

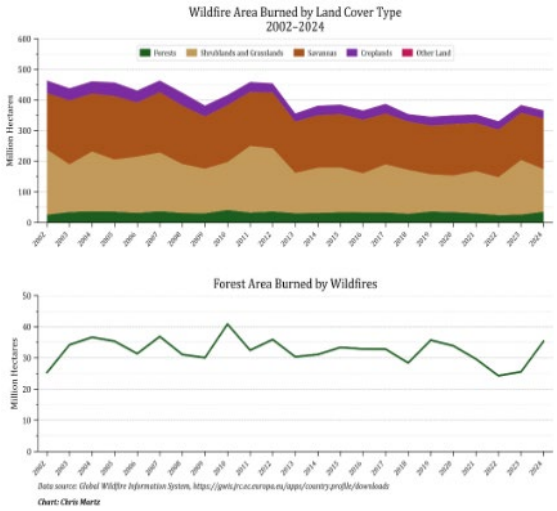
# CLIMATE FACT CHECK: OCTOBER 2026 EDITION

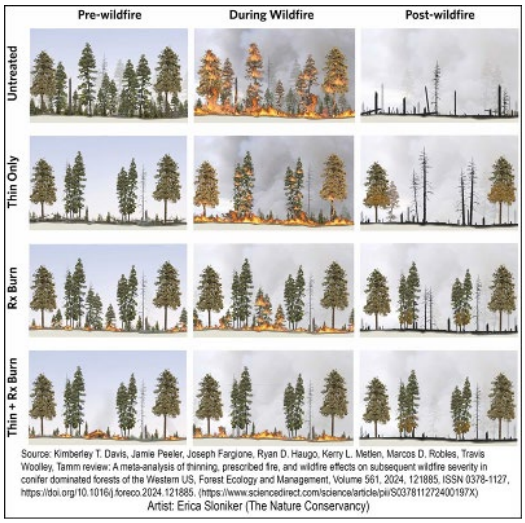
Scientific debunking of claims that 'climate change' is fueling wildfires, floods, hurricanes, hailstorms, droughts & a coral reef collapse

## October 5th: Incorrect, *CNN*, climate change is not fueling wildfires that are contributing to forest destruction

**Claim:** *CNN's* Taylor Romine reported that forests historically adapted to wildfires are now struggling to regrow after fires because man-made climate change is producing faster-moving, higher-temperature fires that obliterate them.

**Fact-Check:** This is false. Globally, annual wildfire burn area measured by NASA satellites has decreased at roughly 1.2–1.4% per year since 2002, with a cumulative drop of ~24%. These trends are largely driven by reductions in savanna, grassland, and cropland burning, however forest-specific burn area has been essentially flat to slightly declining over the same period. In western North America, burn area has risen modestly since the 1980s, but this is mainly an artifact of decades of fire exclusion and the buildup of highly flammable small-diameter fuels and brush on the forest floor. Pre-20th-century burn rates were substantially higher; estimates for modern-day California put the average annual burned area at 4.5–12 million acres before widespread suppression. Even the large 2020 season (~4.2 million acres) fell short of the lower end of that historical range.

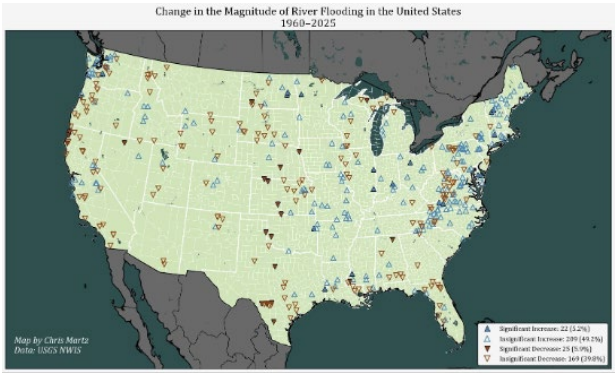


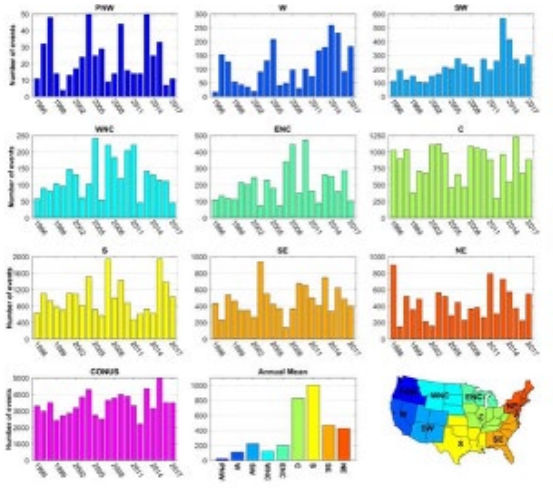




## October 6th: The UN is wrong: floods are *not* becoming more frequent or intense

**Claim:** The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recently took to X to post that "Floods are becoming more frequent [globally], more intense and are impacting more lives." They further emphasized this, claiming that "The signal is clear."

