

New normal? Ever more-intense heat, fires, drought, floods

By Stuart Leavenworth, Sacramento Bee

As portrayed in novels, the California of the future is barely habitable. Brutal storms alternate with crushing droughts. Mudslides and wildfires create waves of climate change refugees.

Fiction, right? Perhaps less so after the last week.

The wildfires in Northern California created scenes from a sci-fi horror movie: Obliterated neighborhoods; thousands evacuated or made homeless; fire authorities stunned by fast-moving blazes and tinderbox conditions that, as Gov. Jerry Brown said, “we’ve never seen.”

California is no stranger to extreme weather. Throughout its history, it has endured natural disasters, ranging from floods to heat waves. But many scientists say the wildfires of the last week are not completely natural. Park Williams, a Columbia University research scientist, said the fingerprint of climate change “is definitely there.” Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA, agrees.

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