National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook

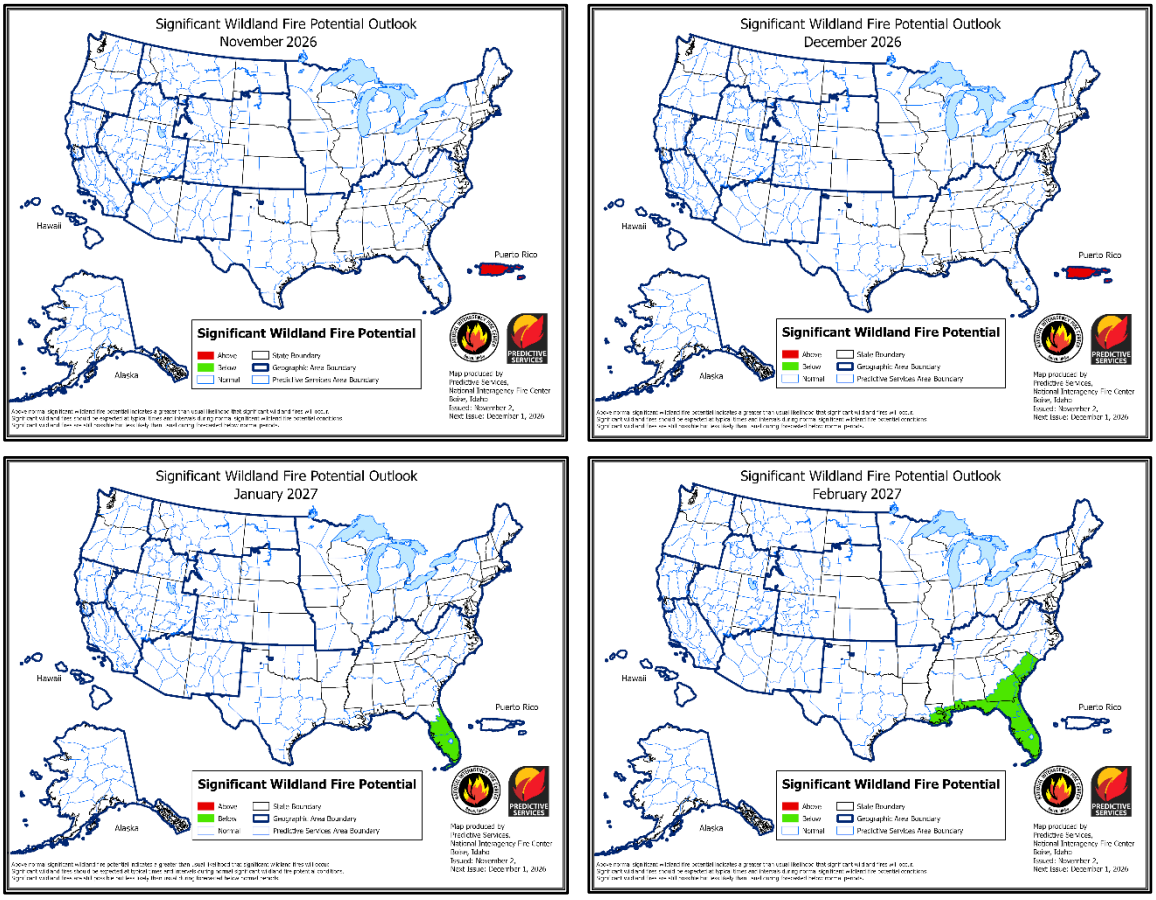
Predictive Services
National Interagency Fire Center

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Outlook Period – November 2026 through February 2027

Executive Summary

The significant wildland fire potential forecasts included in this outlook represent the cumulative forecasts of the ten Geographic Area Predictive Services units and the National Predictive Services unit.



Fire activity continued diminishing across the U.S. in October, with only brief periods of elevated activity occurring in California, the Southern Area, and Eastern Area mid to late month. As a result of the continued diminishing fire activity, the National Preparedness Level dropped from two to one (on a scale of 1-5) October 14. This year 9,388,904 acres have burned across the country through the end of October, which is 146% of the previous 10-year average. So far this year 67,640 wildfires have been reported, also above average, at 133%.

October precipitation was well above normal in southern California into the Greater Four Corners. Above normal precipitation also occurred in portions of the northern Rockies, central and southern Plains, and much of Florida, southeast Alabama, and south Georgia. Precipitation was well below normal in the Lower Mississippi Valley, with below normal precipitation also occurring in northern California, the Northwest, northern Plains, Great Lakes, and Mid-Mississippi Valley to the Northeast. Overall drought improved the past month, with less than 50% of the country now in

drought. Drought developed and/or intensified in much of the Lower and Mid-Mississippi Valley, but drought improved across much of the Southwest, Rockies, southern Plains, and Southeast, and drought removal occurred in 10% of the country.

Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late October forecast temperatures that are likely to be above normal across most of the country in November, with no clear trend in the Southwest, southern Plains, and Lower Mississippi Valley. Precipitation is likely to be above normal in the southern third of the country, especially in the Southeast, consistent with a very strong El Niño. Below-normal precipitation is likely in portions of the northern Rockies and Great Lakes. Similar trends are expected the following three months from December to February, as temperatures are likely to be warmer-than-normal for the northern tier of the country and Alaska, with no favored outcome for the southern half of the country except to lean near normal in the Southeast. Precipitation is likely to be above normal in the southern tier of the U.S., especially in the Southeast, but potentially drier than normal in the northern Rockies and portions of the Great Lakes.

