last year, and Newsom's cutting of the state's fire budget by \$100 million, should surprise no one. Further, even though the mayor knew of the forecast of strong Santa Ana winds as early as days before the fires began, she left the country for a ceremony 7,000 miles from L.A. in Ghana.

The truth is that fires, begun by a spark, finding tinder-dry fuel, and driven by up to 100 mile an hour winds, if not contained within minutes, quickly becomes unstoppable.

Let me give an example from my personal experience. For two summers in 1962 and 1963, I was a member of a forest fire fighting crew in central Oregon's Deschutes National Forest. One day our team was called to a fire burning south of Bend. The area of the fire was a mixture of trees and brush, as was all the land in this arid climate area. When we arrived at the fire we were assigned to go up an incline to the front of the fire, and as we began the several hundred yard walk, and were within a few hundred feet of the fire, the fire came over the top of the hill. The flames were at least 20 feet high and the fire was throwing off sparks, which propelled by the wind, went over our heads. These sparks immediately started new fires behind us. A caterpillar had bulldozed a 30 or 40 foot break at the top of the hill, but the fire was unstoppable at that point. Our crew chief, seeing the new fires starting behind us, ordered us to immediately run back down the hill before the new fires behind us created an unsurvivable trap. We did so, and were then assigned to another part of the fire, away from its front.

The winds driving that fire could not have been more than 20 miles per hour. Not the up to 100 mile per hour winds that drove the Pacific Palisades and Altadena fires two weeks ago. Hurricane-force winds drive fires, like those in Los Angeles, forward, faster than a man can run.

When the conditions are as extreme as seen in the current fires, I wish to underline once again, they are unstoppable, and will not be stopped, as we have seen now for two weeks. While the now three major fires burning in Los Angeles County have been mostly contained they are still not under full control, now, two weeks after they began.

Much has been made about the lack of water pressure from the hydrants, especially in the Pacific Palisades fire, and the one empty water storage reservoir there. As both fire fighters and others have argued, that all the water storage reservoirs in the area were emptied within hours of the start of the fires and it was impossible to refill them faster than the water was being used. And had even the empty reservoir been full, it would have been emptied within a few hours.

At least a couple of articles have made the crucial point that urban water systems are not designed for being able to control large fires. And that truth is where we shall find the reason the hydrants went dry and the reservoirs could not be refilled.

Urban water systems are built to provide water to residents and businesses, and to be able to handle single house fires, maybe even several burning simultaneously. They are not designed for catastrophic fires, and especially not multiple large aggressive fires as seen these last two weeks in Los Angeles.

That leads us to the fundamental problem in California. President Trump has blamed Governor Gavin Newsom for the lack of water to fight the fires. The president does have a point about the state not sending water south from the San Francisco Bay Delta, because of what I will call a pathetic attempt to

save the Delta Smelt by sending too much water out to the ocean instead of sending it south to the farms of the Central Valley and to southern California.

While the Delta Smelt, a protected species under the federal and state laws protecting endangered species, ironically, not one Delta Smelt has been captured by Fish and Wildlife in their twice yearly trolling for them attempts in five years. Salmon, on the other hand, are not so endangered by tapping into the rivers flowing into the Delta (the Sacramento River, the San Joaquin River, and two smaller ones), as they are endangered by the Bass, which prey on the young salmon as they go down the river on their way to the Pacific Ocean, and the pollution pumped into the rivers by cities along them.

But the problem is even deeper and more characteristic of the last 50 years of extreme environmentalism and the financialization of our entire economic system.

It is important to understand some history of California's water management system to grasp that previous sentence. California has the largest and most complex water management system in the world. Major projects, like the Central Valley Project, built by President Roosevelt in the 1930s and the California State Water Project, built by Governor Pat Brown in partnership with President John Kennedy in the 1960s created, the first time ever, a completely integrated water management system that encompassed all the rivers of the state. The State Water Project was completed in 1972. The population of the state then was 20 million people. Not a single large water project has been built in the more than 50 years since then, and the state now has 40 million people.

