

Igniting wildfires: humans vs. lightning

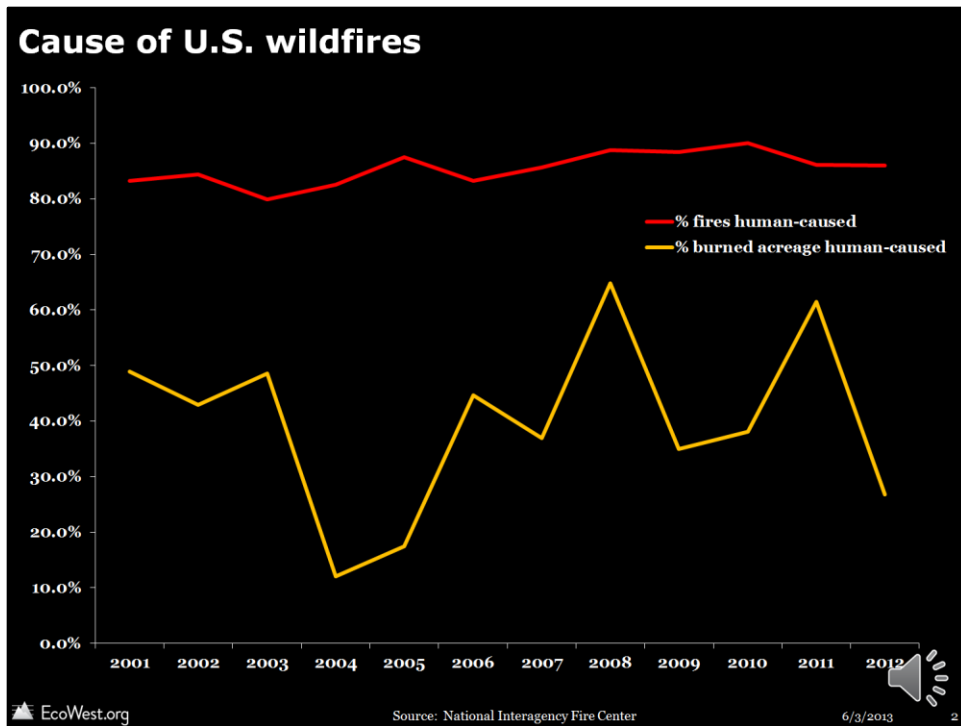


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In this EcoWest presentation, we discuss the ignition sources for wildfires.

