

The relationship between invasive annuals, fire frequency, and changing vegetation communities is well-known in the Mojave Desert. Less often discussed by land managers is the role increased weather variability due to global warming might play in the fire cycle. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports that anthropogenic influence may push the variance of weather to greater extremes; longer, drier droughts and wetter wet years. The winter of 2004 and spring of 2005 was an exceptional season. Rainfall in Mojave National Preserve was a factor of three over normal with patterns of five inches or more of precipitation occurring in a single 24 hour period. The resulting annual spring bloom was spectacular, being reported as far away and as widely circulated as the *New York Times*. The summer monsoon was equally spectacular. Intense thunderstorms began in late June. But previously, the abnormal rainfall abruptly ended in April and the abundant annual vegetation quickly turned to fuel in the summer heat. Lightning strikes on June 22, 2005 ignited the Hackberry Complex conflagration that ultimately burned over 70,000 acres of Mojave National Preserve. Our first stop after Kelso Depot is the westerly extent of the fire perimeter. Scorched Joshua trees and perennials can be seen on the south side of Cedar Canyon road compared to unburned vegetation on the north. Cima Dome, on the western horizon, hosts the largest, densest Joshua tree forest in the world. This forest may have generated during the wet twentieth century and may be doomed in the drier twenty first. As we travel up Cedar Canyon and turn south on Black Canyon road into the most intensely burned area, notice how limited recovery seems to be after three years. The 2007 water year essential tied 2002 as one of the driest years on record in the Mojave Desert. Mid Hills campground was once sheltered under the shade of old growth Pinyon and Juniper. Scattered amongst the charred remnants are isolated islands untouched by fire, showing how the vegetation appeared before the blaze. Our turnaround is in an area burned once in 2002 and again in 2005. Damaged and destroyed vegetation may weaken the native community to invasion by exotic annuals, exacerbating the fire cycle and hastening transition to a new state.