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#### Weekly Article #4

While reading, mark 4 main ideas and 8 supporting details (use different colors or symbols).

## Research study shows humans are responsible for 84 percent of wildfires

By San Diego Union-Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff 03/05/2017

A new study shows that 84 percent of U.S. wildfires have been started by people. The study was conducted by scientists at the University of Colorado, Boulder. In certain parts of the country, the percentage of wildfires started by humans was even higher. In California's Central Valley and along parts of its coast, people caused 97 percent of wildfires.

Over the last 20 years, about 90 million acres in the United States have burned in wildfires.

These fires have vastly expanded the area burned and the extent of the fire season, the researchers say. Sometimes, fires are set intentionally in order to manage ecosystems and keep them healthy, but this is done by experts who carefully determine where to start the fire. These were excluded from the study.

### Mapping California's Wildfires

In California's dry, Mediterranean climate region, 89 percent of the total 5,921,861 acres burned were caused by human-started wildfires. The region extends along the California coast from the Mexican border north to San Francisco. It also goes inland to the Central Valley.

The study pointed out that wildfires started by humans tripled the length of the fire season, the time when wildfires are likely. The human-started wildfires burned far more land than fires started by lightning. Fires started by people were responsible for almost half of the burned area.

One of the biggest wildfires in recent Southern California history, the 2003 Cedar Fire in San Diego County, was started by a lost hunter. He said it was meant as a signal, but it got out of control.

Other large fires in California have been sparked by other human causes. They include broken power lines, people lighting things on fire intentionally, lit cigarettes, fireworks or children playing with fire.

### Researchers Looked At 20 Years Of Federal, State Records

The team used federal and state records from 1992 to 2012. They found that people caused more than 40,000 wildfires a year across the United States. July 4th was the most common day for human-started fires. The most common day for lightning-started fires was July 22nd.

Wildfires play an important natural role in the ecosystem, said Balch, director of the University of Colorado, Boulder's Earth Lab. Suppressing them has unintended bad effects, such as making the fires that eventually occur even more devastating.

"There are good fires and there's bad fires," Balch said. "This study looks at the wildfires that required some sort of suppression or emergency response. But there's a lot of room for us to start the right kinds of fires; the prescribed fires, the controlled burns that many ecosystems, particularly in the Western states, need in order to be healthy ecosystems."

Getting public support for increasing controlled burns is "a tricky problem," Balch said.

"People don't like smoke, and we don't like the risk of a fire burning in our neighborhood," she said. "But we're already living with that risk, because we're putting houses and people in flammable landscapes. "We tried the failed experiment for over 100 years of suppressing fire and trying to get fire out," Balch said. "And we didn't win that war."

### Humans Mostly Responsible For Wildfires Started In Spring

Humans have caused increasing numbers of large wildfires occurring in the spring, the study said. In the summer, increasing numbers of wildfires were largely driven by lightning. A warmer climate in recent years has helped extend the potential range of the fire season in the Western states, Balch said. However, humans literally set the spark.

"People are providing the ignition during this longer fire season, and also contributing to large fires," Balch said. "It's not either people or climate, it's both."

It is unclear what the future holds with regard to climate.

Studies about the future indicate that global warming will continue. By the end of the century, the number of lightning strikes is expected to increase by 50 percent due to global warming, the study stated.

Even if that happens, though, the study said humans would still be the main cause of fires in the United States.

Write a main (central) idea sentence in your own words combining the 4 main ideas you marked on the front:

What are three supporting details?

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- 
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**Author's Craft**

List a quote or statistic that the author uses.

Why did the author use this quote/statistic? How does it help the article?

**Vocabulary:**

Define **suppress** :

Choose another unfamiliar word and define:

**Reflection:**

Ask the author of this article a follow up question.

How will knowing the information from the question help you better understand the article?