

DATELINE: August 2000. US officials say brush fires raging across Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, California and Utah are the worst in 50 years. There have been more than 60 000 fires this year, devastating nearly 1.6 million hectares of land. More than 60 large fires are still raging with most alight for more than a month.

Twenty of the large fires are burning in Montana. The state has used 7500 firefighters, but their base camp was destroyed by fire. Canadian, Australian and New Zealand firefighting teams are being mobilised to tackle some fires. Forecasters predict continued high temperatures, low humidity, and rainless thunderstorms with lightning — conditions that could lead to even more fires.

1. How many fires have been reported in the U.S.A. this year?

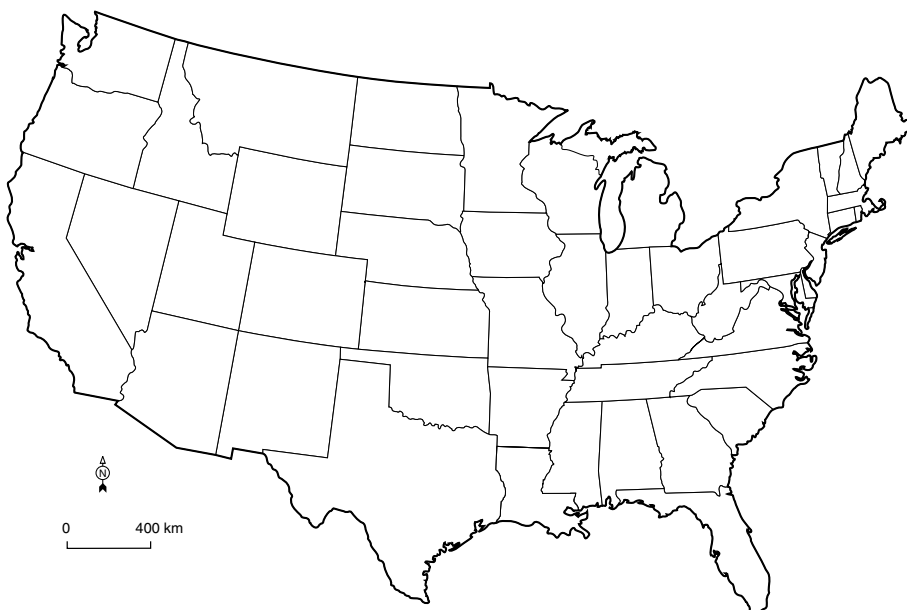
2. How does low humidity (moisture in the air) affect the potential for fires?

3. What role can lightning play in wildfires?

4. Using the outline map of the U.S.A. on the right and pages 198–199 of the *Jacaranda Atlas*,

(a) shade in the states affected by wildfire.

(b) Describe the region of the U.S.A affected by wildfires.



(c) Compare your map to the annual rainfall map for the U.S.A. on page 195 of the *Jacaranda Atlas*. Is there a link between the patterns shown?

(d) Compare your map to the 3D model of North America on page 195 of the *Jacaranda Atlas*. Suggest why many of the fires might be difficult to fight.

(e) Compare your map to the world map of biomes on page 38 of the *Jacaranda Atlas*. Through what type of vegetation are the fires burning?

5. Mark in Australia's fire prone areas on the map on the right using page 21 of the *Jacaranda Atlas*.

6. Mark in an example of a major fire for each of the southern states.

