

Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Northern and Central Great Plains

Date Advisory Effective – March 20, 2026

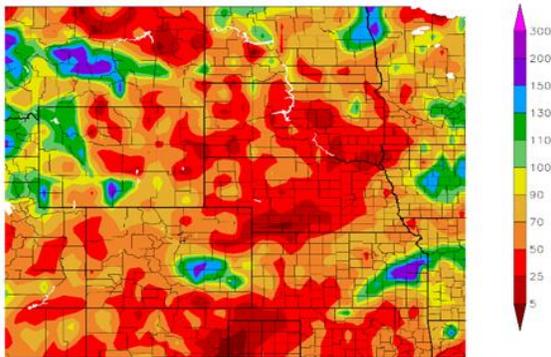


Subject: Historically dry fuels are leading to extreme rates of fire spread and fire behavior not typically seen in March. The forecast for the rest of March shows little opportunity for widespread moisture and fuels will continue to dry. Greenup may be delayed due to a lack of soil moisture leading to an extension of the spring wildfire season.

Discussion: A widespread snow drought across the affected region has led to cured grass fuels. These fuels remain vertically oriented which allows for faster rates of fire spread. Warmer than average and windier than average conditions since mid-December has led to flash drought conditions, low soil moisture, and very low dead fuel moisture across all time-lag categories. The upper level ridge that has led to historic temperatures across the western US will begin to break down which could bring further high wind events to the driest areas.

Difference from Normal Conditions: Much of the region has seen less than 50% of its average 90-day precipitation along with much above average temperatures. Many RAWS stations across the advisory area have been showing record or near-record high ERCs and record or near-record low 100- and 1000-hr fuel moisture. Several wildfires in Nebraska grew in excess of 100,000 acres while the Qury Fire (~9,000 acres) near Custer, SD exhibited group tree torching and crown runs in Ponderosa Pine.

Percent of Normal Precipitation (%)
12/19/2025 – 3/18/2026



Generated 3/19/2026 using provisional data.

ACIS Web Services

Figure 1:
Percent of Normal Precipitation 12/19/2025 – 3/18/2026



Figure 2:
Record ERC's for central/southern Black Hills and surrounding foothills/grasslands



Figure 3:
Qury Fire near Custer, SD exhibited group torching and crown runs



Figure 4:
High spread rates in cured fuels Moreau River Fire, Cheyenne River Reservation, SD

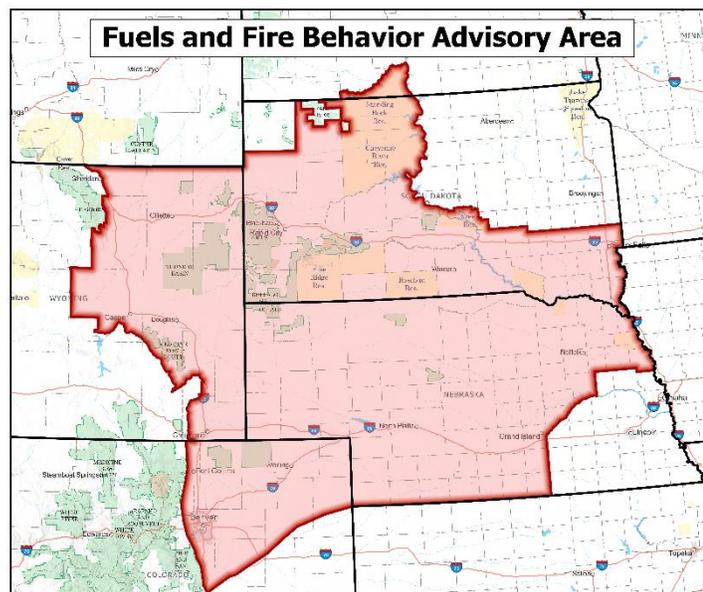
Concerns to Firefighters and the Public:

- Critical fire weather patterns include the pre- and post-cold front environment as well as dry line passages.
 - Frontal passages can change direction of fire spread
 - Winds above 35 mph can extreme rates of spread exceeding 3-5 mph in grasslands with non-critical humidity
- High potential for group tree torching and crown runs in forested areas
 - Spotting potential in excess of ¼ mile
- Record fuel dryness
- Increased fuel loading from December 2025 blowdown event in the greater Black Hills area
- Extended mop up due to dry organic soil layers and fire burning into the root structure of trees
- Increased burn periods due to poor overnight humidity recovery

Mitigation Measures:

- Expect longer duration and more complex initial/extended attack, with increased resource commitment and additional equipment needs
- Modify tactics to account for potential high rapid rates of spread and high resistance to control
- Communicate retardant drop effectiveness and modify as necessary; higher coverage levels or altered tactics may be required
- Pay close attention to weather forecasts and timing of frontal passages especially in grassy fuels
- Higher fire intensities will support the need for larger safety zones. Be aware of slower travel times and potential access issues in blowdown areas
- Ensure solid anchor points – keep one foot in the black
- Park all vehicles in clean, cold black; avoid driving or parking in unburned fuels
- The public should avoid areas in the vicinity of ongoing fires and heed evacuation notices if fires occur near their communities
- Severity Staffing (Short and Long Term) to increase both ground and fire aviation operations. Including heavy equipment operations being added where needed for bladed lines to mineral soil.
- Monitoring the weekly US Drought Monitor Map and daily SD Grassland Fire Danger Index with local fire weather forecasts for changes as needed to increase or decrease fire staffing in areas of concern.

Area of Concern: Northeastern CO, Western and southern SD, eastern WY, and all but southeastern NE. We acknowledge that the higher elevations of the northern Black Hills are not yet critical but have included that area for map continuity.



Issued By: Rocky Mountain GACC in coordination with state, tribal, and federal partners.