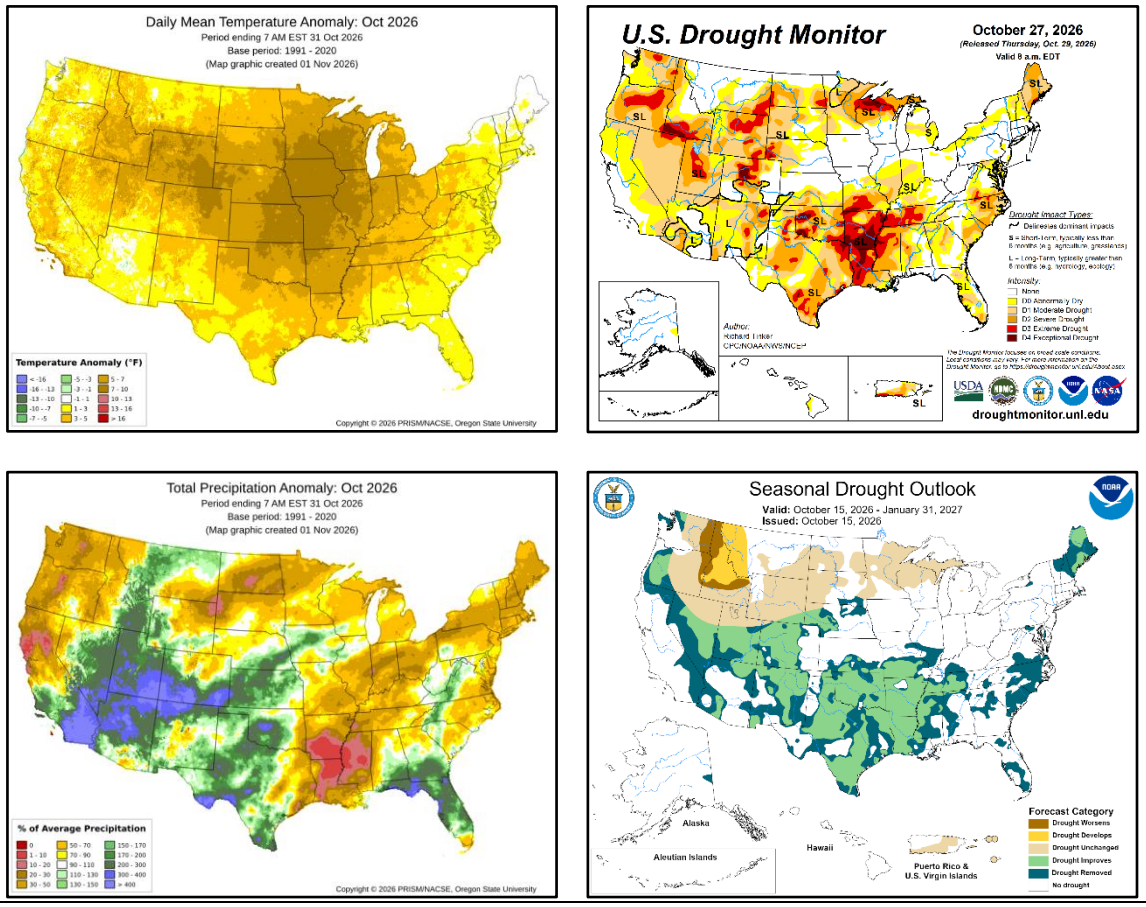
From the current and past weather, as well as forecast conditions, November and December significant fire potential is expected to be normal across the contiguous U.S., Alaska, and Hawai'i, with above normal potential confined to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In January and February, potential will return to normal in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, with normal potential continuing across most of the country as well. However, below normal potential is forecast for the Florida peninsula in January that will expand into the northeast Gulf Coast and southeast Atlantic coast in February.

Past Weather and Drought

Temperatures in October were above normal for most of the U.S., with temperatures averaging 6-10°F above normal for much of the central Plains into the Mid-Mississippi Valley and Great Lakes. Temperatures were near normal in Arizona and much of the Northeast, as well as Florida. Near normal temperatures were observed in the northern Plains and Midwest. Temperatures in Alaska were above normal and near normal for Hawai'i, except for the Big Island which was slightly above normal.

Precipitation in October was well below normal in the Lower Mississippi Valley, with many areas receiving less than 25% of normal precipitation. Below normal precipitation also occurred in northern California, the Northwest, and western Idaho, with another stretch of below normal precipitation occurring in the northern Plains, Great Lakes, Ohio Valley, and Northeast. Well above normal precipitation occurred across southern California into Arizona, Utah, and the Greater Four Corners, with some areas receiving more than 500% of normal precipitation. Precipitation was also above normal in most of Florida, southeast Alabama, and south Georgia, largely due to Hurricane Isaias, with above normal precipitation in portions of the central and southern Plains and northern Rockies. Precipitation in Alaska was mixed, with above normal precipitation in south-central Alaska and the eastern Interior, but below normal for portions of the western Interior, southwest Alaska, and the panhandle. Hawai'i observed well-above-normal precipitation from Kauai to Maui, but Big Island precipitation was mostly below normal.

California was very warm and dry to start the month, except heavy rain fell in far southern California October 9-10 due to the remnants of Pacific Hurricane Rachel. This heat was followed by a moderate Santa Ana event that resulted in several significant fires, mainly in Orange County. Other storms affected southern California, the Southwest, and Four Corners in the second half of the month. The strongest storm moved into the region October 22-25 that resulted in very heavy rainfall in the Four Corners, resulting in significant flooding. As a result of the wet pattern, portions of the San Juan Mountains in southwest Colorado received over 10 inches of precipitation for the month. Alamosa and Del Norte, Colorado recorded their wettest October, with Del Norte recording its wettest month since record keeping began in 1893.



Left: Departure from Normal Temperature (top) and Percent of Normal Precipitation (bottom) ***(from PRISM Climate Group, Oregon State University).*** **Right: U.S. Drought Monitor (top) and Seasonal Drought Outlook (bottom)** ***(from National Drought Mitigation Center and the Climate Prediction Center)***.

Overall drought decreased in October as the areas of above normal precipitation hit many of the drought-stricken areas of the country, and drought now covers less than 50% of the country as of October 27. Drought continued to develop and expand in the Lower Mississippi Valley. However, significant drought improvement occurred in the Southwest and southern Plains, with drought also improving in the Rockies and Southeast. As a result, drought was removed from 10% of the country. Areas of extreme to exceptional drought also decreased with just over 9% of the country in these categories. Extreme to exceptional drought is most widespread across the Lower Mississippi Valley and Upper Great Lakes, with the areas in central Oregon, southern Idaho, and central Utah observing some improvement. Smaller areas of extreme drought are noted in Colorado, Wyoming, southeast Montana, southeast North Dakota, Texas, Oklahoma, and the Virginia—North Carolina border.

