National Seasonal Assessment Workshop

Western States & Alaska

Phoenix, AZ
March 30–April 2, 2004

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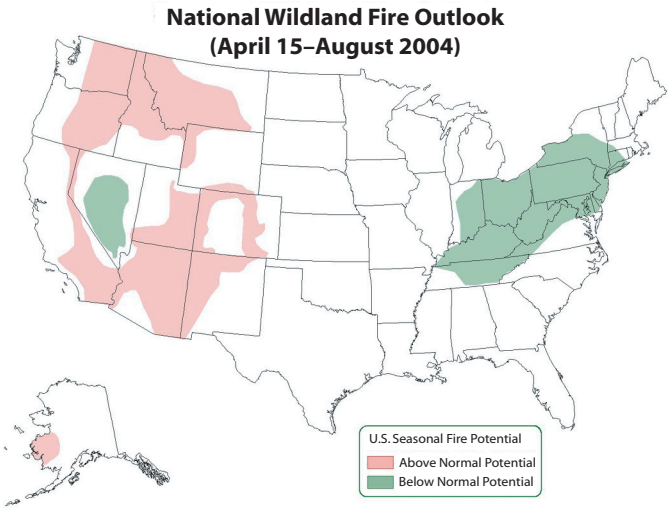
Western States and Alaska Fire Season 2004

During the week of March 30–April 2, 2004, the second annual National Seasonal Assessment Workshop: Western States and Alaska was held in Phoenix, Arizona. Climatologists, predictive service meteorologists, wildland fire analysts, and fire managers from federal and state agencies came together to produce an outlook of the 2004 fire season. These assessments will allow decision makers to proactively manage wildland fire in order to:

- Protect lives and property,
- Reduce costs,
- Improve firefighting efficiency.



The assessment map to the right shows the areas of above- and below-average fire potential. Potential refers to fire activity that may impact firefighting resources. Updated assessments will be issued throughout the fire season.

Independent fire experts from each of the nine geographical areas listed below joined with their colleagues at NSAW to attain consensus on their region's wildfire potential. Each region is influenced by varying effects of accumulated winter precipitation (snowpack), the amount of dead and flammable brush and trees present (fuel), and the effects of long-term drought. Here are the outlooks:

Alaska – Generally near-normal fire potential largely due to normal- to above-normal snowpack.

Eastern Great Basin – Large areas of above-average fire potential due to long-term drought and related vegetation mortality due to insect infestation and disease.

Northern California – Generally near-normal fire potential with some areas of above-normal fire potential due to long-term drought, tree mortality due to insect infestation and disease, and downed trees due to wind and snow.

Northern Rocky Mountain – Large areas of above-normal fire potential due to rapid spring season snowmelt, long-term drought, and significant areas of tree mortality due to insect infestation and disease.

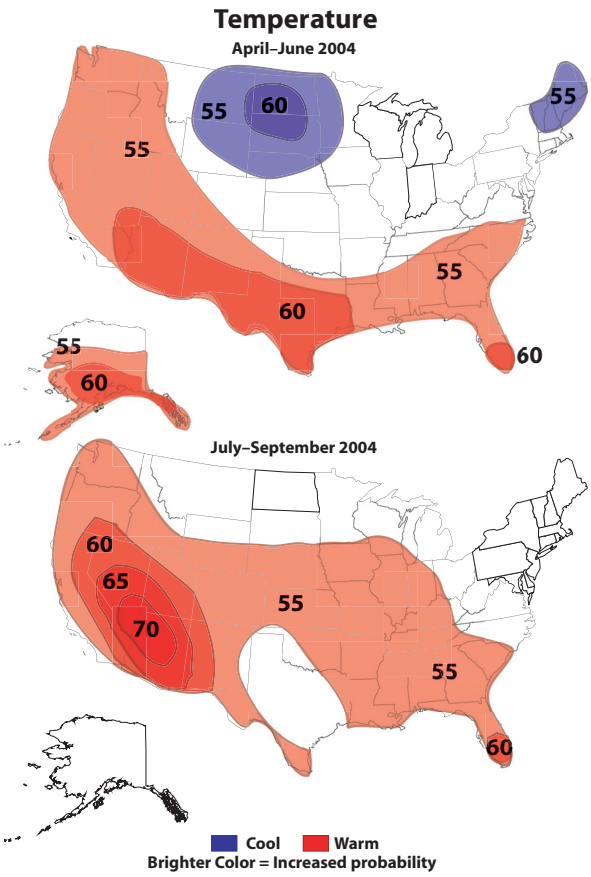
Pacific Northwest – Large areas of above-average fire potential due to long-term drought and lower than normal winter snow snowpack.

