



# the weekly anthropocene

*dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere*



By Sam Matey

**California.** Once more, the Golden State is being ravaged by massive wildfires. As of November 19th, the Camp Fire (pictured), about 190 miles north of San Francisco, had burned about 151,000 acres and levelled over 11,000 homes, including the entire community of Paradise. The death toll currently stands at 79, and 699 people are still missing, making it the deadliest wildfire in the state's history. Disturbingly, this is California's "new abnormal," as Governor Jerry Brown recently characterized it. Drier and hotter winters have extended "wildfire season" to encompass the whole year. In December 2017, the Thomas Fire burned 281,893 acres in southern California, becoming the largest fire in the state's history. Then, in July and August 2018, the Ranch Fire, part of the Mendocino Complex in central California, burned 410,203 acres. There is no sign of this trend slowing down. For the rest of the century, at least, it seems likely that California will be burning, regrowing, and burning again. For updates, see [fire.ca.gov](http://fire.ca.gov). For a more in-depth look, see *National Geographic's* breakdown of how climate change is causing California's mega-fires at [goo.gl/VDjBzX](http://goo.gl/VDjBzX).



**Republic of Congo.** In an admirable example of habitat conservation strongly integrated with local communities' needs, the Republic of Congo (highlighted on map) has created its fifth national park, closing three logging concessions that had had designs on the area. Ogooué-Leketi National Park covers 350,000 hectares (over 1351 square miles) of savannah and rainforest, an area larger than America's Yosemite National Park. The new park is on the Congo-Gabon border, and adjoins Gabon's Plateaux Batéké National Park, creating a transboundary protected area larger than Rhode Island. Ogooué-Leketi is home to gorillas, chimpanzees, forest elephants, mandrills, and at least six very rare specialist savanna plants, along with much more. To ensure a strong sociopolitical foundation for the park, the Congolese government and the Wildlife Conservation Society used "participatory social mapping," which allowed the local communities to define the areas of the park that they needed for subsistence gathering, fishing, or hunting. These areas are integrated into the park's management plan as "eco-development zones." This is a spectacular example of how to preserve priceless natural wonders while protecting the livelihood and support of local communities. For more, see [goo.gl/nPHjnB](http://goo.gl/nPHjnB).

