

Jul 28, 2015 11:17 PM EDT

Climate Change: Alaskan Wildfires May Be Exacerbating Global Warming

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(Photo : United States Geological Survey) Alaska's wildfire season, which is on pace to be the state's worst fire season ever, could be exacerbating global warming.

Alaska's wildfire season, which is on pace to be the state's worst fire season ever, could be exacerbating global warming, according to [The Washington Post reported](#).

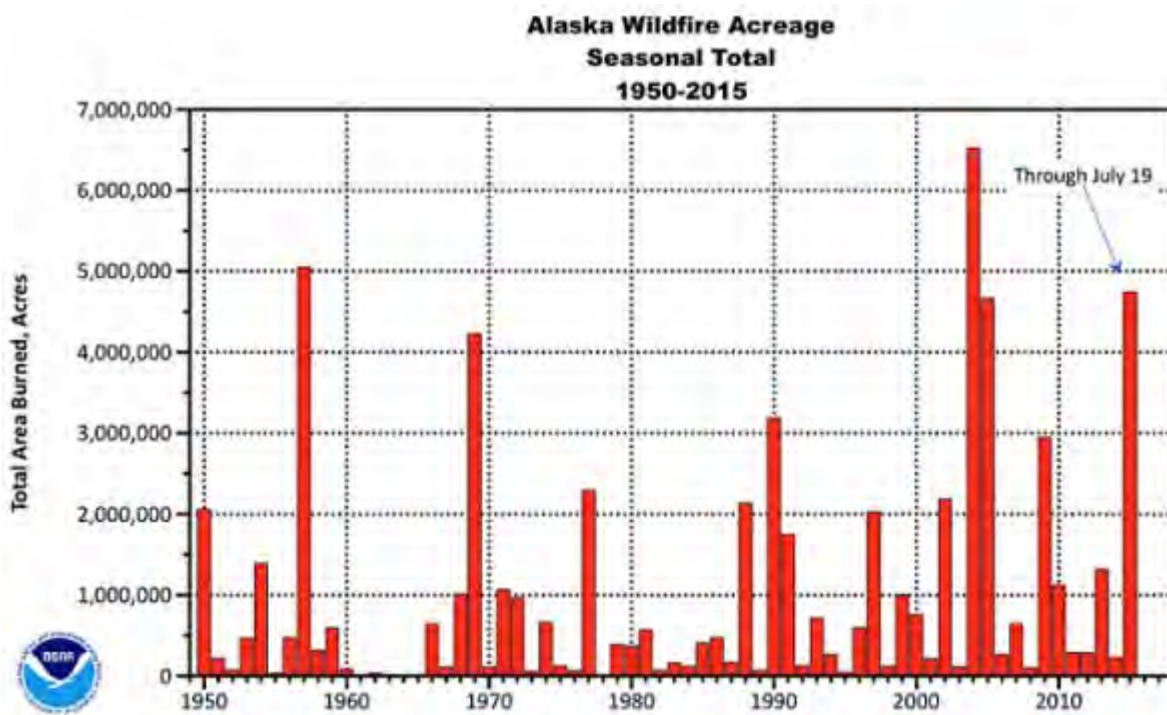
So far this summer, Alaska fires have burned nearly 5 million acres of

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boreal forest and land, more than double the size of Yellowstone National Park, and there are approximately 300 wildfires still burning in the exclave state, [Newsweek reported](#).

The 2004 fire season was Alaska's worst on record with 6.65 million acres burned.

"In a big fire year, like 2004 or what's happening now, about 0.2 percent of the carbon stored in Alaska is released," Dave McGuire, research scientist from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, said in a statement. "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."



(Photo : United States Geological Survey)

There isn't a direct relationship between climate change and fire, but researchers have found strong correlations between warm June temperatures and large fire years. Hot, dry spring conditions, however, do not automatically mean fire something needs to create the spark and actually start the fire. Lightning starts about 35 percent of the fires in Alaska but account for 90 percent of the total area burned.

"Climate models tell us that average June temperatures will continue to increase through this century, but ignition is the wild card," Dr. Scott Rupp, university director of the [Interior Department's Alaska Climate Science Center](#) and a fire ecologist at the [University of Alaska Fairbanks](#), said in a statement. "What will happen in the future is a more complicated story because we don't understand what will happen with convective storms and the lightning."