**Fact-Check:** This is false. Globally, floods have not become more frequent or intense since the 1960s. There are two main types of floods: fluvial (river) and flash (pluvial). Trends in river floods (often caused by prolonged rain events or snowmelt) are evaluated by looking at flow changes (mass flux of water, measured in volume per unit time). The latest United Nations IPCC report states plainly that "Peak flow trends are characterized by high regional variability and lack overall statistical significance... Of more than 3,500 streamflow stations in the USA, central and Northern Europe, Africa, Brazil, and Australia, 7.1% [of] stations showed a significant increase, and 11.9%... showed a significant decrease in annual maximum peak flow during 1961–2005." Recent data from USGS river and stream gauges are affirmative. In the U.S., only 5.2% of gauges show a statistically significant increase since 1960, just 5.9% show a significant decrease, and the rest are near zero. Published research also shows that flash floods (primarily from thunderstorms) have not increased in the U.S. since at least the 1990s.



Timeseries of the number of flash flood events in each year during 1996-2017 for each CONUS region.

## October 9th: No *NPR*, climate change is not making hurricanes more intense

**Claim:** *NPR's* Lauren Sommer reported that Hurricane Isaias (the first Atlantic hurricane of 2026, forming record late), which made landfall on October 10th on the Gulf Coast near Destin, Florida, was fueled by anthropogenic climate change. She writes, "Even as El Niño limited this year's Atlantic storms, climate change is making hurricanes more intense." Sommer interviewed Suzana Carmango, a "Professor of Climate" at Columbia University, who opined that "What we're seeing [now] is [sic] very intense hurricanes—the Cat 4s, Cat 5s—and also how often they go to this—what we call rapid intensification, when they blow up in intensity very fast."

**Fact-Check:** This is false. The quiet Atlantic season and role of El Niño are correctly noted (higher wind shear "tears apart" developing storms). However, no evidence suggests hurricanes have become more intense. According to a widely cited 2022 study, global major hurricane (Category 3+) counts have shown no increase since 1990. The same applies to Category 4–5 hurricanes (nominal, albeit *insignificant* increase). Rapid intensification (≥30-kt / ≥35-mph increase in maximum sustained winds in ≤24 hours) events also exhibit no increase. Higher sea surface temperatures (SSTs) would theoretically raise a storm's potential intensity, but real-world intensity is controlled by multiple factors (e.g., wind shear, humidity, and atmospheric stability). Gulf of America (or Mexico) SST anomalies, for instance, show no correlation with peak hurricane intensity.