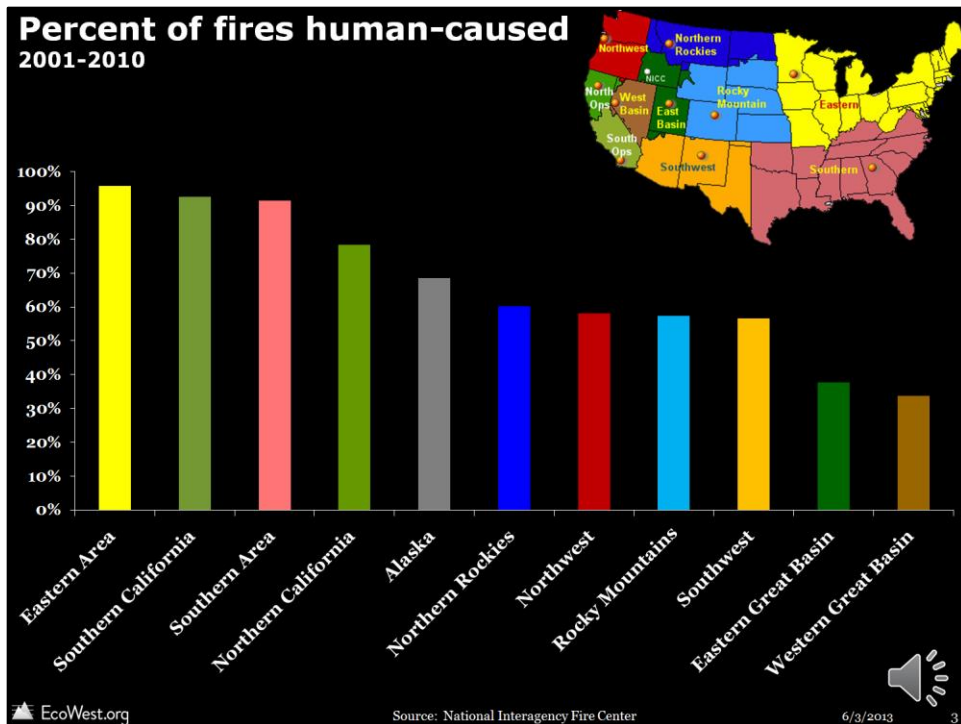


Narrative: What causes wildfires? Basically it boils down to two ignition sources: humans and lightning. Over the past decade, more than 80 percent of all wildfires have been caused by people. But if you look at the acreage burned, humans are usually responsible for less than half. Why the difference? Lightning-sparked fires in remote parts of the West and Alaska may consume large acreage before they are contained, and in some cases these blazes are allowed to burn to reduce fuels. Many human-caused fires start in populated areas and are quickly controlled.

Source: National Interagency Fire Center

URL:

http://www.nifc.gov/fire_info/lightning_human_fires.html



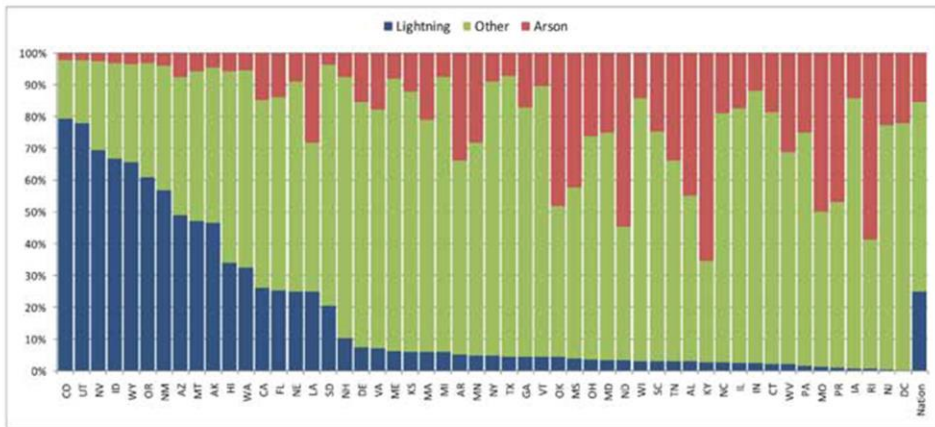
Narrative: Here's the regional breakdown. In the East, California, and the Southeastern U.S., humans are responsible for starting the vast majority of fires, whereas in the Great Basin, it's 40 percent or fewer. This regional breakdown suggests that fire prevention programs will be more effective in some areas than others.

Source: National Interagency Fire Center

URL: http://www.nifc.gov/fire_info/lightning_human_fires.html

Lighting causes most blazes in some Western states

Cause of wildfire ignitions by state (1999-2008)



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Source: National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy

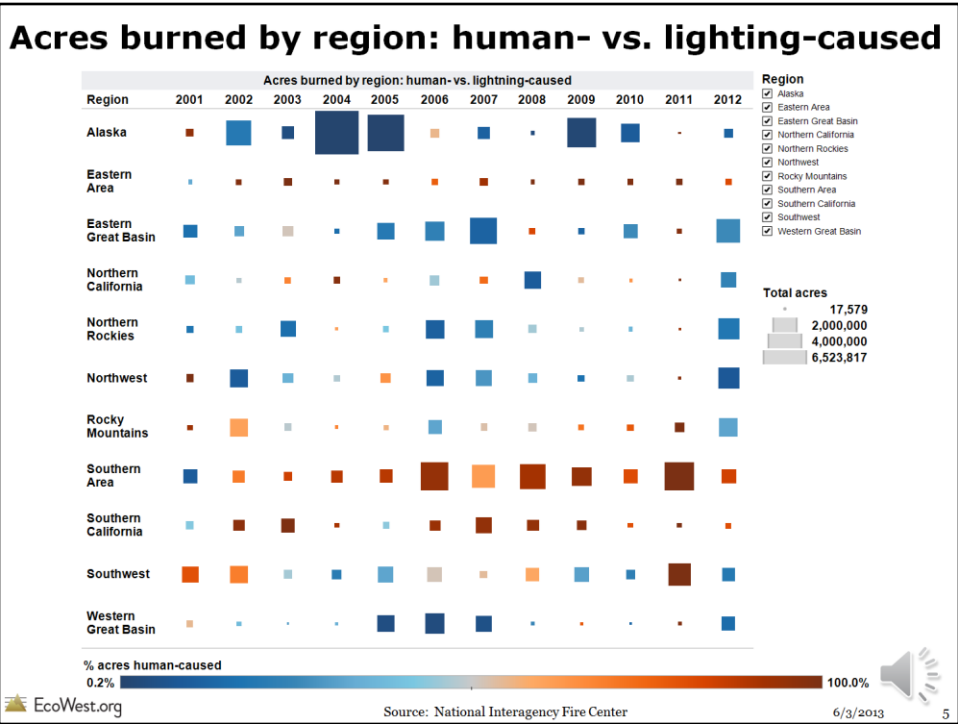
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Narrative: This graphic looks state by state at how fires start. You can see that lighting is primarily a factor in the West and in some inland states, such as Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Nevada, and Idaho, it accounts for more than half of the blazes.

