

Natural disasters timeline

A look through the last month of weather

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Over the last couple of months, the U.S. has seen numerous natural disasters that have hit nearly every part of the country. From wildfires in the west, to hurricanes rocking the south, weather is an ever changing phenomenon and it has reminded everyone just how dangerous it can be.

Many people have felt the effects of these events whether they were directly impacted or they knew someone who was.

National news outlets have spent countless hours over the last month inundating the population with the outcomes of these disasters. However, what caused these events to happen and in such rapid succession may not be as shocking as some have made it out to be, according to experts.

“These things are not unexpected, but some have been worse than usual,” said Dr. Thomas Schmidlin, professor in the department of geology at Kent State University.

Perhaps the least talked about natural disasters have been the wildfires that have blazed through California, Utah, Oregon and many other states in the northwestern part of the U.S.

Nearly 2 million acres of land have been on fire at different times over the last month and according to *Business Insider*, the wildfire season is one of the worst in recent memory.

Schmidlin said the large amount of fires are a change from previous years, but not necessarily unusual. “It’s prime time [for wildfires],” Schmidlin said. “They have rainy winters and dry summers out there, so by the end of summer, the landscape is pretty dry. It’s not uncommon by August and September, even into October sometimes to have quite a few western wildfires.”

Despite 2017 being an unusually active year in terms of wildfires, the overall occurrence of wildfires has been on the decline.

“Wildfires have been on a decline for decades and over the last 20 years annual fires have decreased by 15 percent,” Andre Bernier, meteorologist at FOX 8 News, said.

Bernier cites the advancements in technology as a major reason why large fires have been decreasing.

“Firefighting has become an art and firefighting equipment has

improved and so you have fewer fires,” Bernier said. “That doesn’t minimize those people who are being burnt out of their homes but they are fewer than we ever have had.”

While wildfires raged in the west, the southern half of the U.S. was dealing with a problem of their own.

The wrath of hurricane season has hit hard this year and has led to widespread flooding and damage across many cities in the U.S.

Hurricane Harvey ravaged Houston in late August as it made landfall as a Category 4 storm and dropped a record amount of rainfall on Houston and the surrounding areas. Right behind Harvey, was a second record breaking storm. Just two weeks after Harvey made landfall, Hurricane Irma formed in the Atlantic and laid waste to many Caribbean Islands and made its way up the Florida Peninsula.

Both storms wreaked havoc across the southern U.S. and left many people wondering what the correlation was between these two storms.

“[Hurricane season] is cyclical in nature so we may be cycling,” Bernier said. “We may be seeing a cycle where we see more frequent hurricane buildups in the Caribbean and Western Atlantic.”

Beth Mazzocco, adjunct instructor of geology at AU, believes the hurricane activity is due to the time of year.

“This is the peak of hurricane season,” Mazzocco said. “Hurricane season peaks in mid-September, but the overall time of highest activity is from mid-August to the end of October. The reason for that is because that’s when the water is the warmest in the ocean.”

It has been a while since the U.S. has seen a hurricane season as active as the 2017 season.

“Since [hurricane] Katrina, we have not seen a major hurricane hit the U.S. coast, that’s a long, long time, that 12 year period was a very unusual period for us,” Bernier said. “Usually we have one, two, three hurricanes strike the U.S. per year.”

Schmidlin credits the high hurricane activity this season to the current weather conditions.

“The conditions are just really good this year out in the central, tropical Atlantic for the formation of hurricanes so it’s been a high season,” Schmidlin said. “[It’s been] nowhere near a record sea-

son yet, as far as the number of storms and hurricanes it’s not unusual that way, but it is more than usual.”

Bernier credits today’s technology for making a large impact on how people were able to prepare for these deadly storms.

“The death toll is too many, but yet if you had the same two hurricanes 100 years ago it would have been closer to 1,000 or 2,000, people wouldn’t have gotten out of the way because they didn’t know that they were coming,” Bernier said.

While people have prepared well for recent hurricanes, Schmidlin believes there are more to come that people need to watch out for.

“Hurricane season is just barely half over, so we’ve just passed the peak now and hurricane season continues for several more weeks,” Schmidlin said. “I wouldn’t be surprised to see more storms.”

While all of these events were going on nationally and internationally, there was something that hit a little closer to home for Ashland University.

A tornado hit Richland county on Sept. 4 taking many people by surprise as there was no warning of the tornado.

“I remember watching the spin on it,” Bernier said. “No tornado warning was ever issued because it was a very broad rotation, but I remember the night and everyone was saying, we need to keep an eye on this cell because it may produce a tornado and it did.”

Mazzocco said the tornado was on the ground for 20 minutes, damaging mostly cornfields and a few homes as well, but she understands why no warning was issued.

“I looked at it and it looked like it was a tremendous amount of straight line wind potential...but I didn’t really see anything that really concerned me with regard to actual rotations,” Mazzocco said. “In hindsight though, I did see the tornado, but it didn’t present normally. It presented as potentially a hole in the windfield, so I’m thinking that’s probably why there was no warning.”