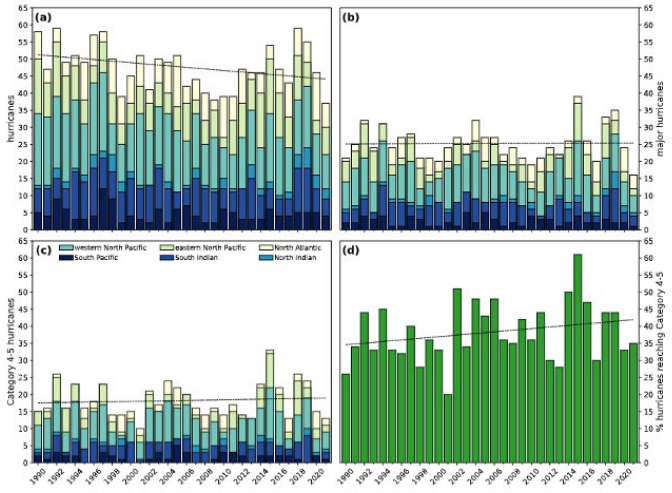
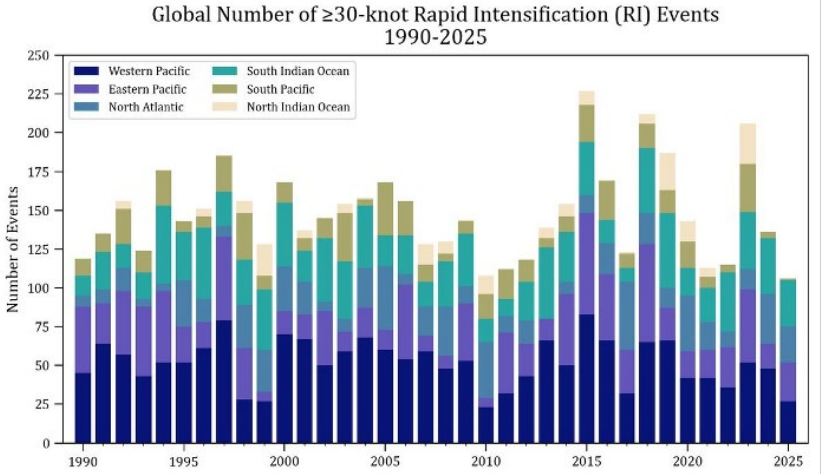
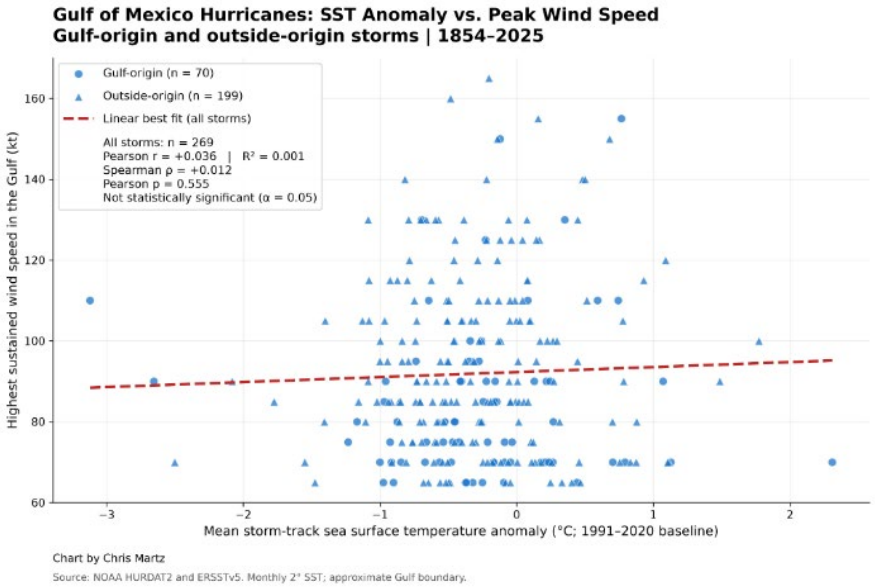



**Figure 3.** As in Figure 2 but for (a) hurricanes, (b) major hurricanes, and (c) Category 4–5 hurricanes. (d) Global percentage of hurricanes reaching Category 4–5 intensity.




*Data: NHC HURDAT2 (Atlantic/Eastern Pacific); IBTrACS v04r01 USA_WIND (JTWC; other basins).*
*Reference: Klotzbach et al. (2022), Trends in global tropical cyclone activity: 1990–2021. Geophysical Research Letters, 49, e2021GL095774. https://doi.org/10.1029/2021GL095774*