Drought is expected to improve in many areas of the country in the next three months, most notably in the southern half of the West, western Oregon, the southern Plains, and Lower to Mid-Mississippi Valley. Drought is also expected to improve in northern New England and continue improving in the Southeast where removal is likely. However, drought is expected to persist in the Inland Northwest, while intensifying in the northern Rockies and Upper Great Lakes.

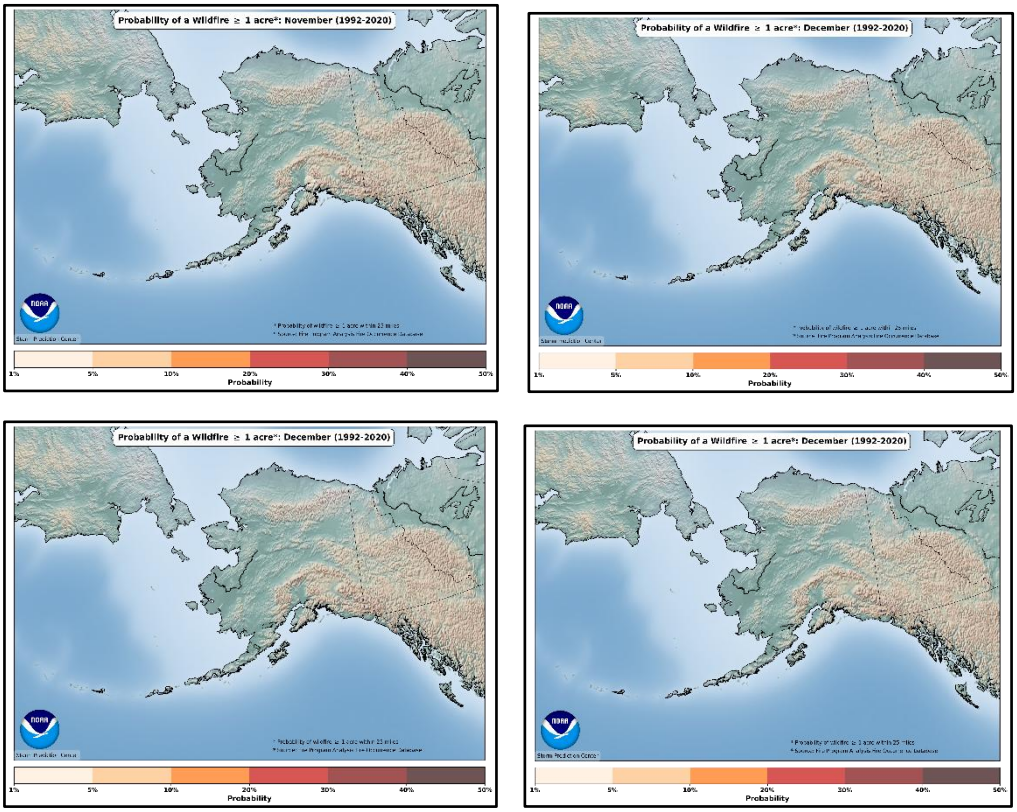
Weather and Climate Outlooks

El Niño continues to rapidly strengthen in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. Central Tropical Pacific sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies are nearly 2.5 C above average, well past the 2°C threshold for a very strong El Niño. In the eastern Pacific off the South American coast, equatorial SST anomalies are more than 4 C above average. El Niño is forecast to continue to strengthen

the next month and peak at the end of November into December by the Climate Prediction Center (CPC), with a greater than 80% chance of the very strong El Niño continuing through the winter. In fact, most of the models used by the CPC and internationally continue to show this El Niño to be the strongest on record, and the CPC forecasts an 83% chance that the strength would exceed the previous strongest El Niño since 1950.

The Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) remains in a weakly negative phase and is likely to remain weakly negative through the outlook period. The Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) was generally weak in October except for some recent enhanced activity in the Indian Ocean. The Arctic Oscillation (AO) has been positive recently but is expected to trend neutral in early November and possibly turn negative mid to late November. The Arctic polar vortex is expected to weaken significantly in the first half of November, with a potential Sudden Stratospheric Warming (SSW). This adds considerable uncertainty to the outlook as a SSW event has never been observed during a very strong El Niño since reliable records began in 1950. The MJO is forecast to strengthen slightly in the Indian Ocean to start November, but its impact is often significantly less during an El Niño. The main driver for this outlook will be the very strong El Niño and how it is impacted by the AO and any potential SSW event.

Geographic Area Forecasts



Normal fire season progression across Alaska shown by the probability of a fire greater than 1 acre within 25 miles. Fire severity cannot be inferred from this analysis. Note that December is shown three times as January and February climatology matches December. (Based on 1992-2020 FPA Data. Analysis courtesy of the Storm Prediction Center.)

Alaska

Normal significant fire potential is expected for Alaska during the next four months. Ample rainfall, snow, and cold temperatures have brought the 2026 fire season to a close in Alaska, with minimal fire activity expected until spring.