It has been a very active month in the U.S. for natural disasters, but Bernier said that this is nothing new and it is not going to change any time soon.

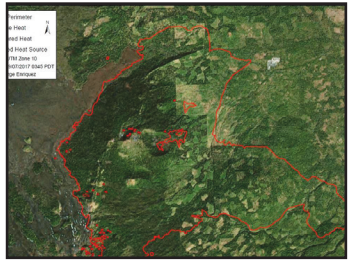
“I do caution you to not take away the pain and suffering that these have caused, they have done that, but you know these things have been happening for millennia,” Bernier said.

August 17

Hurricane Harvey forms in the Atlantic

August 28

Milli fire starts near Sisters, Ore.



INCIWEB.NWCG.GOV

August 30

Hurricane Irma forms in the Atlantic

September 2

La Tuna fire near Burbank, California

September 5-9

Irma strikes Caribbean islands



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

September 7

Magnitude 8.1 earthquake rocks Mexico



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

September 10

Irma makes landfall in the Florida Keys



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

September 19

Remnants of hurricane Jose strike the East Coast

August 25

Harvey makes landfall on the Texas coast



U.S. MARINES

August 29

Ponderosa fire near Oroville, Cal.

August 30

Harvey makes final landfall in Louisiana

September 4

EF-2 tornado touches down in northeast Richland County



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September 5

Hurricane Katia forms in the Gulf of Mexico and Hurricane Jose forms in the Atlantic

September 8

Hurricane Katia hits Eastern Mexico



NASA (ISS)

September 11-13

Irma makes its way up the East Coast

September 18

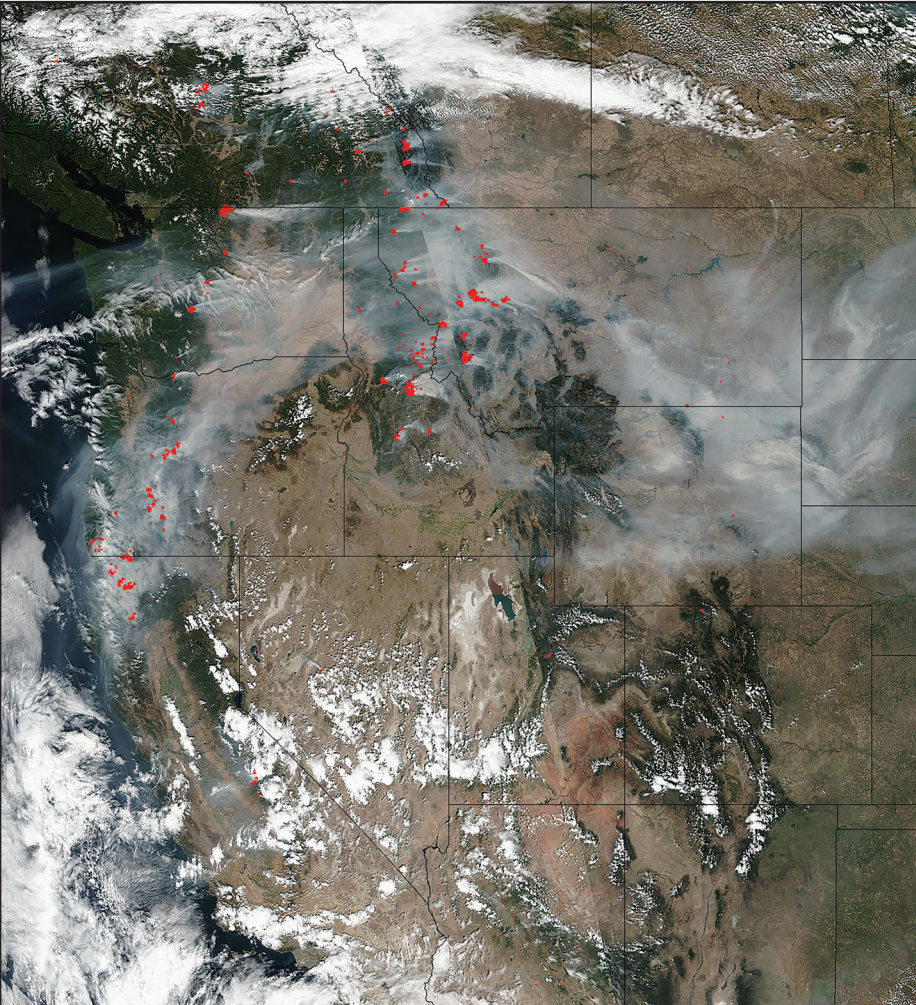
Hurricane Maria intensifies to a category 3 storm. Puerto Rico braces for impact

September 19

7.1 Earthquake rocks Altixco, Mexico

September 19

Hurricane Maria smashes into the Caribbean Island of Dominica



NASA GODDARD

The wildfires that have ravaged the West in the summer of 2017 have left a trail of smoke that can be seen from space.



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A house on Hook Rd. in Crestline was directly hit by the tornado that swept through Richland County on Sept. 4.