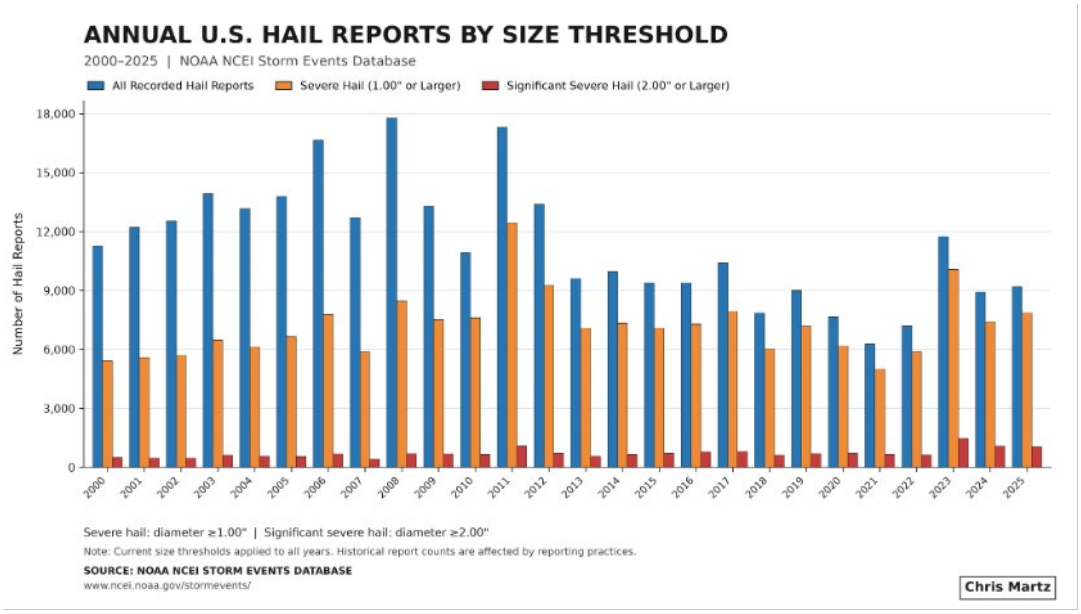
***Chart: Chris Martz***



## October 22nd: Hailstorms are not becoming larger or more frequent, *Washington Post*

**Claim:** The *Washington Post's* Nick Kirkpatrick wrote an article on hailstorms and their impacts in the U.S. The author wrote that "hail causes billions of dollars in damage every year" across the country, then claimed that hailstones are becoming larger and hailstorms are becoming more frequent because of human-caused climate change. Kirkpatrick wrote, "As the climate warms, [Dr. Victor] Gensini says, thunderstorms will create stronger updrafts that hold hailstones in the air for longer, allowing them to grow bigger — and fall harder."

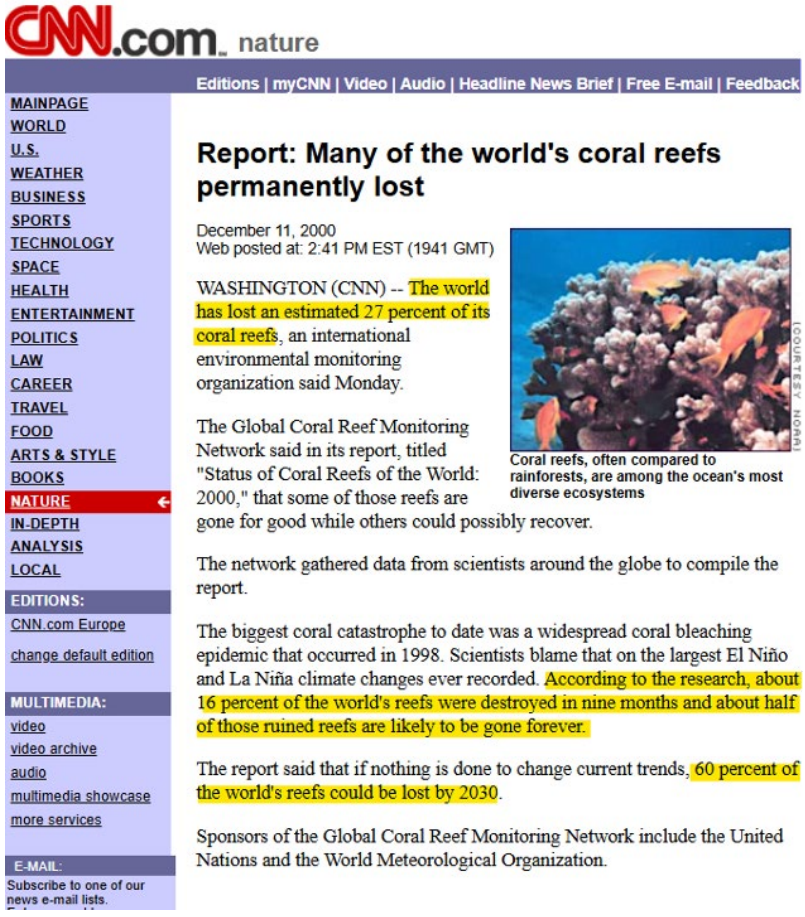
**Fact-Check:** No evidence suggests hailstorms are becoming more frequent or that hailstones are becoming larger. Hail forms when strong thunderstorm updrafts repeatedly carry very tiny supercooled water droplets (water droplets that are below freezing temperature, but still in the liquid state) through ice nuclei, which freeze onto them in successive layers until they grow heavy enough to fall to the ground. Under a global warming scenario, not only does a warmer atmosphere raise the freezing level, but the upper atmosphere is projected to warm faster than the lower, resulting in a stabilization effect that reduces updraft intensity. In fact, the *Washington Post* recently discussed that process in an article about the lack of Atlantic hurricanes this year. Finally, data from NOAA Storm Events Database reveal no statistically significant change in the incidence of hail, severe hail (≥1.0" in diameter), or severe hail (≥2.00") since 2000. The figures in the chart below correct for changes in criteria over time.



## October 22nd: No, *Associated Press*, 96% of the world's coral reefs are not going to collapse in 50 years

**Claim:** The *Associated Press* reported on a new International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) assessment that found 96% of the world's shallow-water coral reef ecosystems are critically endangered and face a high risk of collapse by 2075, mainly due to warming oceans and "marine heatwaves." The piece described climate change as the single most consistent threat to major reef systems such as the Great Barrier, Coral Triangle, Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, and Red Sea reefs.