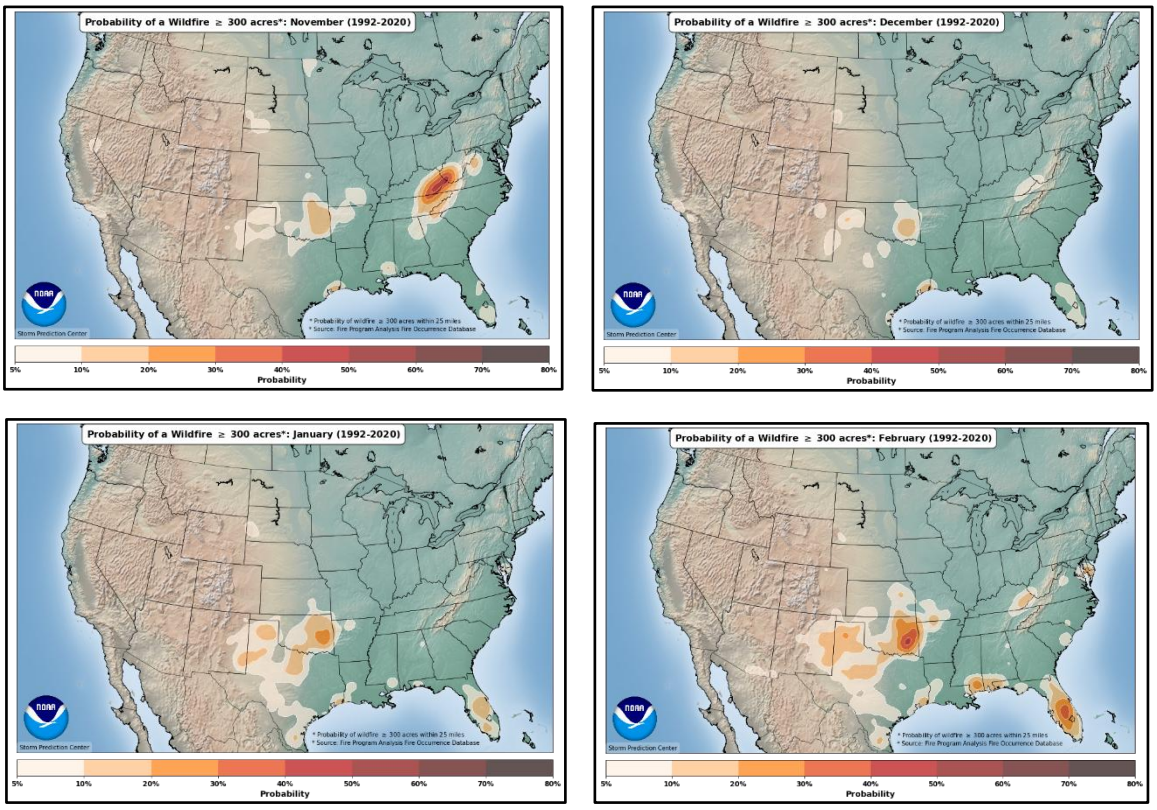
October was another warmer and wetter than normal month for most of Alaska. Significant rain fell in many areas, turning to snow in the last half of the month across much of the north and Interior. The south and west have yet to see substantial snow at lower elevations, but near-freezing temperatures and wet fuels have diminished any concerns.

Climate Prediction Center outlooks for November through February show warmer than normal temperatures are more likely for the central and eastern two thirds of the state including the panhandle. Equal chances for above or below normal temperatures exist across the western third of the state. For precipitation, there are increased chances for below normal precipitation amounts across most of the area between the Alaska Range and the Brooks Range with equal chances for above or below normal precipitation across the eastern Interior and the rest of the state.

Strong El Niño conditions are in the forecast, typically indicating warmer conditions in eastern Alaska as the Climate Prediction Center is forecasting. Conditions during strong El Niño winters are often drier in the interior, like the Climate Prediction Center forecast. Despite the changing climate, fire season in Alaska remains virtually non-existent in winter months, and these warmer and drier leanings in the winter do not have much impact on the summer fire season, which is instead more reliant on spring and summer temperatures as well as snowmelt rates.

Fire activity has been low for October with just one ignition. Fuels are very wet or snow-covered across the state. Fire weather indices have been shut off in areas with an established snowpack. In other areas, rain has dampened fuels to the extent that they pose little to no ignition or spread hazard.

The 2026 fire season is over for Alaska. As the permanent winter snowpack continues to expand through early November, fire potential will remain limited, leading to normal fire potential through February.



Normal fire season progression across the contiguous U.S. shown by the probability of a fire greater than 300 acres within 25 miles. Fire severity cannot be inferred from this analysis. (Based on 1992-2020 FPA Data. Analysis courtesy of the Storm Prediction Center.)

Northwest

Significant fire potential is expected to be normal across all Predictive Services Areas (PSAs) in November and to remain normal through February. Drought persists, and a mild, dry start to November may keep fuels receptive during periods of warm, dry weather and offshore flow. However, higher relative humidity, shorter burn periods, and more frequent cool-season systems should limit opportunities for significant fire growth.

October was warm and dry across most of the Northwest. Temperatures ran above normal across much of Oregon and Washington, with localized areas 4–8°F above normal, mainly in northeast Oregon. Washington and western Oregon received less than 50 percent of normal precipitation, with many areas at 25 percent or less. Central and eastern Oregon were generally 25–75 percent of normal, and parts of south-central Oregon were near to above normal. Maximum vapor pressure deficit, an indicator of daytime drying, ran about 110–150 percent of normal across most of the geographic area. A late-month system brought wetting rain to much of the area, ending the extended dry period.

Drought changed little, though exceptional drought in central Oregon eased to extreme. Extreme drought runs from the southern Willamette Valley and Cascades across central Oregon into the Blue Mountains, with smaller areas in north-central Washington and near the Washington–Idaho border, while severe and moderate drought cover most of the rest of Oregon and central and eastern Washington.

Fire activity remained near average through October. Large-fire growth was minimal, and steady progress continued on incidents burning since mid-July. A warm, dry stretch brought a slight uptick in initial attack, and some fires in and west of the Cascades became more active, but none placed a significant draw on resources.

Energy Release Component (ERC) remained above average across the Northwest through most of October, then dropped sharply in most areas by month's end. Shorter days, lower sun angle, and cooler temperatures now limit additional drying, but underlying drought persists despite the recent rainfall.

El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) remains in a strong El Niño, with a July–September Relative Oceanic Niño Index (RONI) of +1.7 C. The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) gives a greater than 83 percent chance that a very strong event continues through January–March 2027, with a meaningful chance of exceeding any El Niño on record since 1950. Strong El Niño winters typically bring a split jet stream that weakens Pacific storms as they reach Washington and Oregon. The North Pacific remains in a cool phase of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO), which adds uncertainty to how far north storms track. Day-to-day fire weather will still depend on regional ridging, frontal passages and onshore or offshore flow, and strong offshore wind events are most likely at the end of prolonged ridging.

