

# Major wildfire in southern New Jersey consumes over 15,000 acres

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One of the largest wildfires in New Jersey in the last 20 years was still raging Friday in Ocean County, having already burned over 15,000 acres (6070 hectares).

The fire, which has been named the Jones Road Wildfire, was first reported on Tuesday morning, April 22. It prompted authorities to order the evacuation of as many as 5,000 people, forced temporary closure of a 17-mile (27.4-kilometer) stretch of the Garden State Parkway, and impacted air quality from the Pinelands area, in rural southern New Jersey, to New York City and surrounding areas.

On Wednesday, air quality in southern coastal areas of New Jersey was rated at 173. Values of greater than 100 in the air quality index are considered unhealthy.

Electric service, cut to approximately 25,000 homes and businesses as a precautionary measure, was restored around 5 p.m. on Wednesday. More than 1,000 structures remain under threat. No injuries have been reported so far and no homes have been damaged. However, one commercial building and several cars have been destroyed.

As of Friday, the fire was still only 50 percent contained. Low humidity and high winds continue to pose difficulties for firefighters. "These conditions, along with the continued drying of fine fuels, could support the rapid spread of any fires that ignite, which could quickly become difficult to control," according to the National Weather Service.

Among the many dangers raised by the fire concerns the safety of homeless people living in the woods.

News reports on Thursday indicate that a 19-year-old male, Joseph Kling, a local resident, has been charged with responsibility for starting the fire. Allegedly, Kling left a bonfire of wooden pallets unattended, which then spread into the surrounding woods. It is

further alleged that his intent was to trigger a wildfire. Recent, unusually dry conditions in southern New Jersey, fanned by high winds caused the fire to spread rapidly.

Regardless of the proximate cause of the Jones Road Wildfire, the conditions that promote such massive fires have been increasing for decades due to global warming. The frequency and intensity of wildfires have been growing around the world. Major fires have broken out in South Korea, Japan, California, Australia and Canada, to name but a few.

The length of the wildfire season in New Jersey has been increasing over the last 50 years. A study by the nonprofit Climate Central found that the number of fire weather days has risen by 10 in northern New Jersey and four days in the south. Although not expected to reach levels experienced in the west, the wildfire potential in the entire northeastern US, historically a relatively wet area, is likely to increase due to more frequent droughts in coming years as a result of global warming.

AccuWeather forecasts another intense wildfire season in the US, with an estimate of between 7 million and 9 million acres (2,832,800 to 3,642,170 hectares) expected to burn. As witnessed in recent wildfires in the Los Angeles area, urban areas are not immune from this trend. For example, two parks in New York City, Prospect Park in Brooklyn and Inwood Hill Park in Manhattan, recently experienced fires.

Government austerity policies at the federal and state levels, overseen by the Democrats and Republicans, have hampered both immediate responses and long-term harm reduction measures to mitigate the increasing wildfire danger.

In the past, the New Jersey Forest Fire Service typically conducted controlled burns of 25,000 acres

(10,117 hectares) in central New Jersey early in the year, before fire season, in order to reduce the underbrush which feeds wildfires. In 2024, there was a significant reduction when only 15,000 acres (6,070 hectares) were subjected to controlled burns. This year, the decrease was even more dramatic. Only 3,320 acres (1,344 hectares) have so far been treated, when fire season has already started.

In the past, the New Jersey fire season typically ran from March to May, but has lengthened during the past decade, extending from February into the summer. This January was the third-driest since records began to be collected in 1895.

Reductions in fire control efforts at the state level are compounded by the Trump administration's assault on science in general and measures to address climate change in particular. These include cuts to the National Weather Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as well as severe reductions in a whole range of social and environmental programs, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The myriad devastating effects of global warming, due primarily to the massive burning of fossil fuels, are resulting in severe climate disruption. Weather events around the world are getting more extreme, whether floods or drought, hurricanes or tornadoes. This trend will continue to intensify with catastrophic results unless the underlying cause, capitalism, is ended by the working class and a rational international socialist society built.



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