So, in addition to the lack of adequate infrastructure in the cities to deal with large fires, the state now has what is almost a permanent water crisis, as especially seen during droughts. In the 2011-2016 drought about 500,000 acres of the most productive agricultural region in the world, the Central Valley, was fallowed.

As I have mentioned a couple of times, the parallel irresponsible financialization of the economy, has also driven the large number of destructive fires in recent years. The best example of that is the private utility based in northern California, Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E).

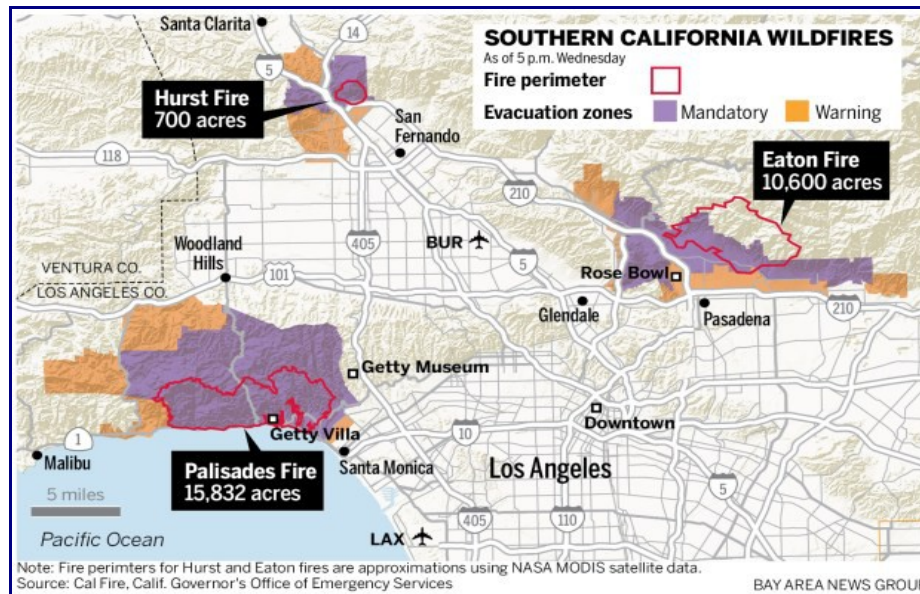
For decades that utility had neglected to inspect, repair and maintain its equipment, including the thousands of miles of overhead wires and their connecting hooks and other parts. They let the branches of trees grow too close to the wires and periodically they and entire trees would fall on the lines, sparking fires. In 2018 such an incident occur near the city of Paradise in the northern and heavily forested part of the state. A devastating fire erupted, covering hundreds of thousands of acres and swept through the town of Paradise, with its 25,000 person population. 95 people were killed in the fire. In the trial of PG&E for its responsibility for the fire and the deaths, the company was found guilty, and the billions of dollars imposed bankrupted the company for the second time in this century. The first time was in 2001 when Enron "gamed" the deregulated electric power system of the state. Another element of the deregulation and financialization of the economy.

As the trial demonstrated, PG&E, instead of investing in the safety of its equipment and lines, focused on paying share holders large dividends each year.

The Fires

The cities that are burning include, in addition to Los Angeles proper, Pacific Palisades, Malibu, Altadena, Pasadena, Granada Hills, North San Francisco Valley, Porter Ranch, Lake Balboa, Sepulveda

Base, and others. And in the last few days several more fires have erupted, including one that is already more than 10,000 acres.



Deja Vu all over again

Scott Stephens, “a veteran professor of fire science at UC Berkeley, the Berkeley professor, said the Palisades Fire reminded him of one of Northern California’s worst wildfires, the 1991 Oakland Hills Fire. That fire, which started in late October, also came during extremely dry conditions — in the fourth year of a brutal drought — and was driven by 50 mph winds blowing from the land toward the ocean.