CPC favors above normal temperatures for November and for December–February across Oregon and Washington, with the highest chances (50–60 percent) over Washington and northern Oregon. A milder background will slow the transition to cool-season conditions, though Arctic outbreaks and valley cold spells remain possible.

CPC shows equal chances for November precipitation. For December–February, CPC leans slightly toward above normal along the coast and in western Oregon, highest in southwest Oregon, with equal chances east of the Cascades. This north–south pattern is typical of a strong El Niño, which tends to steer the stronger storms into California and southern Oregon. Wetting systems should become more frequent, but coverage and duration may be uneven, particularly in Washington.

The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook shows drought removal or improvement along the coast and in parts of western Oregon by January 31, but removal appears optimistic given only a slight wet lean and long-term deficits that include severe to extreme drought in the southern Willamette Valley and Cascades. Some improvement is more likely along the coast and in southwest Oregon, while drought persists across most of central and eastern Oregon and Washington.

Currently, the winter of 2023–24 is the most favored analog, as the only recent strong El Niño that also had a strongly cool PDO. November 2023 was mild and dry, with about 75–80 percent of normal precipitation. December–February was about 2°F above normal in Oregon with above-normal precipitation, but much of it fell as rain at lower and middle elevations. By late February, snowpack was 50–89 percent of median across much of Washington and western Oregon and near to above median farther east. A multi-day Arctic outbreak in mid-January still brought valley snow and ice that winter.

Other analogs include 1972–73 and 1982–83, both strong El Niños with a neutral to slightly cool PDO, which also had a dry November before diverging. 1972–73 was cold and dry with a prolonged December Arctic outbreak, while 1982–83 was mild and wet, with about 135 percent of normal precipitation in Oregon and well-above-median snowpack. Across past strong El Niño events, November was usually drier than normal and winters usually mild, but winter precipitation and snowpack varied widely. Analogs remain secondary to real-time fuels and weather, and none of the three analog winters produced significant fire activity.

Significant fire potential is expected to remain normal across all PSAs from November through February. Although drought persists and a mild, dry start to November is favored, long nights, low sun angle, higher humidity, and periodic wetting systems will keep burn periods short and limit fire spread. Scattered smaller fires remain possible during extended dry spells, and winter burn projects in the Coast Range are most at risk when a prolonged dry period is followed by an east wind event. Even with above normal temperatures favored, the likelihood of significant incidents remains very low.

Northern California and Hawai'i

Significant fire potential is projected to be normal from November through February. During November, one large fire is typically observed across northern California on average, with an average of less than one each month from December through February. Hawaii's significant fire potential is normal for November through February.

October weather patterns were largely dominated by a blocking ridge during most of the month that transitioned towards more troughing late in the month. A fall heat wave occurred October 3-8. An unusually moist and cool period occurred October 19-23 and brought widespread wetting precipitation to the region, including snow above 8,000 feet. Precipitation was near to below normal for the month across the region. Average temperatures were above normal across most of the area although near normal across the North Coast Predictive Services Area (PSA). Nearly 650 lightning strikes were recorded through October 28. The 2000-2025 Vaisala lightning average for October is a little over 1,200, therefore strike counts were around half the average. Red Flag Warnings were issued by the National Weather Service on six separate days due to dry and breezy winds, that were mainly northerly and/or offshore. High-Risk Significant Fire Potential was issued by Predictive Services on four separate days due to the wind events. The two strongest dry northerly/offshore wind events occurred during October 11-12 and 15-16.

Dead fuel moisture was unusually low through October 21 then readings fluctuated between slightly below and slightly above average for the rest of the month. Regional Energy Release Component values were at or above the 90th percentile for five days. Live shrub moisture readings were generally near to a little below normal during October and at minimum levels for the year, and therefore flammable to critically flammable. Herbaceous fuels were generally cured. The U.S.

Drought Monitor on October 27 showed moderate drought across the northern and eastern tier and represented no change from late September. The two-month Evaporative Demand Drought Index values on October 26 indicated near to below normal vegetative stress across the area.

Wildfire business was steady during October, with the daily wildfire ignition averaging 11.6 through October 27, which was a little above the monthly 2008-2025 daily ignition average of 9.1. A total of two large fires were reported through October 27. The largest was nearly 1,400 acres in an oak woodland, hard to access environment found in Mendocino County. None of the large fires required a Complex Incident Management Team (CIMT) to manage them. The regional large fire average for October based on a 1992-2025 database is 4.4. The regional preparedness level remained at two for the entire month. Prescribed burning noticeably increased with several broadcast or understory burns implemented in many fuel types.

There will be several coupled ocean and atmospheric states in play during the next several months but the very strong El Nino will likely be the main player for regional weather patterns. The latest model guidance remains persistent for a general trend towards above normal precipitation from November through February. Average temperature anomalies are likely to be mixed due to mixed guidance suggestions. The number of dry and gusty wind events should be near to below normal with jet stream being split due to a hyperactive southern branch of the jet stream due to El Nino.

Based on the current fuel state and future weather predictions, normal significant fire potential is projected for November through February which means very little large fire activity overall. November will likely be the transition month towards unusually moist, less flammable conditions with noticeable herbaceous green-up likely across the lower elevations by the end of the month. If any dry and gusty wind periods occur prior to the notable lower elevation green-up, then some modest fire spread will be possible in the grass-oak woodland dominated landscapes. During November, an average of one large fire is typically observed across northern California with less than one each month from December through February.

Sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies surrounding the Hawai'ian Islands were mixed but generally near average during October. Two multi-day tropical moisture surges impacted the island chain during the month and helped to create mixed precipitation anomalies. Average temperature anomalies were also mixed. Drought was not found across the island chain and the amount of abnormally dry conditions found on the U.S. Drought Monitor changed very little between late September to late October. As a result of an active tropical season, herbaceous fuels are greener than normal with abundant growth, although some areas were in a mixed phase. No Red Flag Warnings were issued by the National Weather Service last month.

