

Experts: 'Dice was really loaded' for wildfires



Entire neighborhoods in Santa Rosa have been reduced to ash. Photo/CHP

Publisher's note: *The smoke blowing into the Lake Tahoe Basin and Truckee on Oct. 11 is from the Wine Country fires.*

By Stuart Leavenworth, Sacramento Bee

A cascade of extreme weather events fed Northern California's wildfires that exploded Sunday: Unusually high winds blew flames through unusually dense and dry vegetation, which sprang up following last winter's heavy rains and then were toasted by months of record hot temperatures.

"The dice was really loaded because of the big wet winter," said Park Williams, a California native and a research scientist at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University. "That set up the West with a lot of fuel to burn, and this summer has been exceptional in terms of dryness."

Scientists such as Williams say California is especially prone to wildfires, in part because of the state's dense population, which makes it easy for sparks to be ignited and turn into raging fire storms. But this week's blazes also show the fingerprints of climate change, he said, a harbinger of what the West should expect in the years to come.

Read the whole story