

During what should have been an average summer, California and several US states witnessed record high temperatures. These high temperatures sparked blazes, and the year 2020 saw more than 8,000 fires break out across California. Locally, the Riverside Apple Fire burned more than 30,000 acres of land.

These severe wildfires caused Governor Gavin Newsom to declare a state of emergency Aug. 18. The White House reacted to this state of emergency by declaring a presidential major disaster Aug. 22 to help support California's emergency response to the fire.

"Thank you to the president for your partnership and granting this urgent Major Disaster Declaration," Newsom said in a press conference. "California is battling two of the largest fires in our history caused by dry lightning strikes ... These are unprecedented times and conditions, but California is strong, we will get through this."

For some students, the fires were close to home.

Kaia Shrum, sophomore chemistry major, could see and smell smoke from her house in Northern California, where the fires have been severe.

"It is scary and heartbreaking," Shrum says. "It shows how climate change affected the environment and how unstable things are. The fires could destroy a lot of people's lives which is very scary."

Ashley Anderson, sophomore commercial performance major, did not see the fires from her house, but her parents saw the fire and ash on their property in Northern California. Anderson said some restaurants near her house had to close because the air quality was too unhealthy to be open for outdoor dining.

"The fires are tragic and sad," Anderson says. "I hope all of the fires are able to be contained soon."

Miranda Johnson-Phillips, senior environmental science major and president of the environmental science club, explains the causes behind the fires.

“The environment has particular limits just like people. As temperatures have been getting higher and heat waves have been going for longer in the environment, the trees along with the leaves and twigs around the area are dry and can catch on fire more often,” she says.

Johnson-Phillips explains the steps CBU students can take to combat these fires and help California recover by taking small steps.

“We can start by having everyday items that are sustainable such as reusable bags, water bottles, etc. Also, decreasing our use of single-use items can go a long way in decreasing our overall ecological footprint.”

She also recommends using water and electricity wisely in our dining areas, living rooms, and classrooms.

“I think that students can be empowered by actually tracking their decrease in use of water and electricity. They can track this through their water/ electricity use on their monthly statements as well through ecological trackers that calculate the amount of energy and water or plastics that are saved for different monthly/ annual usage. Having tangible results in students’ lives will encourage them to stay consistent.”

As climate change occurs and temperatures continue to rise, CBU students have a duty to be careful of their global impact and do what they can to maintain a healthy environment.