

Dry conditions create winter fire threat

By Joseph Serna, Los Angeles Times

California is bracing for what officials fear could be an unprecedented winter fire season fueled by record dry conditions that show no signs of letting up.

January is typically a time when forest fire camps and air bases are closed and seasonal firefighters go home. But not this year. Calfire has responded to 150 wildfires so far. During the same period last January, there were none, and the historic average is 25.

Across California, vegetation that typically rehydrates with rain between December and April continues to get dryer and more dangerous. The fires so far this winter have been relatively moderate compared with some of the state's largest, but officials worry that the fires will get worse as the fuel gets even dryer. Forecasters say there is little relief in sight. The National Weather Service last week released a forecast for the southwestern United States calling for unseasonably dry and hot conditions.

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