The El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is in a very strong El Nino state and will influence the island's weather patterns during the next four months. Mixed temperature anomalies are likely to continue with a lean towards drier than normal precipitation amounts as the outlook period progresses. This drier expectation creates concern for the later months as the abundant herbaceous fuel bed is likely to cure or partially cure across the leeward sides and support enhanced fire potential at times. There is also cured surface debris left over from the active tropical season. Normal significant fire potential is projected for the four-month outlook period at this time but will be reassessed in future outlooks.

Southern California

October was a notably warm month across the region, as a scorching heatwave over the month's first ten days easily offset the more seasonable and variable conditions over the last three weeks of the month. Most areas ended 2-6°F above normal, warmest in coastal areas where much warmer than normal offshore waters continue to produce a coastal warming effect. For the second month in a row, a significant rainfall event enhanced by a remnant tropical cyclone occurred, this time related to Hurricane Rachel. Once again, effects were greatest over southern California. An

additional widespread rain event occurred about a week later, and precipitation ended up vastly above normal over southern California, while it was closer to normal over most of central California.

A moderate to strong Santa Ana wind event occurred from October 14-17, after the rainfall event associated with Rachel. Multiple significant wildfires occurred across Orange County, despite 1.5 to 2 inches of rainfall occurring just days prior. Several smaller fires also occurred elsewhere in the region during that wind event. Subsequent wetter and less windy weather brought rapid containment of this fire activity and a lack of fire activity for the remainder of the month.

Latest U.S. Drought Monitor shows little in the way of drought over central and southern California, with just some moderate drought over the southern California deserts. Abnormally dry conditions persist across much of interior California, but these areas are not in jeopardy of any further degradation as cool season rains have already started to arrive.

The hot and dry conditions early in the month drove dead fuel moistures to well below average values and produced a considerable spike in Energy Release Component (ERC). However, rainfall and cooler weather over the second half of the month dramatically moderated the fire environment. Rainfall of this significance typically does not arrive until a few weeks later in the season, so dead fuel moistures are now well above normal across the region, with ERCs well below normal, and these conditions are likely to exist for the foreseeable future.

The rainfall in October is also starting to affect live fuel moisture (LFM). Quantitative LFM data reflecting the recent moisture is limited but will likely start to be reflected in upcoming readings. Visual observations also confirm new grass growth is increasingly prevalent across the lower elevations, significantly reducing potential for fire spread.

A very strong to near record strength El Niño event continues across the equatorial Pacific. This event is likely to peak in the next couple of months, and it is certain that very strong El Niño conditions will be in place throughout this winter. Very warm sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies also extend from the California coast and southward, and across broad swaths of the mid and higher latitudes of the Pacific.

There is no change in forecast expectations heading into the deeper cool season months. A balance of climate modeling combined with the very strong El Niño conditions strongly favor above normal precipitation through the remainder of this fall and winter, especially from December onward. Despite the warmth of early October, the expected pattern should also favor below normal temperatures as frequent troughing affects the region, more in line with conditions over the second half of October. The pattern is also expected to favor troughs moving in from the Pacific as opposed to dropping southward over interior North America, likely bringing a below normal number of Santa Ana wind events.

We may see substantial variation in snow levels this winter. The El Niño pattern will likely favor the occurrence of at least a couple of significant storms featuring high snow levels thanks to lower latitude moisture connections. However, these will also likely be interspersed with colder systems, as the SST pattern favors an active storm track from the Gulf of Alaska as well. The potential for severe hydrologic impacts this winter should not be underestimated. Moisture projections in some of the climate modeling far exceed any prior years' projections, even other strong El Niño years. While there are no guarantees, a winter of extreme or even historic storminess over our region is possible.

The potential for significant wildfire activity is expected to remain very low throughout the forecast period. Flammability across the landscape has already been broadly reduced by the moisture received so far. Near normal significant fire potential is indicated throughout the outlook period across the region, which is little to no significant fire activity.

Northern Rockies

The outlook for November through February for the Northern Rockies Geographic Area (NRGA) will be normal for all areas. Precipitation in October was above normal in southwest Montana through north central Montana which covers areas prone to leeside wind driven fires. Weather during the last week of the month into early November is expected to bring more precipitation to north Idaho and southeast Montana and parts of North Dakota which will mitigate current dry spots in the NRGA. The favorable October moisture and decreasing burn periods in November with shorter days support the normal outlook in the late fall and through the winter.

Weather events centered around October 10-11 and October 23-24 brought rain and snow to a large portion of western and central Montana. Late month precipitation is expected to favor north Idaho and northwest Montana and parts of North Dakota. This should continue the trend observed over the past few months where most of the drought in the NRGA has been reduced by 50%. Only small portions of north Idaho and eastern Montana are reporting severe to extreme drought. North Dakota is reporting 31% coverage of severe to extreme drought.

Most of the month was favorable for prescribed fire with airsheds experiencing periodic favorable ventilation. One large fire was reported in northwest Montana October 17 which also was the last 70 degree day of the month for portions of western Montana.

December through February outlooks lean above normal for temperatures and below normal for precipitation across the NRGA. Fire activity is rare in this period in the NRGA and limited coverage of severe to extreme drought support minimal chances of significant wildland fire despite the weather outlooks.

Great Basin

Overall wildfire potential has decreased area wide due to above normal precipitation across much of the area in October. A few drier spots remain where the precipitation was more localized, such as western Nevada and southwest Idaho. A storm moving through the Great Basin in early November should bring at least light precipitation to these areas, further decreasing wildfire potential in those areas.

Temperatures over the last 30 days have been normal to above normal across the area. Precipitation was 200-600% above normal across parts of Utah, eastern Nevada and southeast Idaho. However, western Nevada and western Idaho saw much less precipitation with values only 10-50% of normal. The U.S. Drought Monitor has most southern and central areas in moderate to extreme drought, with portions of southwest Idaho and northeast Nevada observing exceptional drought.

Fire danger values remain generally below normal for the time of year across the region. Most fire weather zones have lowered back to non-critical status where fuels are not in a state that will carry fire or support wildfire activity. Fuels across western Nevada and western Idaho have benefitted from the recent, light precipitation and with more precipitation in the forecast these fuels will likely lower to non-critical status in the coming weeks.