“It killed 25 people, making it the third deadliest fire in California’s recorded history,”

https://www.mercurynews.com/2025/01/08/los-angeles-fires-catastrophic-weather-conditions-drive-firestorms-across-southern-california/?utm_email=452034416564659205A55473A5&lctg=452034416564659205A55473A5&active=no&utm_source=listrak&utm_medium=email&utm_term=https%3a%2f%2fwww.mercurynews.com%2f2025%2f01%2f08%2flos-angeles-fires-catastrophic-weather-conditions-drive-firestorms-across-southern-california%2f&utm_campaign=bang-mult-nl-pm-report-nl&utm_content=curated

That should make the citizens of Oakland rise up in arms as the city has closed two fire stations as of a few days ago in order to attempt to balance the city's budget. A demand to not put the residents of the city at risk to a repeat of that 1991 disaster is a major point of the campaign of Mindy Pechenuk, a leader of *Promethean Action* and *Promethean PAC*, for mayor of Oakland now, as the now ex-Mayor was recalled in November.

The Green Agenda and “Wokeness”

While former President Biden had consulted with Governor Gavin Newsom, and offered full federal support, it is both the former president and the governor's commitment to the global warming hoax and related “woke” policies that have helped set the stage for the disaster that engulfs southern California today.

Thus far, more than 1,400 fire fighters are on the fire lines, in addition to more than 700 California

National Guard troops have been mobilized to join the other fire fighters. The California Guard has a large number of well-trained and experienced fire fighters.

In addition, ten Navy helicopters with water delivery buckets are now deployed.

The Environmentalist Opposition to Building Water Infrastructure

The environmentalist opposition to building water infrastructure over the past few decades, in order to protect Salmon and an already extinct Delta Smelt, has been a key factor preventing the construction of any significant water infrastructure since 1972. More than fifty years!

We cannot say that that opposition has any direct bearing on the present disaster. But over recent decades, the virtual shut down of logging, along with the state's major private utilities not clearing power lines of trees that fall on those lines and create fires, and the shift over the decades to the financialization of the economy, ensuring that those power companies put share-holder interest above their responsibility to protect the forests and people.

For example, the Camp fire in 2018, which burned about one million acres of forest also killed 95 people in the town of Paradise. That was caused by faulty equipment sparking the fire. Pacific Gas & Electric, the major power provider in northern California was found guilty and fined billions of dollars, bankrupting the company for the second time since the year 2000. The first time was a result of the deregulation of electricity in 1996, and companies like Enron then manipulated the power market driving electricity prices thousands of percent higher than they have ever been.

President Trump Unleashes against Newsom

“President-elect Donald Trump blamed California’s Gavin Newsom for the ‘apocalyptic’ [wildfires ravaging the Pacific Palisades](#) in Los Angeles — claiming he chose to save an extinct tiny fish species, instead of sending more water to southern California.

“Trump raged that the Democratic governor blocked an order that would have diverted more water from the much wetter north to the state’s parched regions “including the areas that are currently burning in a virtually apocalyptic way.” (<https://nypost.com/2025/01/08/us-news/trump-says-gov-gavin-newsom-chose-to-save-an-endangered-fish-instead-of-sending-water-to-southern-california-to-fight-apocalyptic-wildfires/>)

While Trump is correct that Newsom's policies have resulted in less water being sent to southern California in recent years, I do not find that that is directly connected to the present disaster.

More to the point, I think is this statement by Trump:

“As of this moment, Gavin Newsom and his Los Angeles crew have contained exactly ZERO percent of the fire. It is burning at levels that even surpass last night. This is not Government. I can’t wait till January 20th!”

Trump also warned Biden on X in 2019:

"The Governor of California, @GavinNewsom, has done a terrible job of forest management. I told him from the first day we met that he must ‘clean’ his forest floors regardless of what his bosses, the environmentalists, DEMAND of him. Must also do burns and cut fire stoppers."

