Read the text again. **Match the headings with the paragraphs (1–13)**

A. Campfires as the top cause

B. How climate change worsens forest conditions

C. A puzzling question about starting fires

D. Cigarettes and fire safety education

E. Most wildfires are caused by humans

F. Backyard burning as a cause

G. Understanding wildfires and their importance

H. Some positive but mostly harmful effects

I. The increasing scale and cost of wildfires

J. Sparks from machines

K. What starts a wildfire

L. Children and unsafe behavior

M. Global warming as the main cause

The top five causes of wildfires

Paragraph 1 _____

How is it that if you drop a cigarette in a wet forest it starts a fire by accident, but when you're camping and trying to set a fire on purpose, with dry wood and plenty of matches, you can't do it?

Paragraph 2 _____

Personal fire-making skills aside, the causes of wildfires—defined as large, rapidly spreading fires especially in rural areas—are worth understanding. If we know what causes fires, we can prepare for them, and hopefully, prevent them.

Paragraph 3 _____

Wildfires are both destructive and costly—and they're getting worse. Over the past few years, the number of wildfires has increased around the world, especially in countries with large forests such as Russia and Canada. One country in particular that is facing wildfire problems is the United States. In fact, every state in the western United States has seen an increase in the number of wildfires. They occur up to five times more often than 10 or 20 years ago. The fires burn for longer, too, and last nearly five times as long, and cover six times as much land. In 2015, more than ten million acres of land burned—an area about the size of the entire country of Switzerland. The amount of money spent to put out these fires is climbing to two billion dollars a year.

Paragraph 4 _____

LIVEWORKSHEETS

What's causing this? Fires have to be started by a trigger—that is, something that begins the fire. This can be by humans, either on purpose or by accident, or something natural, such as lightning. But events like these have always happened. Why are they leading to more fires now?

Paragraph 5

The main answer is global warming: a gradual heating of the planet. This affects forests in several ways. First of all, a warmer climate means a drier climate because more water evaporates. Snow in mountain areas melts earlier, so the ground is drier for a longer period of time. Together, these factors increase the risk of a chance spark growing into a wildfire. Furthermore, when fires do start, the outcome is worse. Because the ground is drier, they burn hotter, spread faster, and last longer. And they're more difficult to contain or extinguish. Wildfires in large forests can burn for several months.

Paragraph 6

Climate change affects fires in other ways too. When the balance of nature in a forest changes, trees become weak or sick. Insects and other animals damage the weakened trees, which can die, and dead trees become a fuel source for fires. Lightning strikes the Earth more than 100,000 times a day, and 10–20% of these events are capable of starting a fire. It's clear that steps need to be taken to reduce this risk.

Paragraph 7

However, about 90% of all wildfires are started by humans. In theory, it should be easier to reduce this number than the number of lightning strikes. Let's take a closer look at some of the causes.

Paragraph 8

The fifth most common cause of wildfires started by humans is backyard burning—fires that people set to burn garden waste or trash. These fires may be set following local laws, but then grow too large, are spread by wind, or are not put out correctly. Local laws need to be clarified and properly enforced to reduce risky behavior.

Paragraph 9

The fourth most common cause is sparks from equipment such as cars, trucks, or farm machinery. Proper maintenance is essential to stop machines from starting a fire.

Paragraph 10

Cigarettes are the third leading cause of wildfires. Education campaigns that teach fire safety are a good way to address this problem.

Paragraph 11

Second is unsupervised activities, such as children playing with matches or setting off fireworks. Education is important but not sufficient in the case of young children. They need to be watched at all times by parents or other adults and kept away from fuel and things that start fires.

Paragraph 12

And first? The main cause of human-caused wildfires is campfires that are either not in a safe area, get out of control, or aren't put out properly. Campers and outdoor enthusiasts need to learn where and when it is safe to build a campfire and how to make sure the fire is completely out before they leave the area.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Paragraph 13

It is true that some fires in wilderness areas can have beneficial effects too, such as helping new trees and plants to grow. However, because recent wildfires burn hotter and longer, these effects don't always occur. Instead, we lose land, animal, and plant life, and a lot of money. As the Earth grows warmer, we need to work harder to protect forests from wildfires.

LIVEWORKSHEETS