There were a few wildfires in western Nevada at the very beginning of the month, including one that was managed by a Type 3 Incident Management Team, but overall fire activity decreased rapidly after those first few days and was very light for the remainder of the month.

Overall wildfire activity is expected to be normal, which is typically very low, through the fall and winter months across the Great Basin. While this is generally true, any extended warm, dry, and windy periods that develop over western Nevada during this time may temporarily increase the potential for short-duration, fast-moving grass wildfires along the Sierra Front.

Southwest

Normal significant fire potential is anticipated across much of the Southwest Area (SWA) through February.

Active troughing combined with a robust Pacific hurricane season led to an unsettled September and October in which the SWA saw repeated rounds of precipitation, strong winds, and severe weather. Historic rainfall in September followed by continued bouts of precipitation in October has led to a widespread reduction in fuel combustibility. The resulting moisture has worked to offset antecedent drought conditions, with the previously exceptional drought being eliminated from northern New Mexico. Likewise, much of central and southern Arizona has seen drought removed.

Ongoing El Niño conditions and its historic intensification will dominate the overall pattern for late fall and into early winter. Forecast guidance overall suggests that November will trend in a similar fashion to its predecessors, with frequent cold air intrusions and bouts of precipitation. This scenario is likely to continue into early 2027 as El Niño approaches its peak.

How the pattern relates to snowpack throughout the outlook period will be dependent on temperature. Should similar conditions to the favored 2015-16 analog prevail, snowpack will be hindered by warmer than normal conditions. The result would be less compaction of fine fuels throughout winter, leading to broader fire carrying capacity as El Nino wanes this spring. Otherwise, significant fires should not be a concern during the outlook period.

Rocky Mountain

October turned very wet for at least part of the Rocky Mountain Area (RMA), leading to continued moderated fire weather conditions. Temperatures, however, remained above average for the month. The rains brought some improvement to drought conditions across Colorado and Wyoming. Moving into the fall and winter, El Niño conditions will persist, bringing more favorable weather and normal significant fire potential across the RMA.

October started out with a relatively dry week, but then the pattern shifted starting mid-month. A series of increasingly wet storm systems moved through the southwestern U.S. and into the RMA through the end of the month. Southwest Colorado was especially impacted by heavy rains with some areas in the mountains above Pagosa Springs seeing more than 10 inches of precipitation for October. Wyoming and the central Plains states into northeast Colorado still generally saw a little less precipitation than is normally expected. Temperatures continued to be above normal even though the storm systems brought brief cool downs. Southwest Colorado was only a couple of degrees above average, while much of the rest of the RMA was 3-6°F warmer than normal. Drought conditions improved with the wetter conditions on the West Slope, improving to mostly moderate drought on the U.S. Drought Monitor. Central Colorado into eastern Wyoming and the Nebraska Panhandle continue in extreme to exceptional drought. El Niño, warmer temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, has continued to strengthen through the month, warmer than all previous recorded El Niño events.

Flooding rains in southern Colorado brought steadily increasing fuel moisture, continuing the trend of moderating fire danger. Parts of the northern half of the RMA have seen fuel conditions align for fall season prescribed fire windows. Fuels are not susceptible to large fire growth, but fire danger will not be minimal until consistent snow covers most dormant fuels. Fuels continue to enter dormancy, even with the consistent precipitation in October.

Fire activity within the RMA stayed minimal for the month of October. There was one new large fire in northern Wyoming, which only burned actively for one operational period. Most fire activity has transitioned from the suppression of wildfires to the implementation of prescribed fire during the fall season. Large fires from the summer months are still not 100% contained but continue to show minimal activity and no new growth.

The short-term pattern continuing through November keeps the potential for wetter weather across southern Colorado and generally normal weather in other portions of the RMA. Moving forward as the El Niño continues to strengthen to near historic values, the southern third of the RMA will still be favored for above normal precipitation through February. Temperature will also generally be close to average, though the central Plains have a better chance to see warmer temperatures. As storm systems track across the RMA, expect brief periods of stronger winds, some of which could produce gusts over 70 mph, typical for this time of year.

Weather conditions going into November will continue to support favorable fire weather, as will the developing very strong El Niño through the remainder of the outlook period. Across the RMA, the significant fire potential will be normal through the November to February outlook period. However, due to the potential for increased wind events in the fall and winter, brief periods of elevated fire potential may occur, particularly following stretches of warm, dry weather. These elevated conditions are expected to be short-lived, generally lasting no more than one or two operational periods.

Eastern Area

Normal significant fire potential is forecast for most of the Eastern Area through February. While Missouri has been in drought for the past two months due to very dry conditions, a wet storm is expected to begin November. In addition, while the rest of the month may lean drier than normal, periodic light to moderate precipitation is expected to keep potential closer to normal.

For October, temperatures were above normal across most of the Eastern Area, with temperatures 5-10°F above normal for much of the Midwest. Temperatures in the Mid-Atlantic were slightly above normal, ranging 1-3°F above normal, while the Northeast was near normal.

Precipitation across the Eastern Area was mostly below normal for October. Areas that received the lowest totals relative to normal were the Upper Midwest, Northeast, and portions of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, which received less than 50% of normal precipitation. Areas in the Upper Midwest received most of their precipitation in the past ten days. Areas of above normal precipitation were limited to portions of Iowa, West Virginia, western Maryland, and southwest Pennsylvania.

In the Midwest and Great Lakes, drought persists from northeast Minnesota to Upper Michigan, with localized extreme to exceptional drought in northern Wisconsin. Drought also persists in much of southern Missouri and southern Illinois, with portions of southwest Missouri in extreme to exceptional drought. Drought also persists across portions of northern New England and now covers most of Maine. Given the precipitation patterns of the past month, drought developed and/or intensified in the Mid-Mississippi Valley, Upper Michigan, and northern New England. Drought improvement was limited across the region the past month.

Periods of increased initial attack across multiple states continued in drought areas of the Eastern Area during October, with live fuel stress and periods of warm, dry, windy events. Areas of extensive drought may result in periods of increased initial attack and extended mop-up during this outlook period, mainly during long dry periods with increased winds. The entire Eastern Area will complete the transition during this outlook period from a live fuel system to a dead fuel system with normal late fall and over-winter wildfire activity. This is usually minimal except along the southern tier where occasional spikes in activity occur. Periods of increased wildfire activity will

occur in areas that do not receive long-duration soaking rains from frontal systems or at least frequent short-duration rains that maintain wet surface fuels.

