

How a 'foreign invasion' contributed to Hawaii's devastating wildfires

After a catastrophic wildfire that killed more than 100 people in Hawaii, eyes have turned toward an unexpected culprit: invasive grass species that have spread massively over the archipelago for decades, serving as the perfect fuel.

Drought-resistant, capable of invading difficult terrain, and gradually muscling out [local species](#), they are also a growing threat in the western United States, where devastating fires are increasing.

"Invasive grasses are very ignitable. They change the landscape," Carla D'Antonio, a professor of ecology at the University of California, Santa Barbara told AFP.

"They make conditions that are more conducive to more fire, and all of a sudden, we just have a lot more fire."

Rather than decomposing when they die, they stay "standing there for a long time, dry as a bone," said D'Antonio, who has been studying these species for more than 30 years. They're also hardy, surviving fires better than [native species](#) and gradually replacing them.

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For D'Antonio of UC Santa Barbara, tragedies like that of Hawaii are linked to many factors: the alteration of the landscape by humans, the invasion of alien [species](#), droughts made worse by climate change, but also a lack of preparation.

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