**Fact-Check:** This is highly misleading. The 96% figure is driven almost entirely by future climate model projections under a middle-of-the-road emissions scenario (SSP2-4.5), not by observed trends. Based on actual changes over the past 50 years, only ~24% of the assessed ecoregions meet their critically endangered threshold. Corals have repeatedly demonstrated recovery between bleaching events, and some assemblages show emerging increases in thermal tolerance. Earlier alarmist forecasts have also failed. For instance, in 2000, *CNN* reported that 60% of the world's reefs would be lost by 2030 if trends continued, which is an outcome that is not likely to occur. While heat stress can cause coral bleaching, the most important drivers are localized. These include fertilizer runoff and other water pollution (e.g., non-mineral-based sunscreen from tourists)



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**Report: Many of the world's coral reefs permanently lost**

December 11, 2000
Web posted at: 2:41 PM EST (1941 GMT)

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The world has lost an estimated 27 percent of its coral reefs, an international environmental monitoring organization said Monday.

The Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network said in its report, titled "Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2000," that some of those reefs are gone for good while others could possibly recover.



Coral reefs, often compared to rainforests, are among the ocean's most diverse ecosystems

The network gathered data from scientists around the globe to compile the report.

The biggest coral catastrophe to date was a widespread coral bleaching epidemic that occurred in 1998. Scientists blame that on the largest El Niño and La Niña climate changes ever recorded. According to the research, about 16 percent of the world's reefs were destroyed in nine months and about half of those ruined reefs are likely to be gone forever.

The report said that if nothing is done to change current trends, 60 percent of the world's reefs could be lost by 2030.

Sponsors of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network include the United Nations and the World Meteorological Organization.

## October 24th: Wrong again, UN, droughts are *not* becoming more severe

**Claim:** The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recently posted on X that more than one third of river basins had below-average flows (which is just a measure of the mass flux of water passing through a point per unit time) in 2025. They went on to state, "climate change makes droughts more severe," which is leading to countries to build resilience.

**Fact-Check:** There is no compelling evidence to suggest that droughts are becoming more frequent because of climate change. First, below-average river flows during a single year is not indicative of long-term trends either globally or at a specific location. This is weather, not climate. Second, this claim runs contrary to their October 6th headline that floods are becoming more frequent and intense. Finally, peer-reviewed research shows that meteorological droughts (defined as rainfall deficits relative to a given location's climatology) have neither increased nor decreased in frequency or intensity globally since 1950. The percent of land area in drought (including severe drought) has not increased. Increases in hydrological (shortages in surface and/or subsurface water supply) and agricultural droughts are primarily due to land use change and poor water resource management, and are primarily regional.

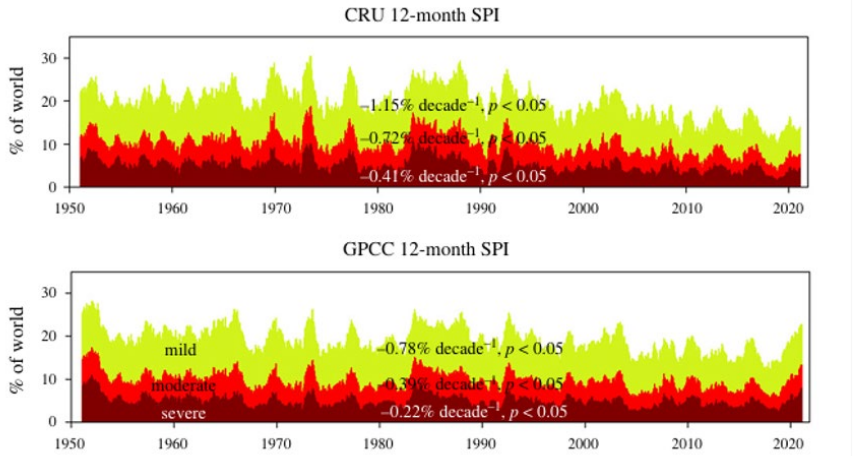



**Figure 2.** Evolution of the percentage of world surface area affected by different typologies of drought severity based on the 12-month SPI. The magnitude of change and significance of the trend were assessed with the 12-month SPI data of December (one data per year) in order to remove the effect of temporal autocorrelation that characterizes long SPI timescales. The magnitude of change was calculated by a linear regression between time (independent variable) and the percentage of global land areas affected by drought (dependent variable). (Online version in colour.)

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