The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) forecasts above-normal temperatures for the entire Eastern Area November through February, consistent with the very strong El Niño conditions in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. However, one or two short to moderate duration Arctic outbreaks are possible as the Polar Vortex is currently weaker than normal which may continue through the winter and result in a neutral to negative Arctic Oscillation. Precipitation will lean below normal for the Great Lakes but may lean above normal in portions of the Mid-Mississippi Valley and Mid-Atlantic coast, with equal chances for above or below normal precipitation elsewhere.

As a result, normal significant fire potential is forecast for the Eastern Area through February. While areas of drought in the Upper Midwest, Missouri, and northern New England are concerning, recent or expected precipitation in the first week of November is expected to decrease potential, although brief spikes in potential are possible the latter half of November if warm temperatures and dry and breezy conditions align. Then, over the winter, seasonality of cold temperatures and periods of at least light precipitation will keep potential close to normal, which is minimal.

Southern Area

Significant drought has plagued much of the Southern Area the past year. These underlying conditions still linger in many areas, but rainfall and Gulf moisture in early November will at least temporarily moderate some of the dryness that intensified over the last month from the eastern Plains through the Mississippi Valley. Killing freezes have been limited to the High Plains and Texas mountains, portions of Kentucky, and higher elevations of the Appalachians. There are no clear signs of widespread or unusually cold weather over the next couple of weeks, but color changes are under way in the mountains, and leaf drop or needle cast is occurring in lower elevations of the eastern Plains states, Mississippi Valley, and Southeast due to the late summer heat and long-term drought.

It is too early for a complete picture of fuel loading in the southern Plains, but confidence is high that the Texas Hill Country will have an inherent risk of fires due to abundant grasses from the devastating flooding that occurred in July 2025 and again this July. For the most part, this year's grass crop began to cure out during the late summer and early fall heat. Once killing freezes occur, this part of central and southwest Texas will have to be watched closely for any extended warm, dry, and windy spells. These conditions may not align until next spring, however. Increasingly available Helene fuels in the Southeast and ice storm debris in the Mississippi Valley may both play outsized roles in fire activity if weather conditions align.

The forecast for normal significant fire potential in November is largely due to low confidence in what to expect for the traditional peak of the fall fire season. Rainfall and warm temperatures in early November could result in some greening of herbaceous fuels and roadside grasses over western and central portions of the geographic area, similar to what occurred in the Plains during October. Frequency of precipitation events through the rest of the month is highly uncertain, and the timing of leaf drop and dormancy in some areas is also not clear. Weather models have been struggling with forecast details of late, and El Niño's wetter weather may not reliably kick in until winter. Forcing from the Madden-Julian Oscillation, another tropical driver of global weather patterns, along with a potential stratospheric warming event in early November, could interact or interfere with El Niño later in the month, but in unpredictable ways. It should also be noted that global ocean heat content continues to set records, and historically warm water associated with El Niño in the Pacific is centered farther east than in any other modern event. Bottom line: what we are seeing is unprecedented and leads to higher uncertainty than usual.

November's areas of potential concern include well-established drought across the Lower Mississippi Valley, in addition to large portions of the Carolinas into Virginia that have been exceptionally dry for two years in a row. Timbered areas in eastern Oklahoma and east Texas should receive substantial rainfall early in the month, but there is the potential for an extended period of drier weather thereafter. Additionally, the Appalachians have continued to see rain chances dwindle and will enter November without wetting rainfall in more than three weeks, a critical threshold this time of year. Heavy dead fuels from Helene's impacts have been consumed in lower elevation fires this year, a sign that more significant fires could occur if long stretches of dry weather follow leaf drop. Throughout all these areas, it may be best to be prepared for a worst-case scenario until El Niño's expected wet weather becomes established.

Fire activity normally decreases quickly in early December, and this is currently anticipated for the month. Once we move past the shortest days of the year, fires typically begin to increase in frequency and size over the Florida Peninsula, with this trend spreading north quickly during February. This year, the historically strong El Niño has the potential to result in very wet conditions for the coastal Southeast, where NOAA's confidence is highest in a wet November to February period. Most of the geographic area is favored to see above average precipitation into early next year, but this is not as certain as in the coastal Southeast. A southward-displaced storm track could mean that winter storms will impact fuels and the fire environment, when or if Arctic air ever comes into the picture. Periods of unusual warmth that have been common all year should continue to appear now and then. Below normal significant fire potential is expected over the Florida Peninsula in January, expanding to cover coastal Mississippi and Alabama, north Florida, south Georgia, and coastal South Carolina in February. If these conditions occur as expected, a significant prescribed fire deficit extending from drought this year followed by conditions that are too wet could mean that fuels are abundant leading into the spring fire season.

Some drought relief has occurred in the Caribbean, but conditions remain unusually dry for this time of year, like the most recent very strong El Niño in 2015-2016. Drier and warmer than average conditions in November and December will result in above normal significant fire potential as drought lingers. Thereafter, seasonal guidance indicates that wetter weather could encroach from the north, and El Niño winters do tend to trend wetter there as time goes on. For now, normal significant fire potential is forecasted in January and February for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. If drier trends hold, then conditions could be ripe for fire activity once intrusions of less humid air move in behind cold fronts.

Outlook Objectives

The National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook is intended as a decision support tool for wildland fire managers, providing an assessment of current weather and fuels conditions and how these will evolve in the next four months. The objective is to assist fire managers in making proactive decisions that will improve protection of life, property, and natural resources, increase fire fighter safety and effectiveness, and reduce firefighting costs.

For questions about this outlook, please contact the National Interagency Coordination Center at (208) 387-5400 or contact your local Geographic Area Predictive Services unit.

Note: Additional Geographic Area assessments may be available at the specific GACC websites. The GACC websites can also be accessed through the NICC webpage at:
http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/predictive/outlooks/outlooks.htm