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California's Devastating 2018 Wildfire Season

On the afternoon of July 23, 2018, a travel trailer was being towed through the Whiskeytown–Shasta–Trinity National Recreation Area in northern California when it experienced a blowout. As the RV's exposed steel rim scraped along the pavement, a few sparks found their way into the tinder-dry vegetation skirting the intersection of Highway 299 and Carr Powerhouse Road.

That and a brisk mountain breeze was all it took to ignite the Carr fire, a 37-day conflagration that would force the evacuation of 38,000 residents, consume 230,000 acres and over 1,600 structures, and claim the lives of seven people.

About 150 miles to the south and just four days after the start of the Carr fire, a rancher was hammering a metal stake into the ground in search of a wasp nest. A few errant sparks liberated as metal struck metal was enough. The Mendocino Complex Fire burned twice the acreage of the Carr fire, but thankfully took only one life.

Under 'normal' conditions a flat tire would be nothing more than an inconvenience, and driving a stake into the ground would be an inconsequential non-event in a rancher's busy day. The increasingly hot and dry conditions affecting California, Washington State, and so many other vulnerable areas, however, are challenging our notions of 'normality' and forcing us to face an uncomfortable fact - our climate is changing, and it's our own fault.