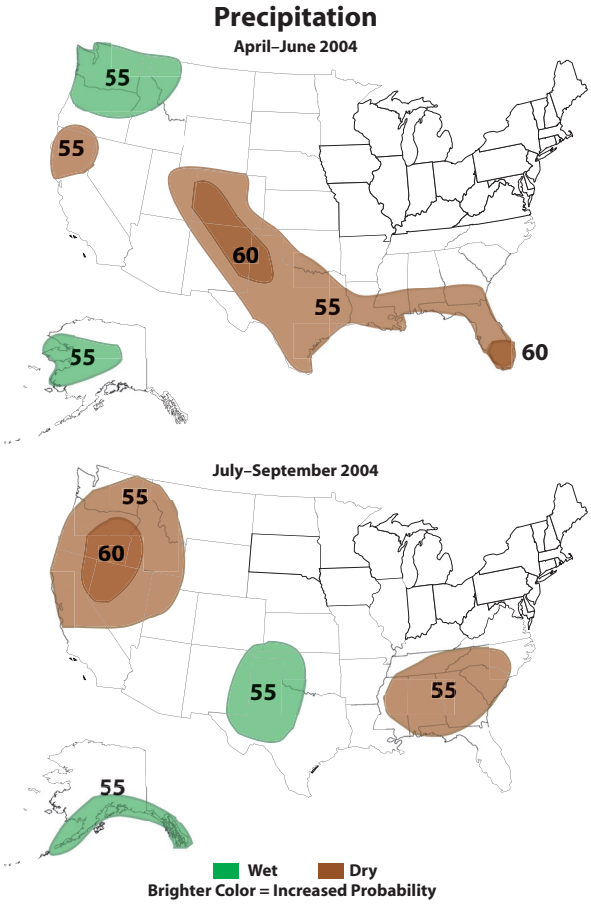
Rocky Mountain – Some areas of above-average fire potential due to long-term drought, fine fuels buildup, and an increased amount of dead timber.

Southern California – Large areas of above-average fire potential with threats to home at the wildland/urban interface locations due to long-term drought, extensive brush die-back, and dead/dying timber due to insect infestation and disease.

Southwest – Large areas of above-average fire potential due to long-term drought, rapid spring season snowmelt, accumulated fine fuel buildup, and tree mortality due to insect infestation and disease.

Western Great Basin – Generally below-average fire potential with some areas of increased fire potential due to abundant fuel loads.





Climate Forecast

Facilitated by the Program for Climate, Ecosystem, and Fire Applications (CEFA), regional climate forecasts and information were merged into a set of two-category consensus forecasts for the spring and summer 2004 fire season. In the two temperature figures (see top left), warm temperatures are indicated by red and cool temperatures by blue. The degree of probability is indicated with numbers above each region (e.g. in the Southwest there is a 60 percent chance that temperatures will be higher than average this April–June). In the two precipitation figures (see bottom left), green indicates a wet season and brown indicates a dry season. The probability of these forecasts are also indicated with numbers. Climatologists from six federal and regional organizations contributed to the forecasts. This climate decision-support tool, along with regional fire and fuels assessments prepared in advance of and during the workshop, provided the foundation for the national wildland fire outlook.

The Value of the Workshop

Workshop interactions between a variety of specialists in climate, weather, fuels, and fire management strengthen interagency coordination, and improve scientist-management collaboration in addressing the pressing need to predict seasonal fire potential and resource needs.

Given the high costs of suppressing wildland fires, effective decision-support products and tools are needed to improve resource allocation decisions. Preseason predictions, using the best possible science and observations, will help reduce suppression costs and maintain a high standard of safety for firefighters and the public.

The 2004 NSAW: Western States and Alaska meeting marks a giant leap in a process to improve information available to fire management for proactive strategies. The workshop's final products help address three key components of the National Fire Plan—firefighting, fuels reduction, and accountability. The meeting, focused specifically on the late spring and summer fire seasons of the western states, built on expertise developed at the seminal 2003 NSAW.

Participating Agencies

Alaska Interagency Coordination Center
Arizona State Land Department
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Bureau of Land Management
California Applications Program
California Department of Forestry
CEFA/Desert Research Institute
CLIMAS/University of Arizona
Department of Interior
Dixie National Forest
Eastern Great Basin Coordination Center
ECPC/Scripps Institution of Oceanography
Fire Program Solutions
IRI/Columbia University
Joint Fire Science Program
Los Padres National Forest
National Association of State Foresters
National Interagency Coordination Center
National Interagency Fire Center
National Park Service
NOAA Climate Diagnostics Center
NOAA Climate Prediction Center
NOAA Office of Global Programs
Northern California Coordination Center
Northern Rockies Coordination Center
Northwest Interagency Coordination Center
Redding Fire Weather Office
Rocky Mountain Coordination Center
South Dakota School of Mines and Technology
Southern California Coordination Center
Southwest Coordination Center
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USDA-Forest Service
USDA-Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Lab
Western Great Basin Coordination Center

More Information

National Wildland Fire Outlook
http://www.nifc.gov/news/intell_predserv_forms/season_outlook.html

Program for Climate, Ecosystem, and Fire Applications
http://cefa.dri.edu/

Climate Assessment for the Southwest (CLIMAS)
http://www.ispe.arizona.edu/climas/swoutlook.html