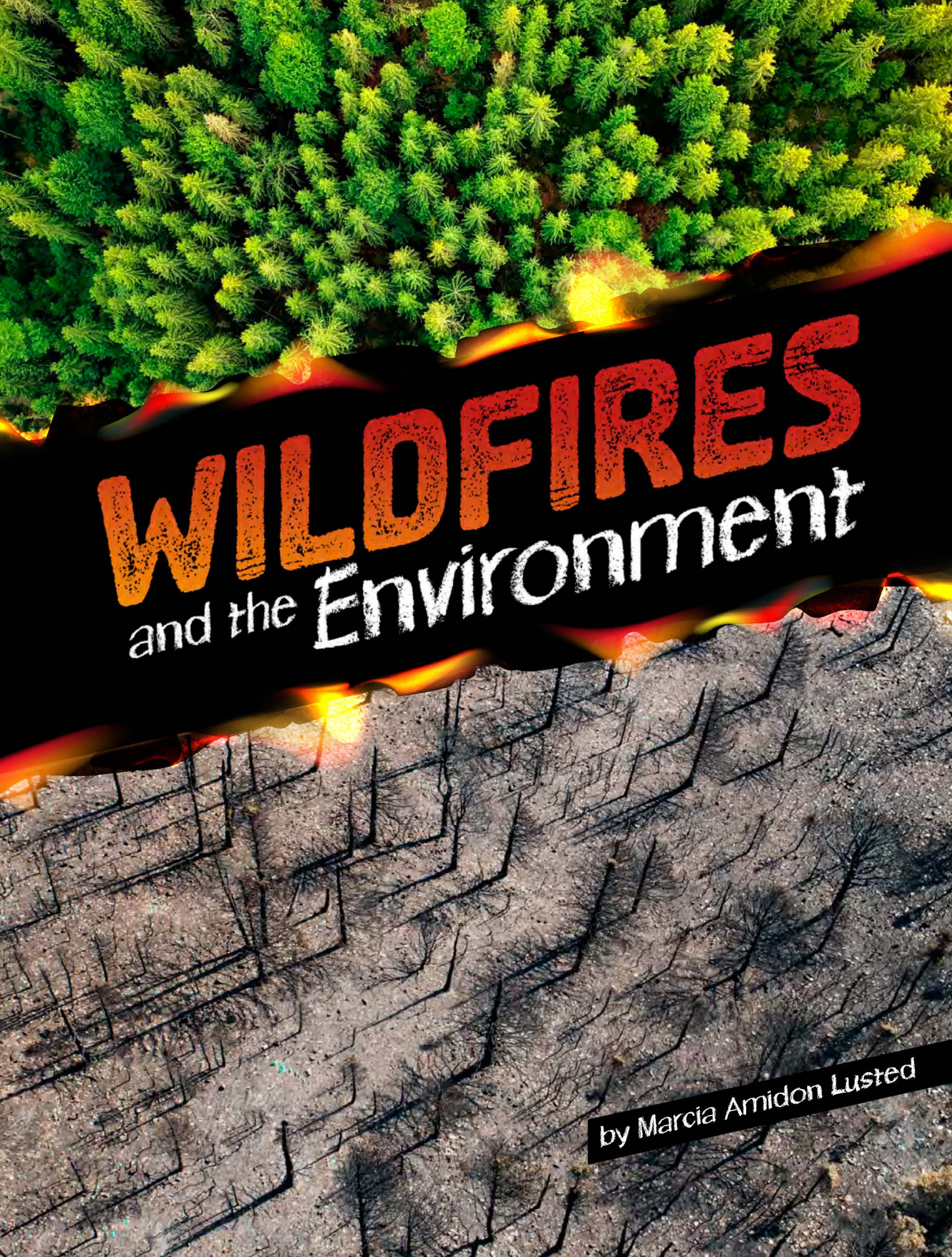
WILDFIRES
and the Environment
by Marcia Amidon Lusted

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For Review Only

# SURROUNDED BY FLAMES

On November 8, 2018, a teacher drove to school in Paradise, California, and noticed that the sky looked orange. A wildfire had started when the wind blew down power lines. Dry pine needles, grass, and brush quickly caught fire. The wind grew stronger. The fire swept toward the town of Paradise very quickly. Fiery branches landed near children playing on their school playground. They had to get on a bus to get away from the fire. Soon everyone was told to **evacuate** the town.

## FACT

The Camp Fire got its name from where it started near Camp Creek Road.

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The fire came to be known as the Camp Fire. Causing 85 deaths, it was the deadliest wildfire in California's history. More than 18,000 homes, buildings, and other structures burned down. The towns of Paradise and Concow were nearly destroyed. The area burned covered more than 150,000 acres (60,700 hectares). In addition to the human impact, soil and water were **polluted**. Many animals died or were displaced. Scientists continue to study how the fire affected the **environment**.

People flee the Camp Fire in Paradise on November 8, 2018.

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Chapter One

# JUST ONE SPARK

About 70,000 wildfires occur in the United States every year. People cause about 80 percent of these fires. People can start wildfires by throwing away lit cigarettes or setting off fireworks. Campfires can create sparks that cause wildfires. Sometimes people even start fires on purpose. Natural events such as lightning can start wildfires too. Very dry conditions make it easier for fires to start. High winds can cause flames to spread quickly.

People need to be aware of an area's weather and surroundings before starting campfires.

Review Only

In California, the area burned by wildfires has been increasing since 1950. Snow in the mountains has been melting earlier in the spring than usual. Temperatures in spring and summer have also been rising. This has caused drier conditions, which can lead to more and larger wildfires.

The Woolsey Fire burns in Malibu, California, in November 2018.

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Wildfires can move very quickly. Some fires can travel 14 miles (23 kilometers) per hour. Fires that spread uphill move faster than fires that spread downhill. Fallen leaves and dry grass burn first. Then a fire can spread into the tops of trees. It burns from one tree to the next. Smoke gets thicker as the fire spreads to other areas.

Wildfires affect people, animals, and the environment. People who live in areas close to a fire may have to evacuate so they aren't injured or killed. Animals can tell when there is danger. Some can run away from a fire. But sick, old, or young animals may not be able to escape. Wildfires burn trees, shrubs, and other plants. Ash can pollute water sources and the air.

A hare flees a forest fire.

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# Case Study
## 2019 Bolivia Forest Fires

In 2019, wildfires in the country of Bolivia burned nearly 14.8 million acres (6 million hectares) of forest. Much of the destroyed area was protected land where a large variety of animals and plants lived. More than 2 million animals died, including anteaters, lizards, tapirs, ocelots, and pumas. Many jaguars live in the Pantanal. This wetland area is mainly in Brazil, but it also reaches into parts of Bolivia and Paraguay. Scientists estimate at least 500 jaguars were killed or left homeless in the fires.

Soon after the fires, Bolivia's government launched Plan Paradise. Through this plan, conservation experts will work with the military to restore plants in the Chiquitania area.

Wildlife in the Pantanal was greatly affected by the 2019 forest fires.

For Review Only