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Science | By **Deborah Grace**

Alaska's Wildfires Burn Slow But Still Do a Massive Damage

Right now, there is probably 300 wildfires burning in Alaska. Most of these fires are probably slow to burn and are likely smoldering but still alive, barely. These fires have already succumbed nearly five million acres, which is still only a small amount of the acreage lost to similar fires in Canada.

Alaska's wildfires might be slow to move, but they are definitely headset on damaging as much land as they can consume.

"It's really a different kind of fire," explains Teresa Hollingsworth, who is a researcher and ecology professor with the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Furthermore, Fairbanks research scientist Dave McGuire notes, "In a big fire year, like 2004 or what's happening now, about 0.2 percent of the carbon stored in Alaska is released." McGuire is also a leader of the USGS Alaska Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, and he goes on to say "The carbon released from fire emissions during a large fire year in Alaska is roughly equivalent to 1 percent of the global fossil fuel and land use emissions."



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Now, some scientists simply believe that carbon lost to the atmosphere as permafrost will be made up for within the ecosystem but not everyone agrees, of course.

In addition, University of Guelph (Canada) ecologist Merritt Turetsky tells, “The atmosphere thought it lost that carbon and all of a sudden it’s being returned to the atmosphere after a prolonged period of time. That’s the kind of carbon pulse to the atmosphere that actually can invoke additional climate change, above and beyond human emissions.”

And at the end of the day, all of this really points to 75 billion metric tons of ice lost from glaciers thanks to rising temperatures in the air and in the oceans.

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