

# Dry winter creating wicked fire season

By Max Ehrenfreund, Sacramento Bee

A dry winter has turned into a busy summer for firefighters in California's wildlands, and the largest and most intense fires of the year may be yet to come.

According to data provided by the U.S. Forest Service, wildfires had already burned 276,252 acres across the state as of last week, excluding the large Rush fire on the Nevada border.

That fire, which started Aug. 12, had burned 270,684 acres of grass, sagebrush and juniper by Sunday evening.

Last weekend, the Ponderosa fire burning outside Shingletown east of Redding destroyed seven houses. The fire has charred 15,000 acres since it started Saturday morning.

This summer follows several wetter, cooler years with fewer fires. By the middle of August last year, fires had burned only 73,868 acres statewide.

Last week, 8,000 firefighters were battling wildfires in California, including the 47,000-acre Chips fire in Plumas County, the 28,000-acre Reading fire in Lassen Volcanic National Park and the Rush fire east of Susanville.

A similar number of firefighters were on the job this week, too.

"Though we've already seen an increase in fire activity, the busier parts of the year are still ahead of us," said California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokesman Daniel Berlant.

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