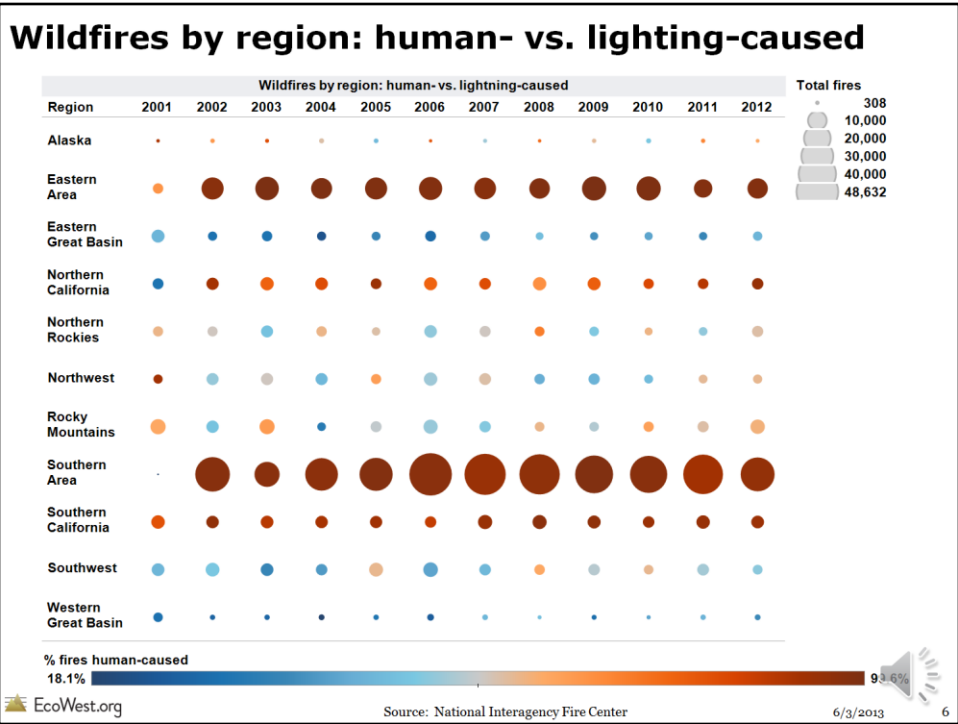
Source: Federal Cohesive Strategy

URL: <http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/strategy/index.shtml>



Narrative: Here's another look at the data, from the dashboard on our website. You can see that Alaska has some very big fires and nearly all the acreage burned in sparked by lightning. Conversely, in the Southern area, human-caused wildfires predominate.

Source: National Interagency Fire Center
 URL: http://www.nifc.gov/fire_info/lightning_human_fires.html



Narrative: This graphic illustrates the number of fires, rather than the acres burned. There are relatively few fires in Alaska, but a large number in the Southern area.

Source: National Interagency Fire Center
 URL: http://www.nifc.gov/fire_info/lightning_human_fires.html

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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



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Anomalies
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