While Newsom's policies since 2019, when he became governor, has seen a doubling of the fire fighting and prevention budget, and doubling the manpower employed by Cal Fire, it is the broader “global warming” focus of the state government that put tens of billions of dollars into “climate

mitigation” policies that continue decades of not building the water management and fire prevention actions required.

Good leadership does not ignore what is required to ensure the safety and well-being of the population, and forests and cities that that population lives in. And in California, all levels of government have failed that requirement.

California Fire Fighting Capabilities

Because California and the other southwestern states every year face wildfires like no other region in the country, the state does possess a formidable army of fire fighters. Tens of thousands of personnel and thousands pieces of equipment, make the state probably the largest and most capable fire fighting operation in the world.

Though fire fighters for the federal government, in California and the rest of the nation, are paid a measly \$15 per hour for such dangerous and exhausting work in the nation's National Forests, these men and women every year are on the job and are both skilled and dedicated.

The equipment they employ include hand tools, bulldozers, pumper trucks for water, airplanes that bomb fires with retardant, and an infrastructure like that of an army in combat.

Local Irresponsibility

The mayor of Los Angeles, Karen Bass, just happens to be more than 7,000 miles away from the city attending the inauguration of the new President of Ghana, but she did send a message of encouragement to the firefighters.

Of course that is the least of her of irresponsibility.

She recently oversaw the cutting of the city fire department budget by \$17.16 million a few months ago.

“LA Mayor Karen Bass cut fire department funding by \$17.6M — months before wildfires turned city into hellscape

By [Emily Crane](#)

Published Jan. 8, 2025, 10:22 am. ET

<https://nypost.com/2025/01/08/us-news/la-mayor-karen-bass-cut-fire-department-funding-by-17-6m/>

The Los Angeles Fire Department had its budget cut by a staggering \$17.6 million this financial year, records show — as [fire crews continue to battle out-of-control blazes](#) ravaging the City of Angels.

The drastic decrease in funding for the fire department was the second-largest cut to come out of [embattled Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass](#) ‘2024-25 fiscal year budget, according to city figures.’”

And we have this: All the fire hydrants ran dry in Pacific Palisades at 3:00am this morning.

In the Pacific Palisades fire, the first and the largest of the swarm of fires, all of the fire hydrants ran dry.

“The hydrants are down,” said one firefighter in internal radio communications.

Janisse Quiñones, chief executive and chief engineer of the Los Angeles Department of Water and

Power, the city's utility, said:

"We had a tremendous demand on our system in the Palisades. We pushed the system to the extreme," Quiñones said Wednesday morning. "Four times the normal demand was seen for 15 hours straight, which lowered our water pressure."

L.A. City Council member Traci Park, who represents Pacific Palisades, said:

"The chronic under-investment in the city of Los Angeles in our public infrastructure and our public safety partners was evident and on full display over the last 24 hours." She added, "I am extremely concerned about this. I'm already working with my team to take a closer look at this, and I think we've got more questions than answers at this point."

Water officials said that before the fire, all 114 tanks that supply the city water infrastructure were completely filled. They said that the hydrants in the Palisades rely on three large water tanks with all of them running dry at 3 am. Wednesday, the morning after the fire started.

"Those tanks help with the pressure on the fire hydrants in the hills in the Palisades, and because we were pushing so much water in our trunk line, and so much water was being used. ... we were not able to fill the tanks fast enough. So the consumption of water was faster than we can provide water in a trunk line."

Finally, the fire victims will get another kick in the teeth:

As of now, more than 6,000 structures have burned in Los Angeles' Pacific Palisades neighborhood since the fire began.

"The news gets worse — many of them recently lost the most important thing that families rely on when disaster strikes: insurance."

"When national insurance company State Farm announced it would drop coverage for tens of thousands of Californians last year, the Pacific Palisades community suffered more policy non-renewals than anywhere in the state, according to a [San Francisco Chronicle investigation](#) that relied on California Department of Insurance data. The national insurer planned to scrap 1,626 of 2,342 policies in that zip code, or 69.4 percent."

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