

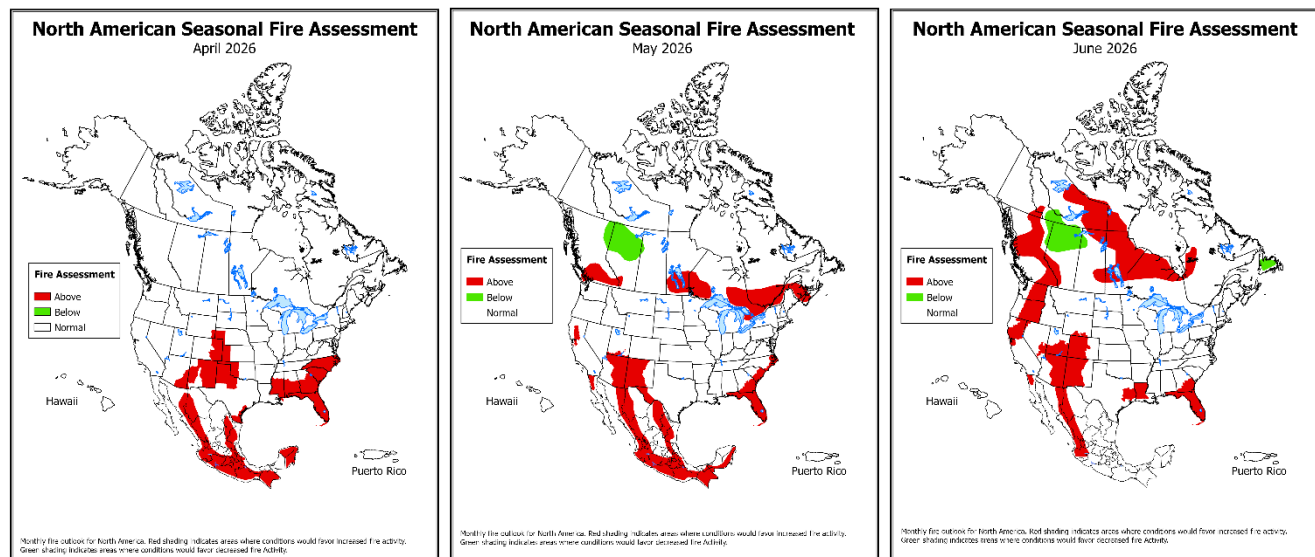
North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook

National Interagency Fire Center • Natural Resources Canada • Servicio Meteorológico Nacional
United States Canada Mexico

Outlook Period April through June 2026
Issued 15 April 2026

Executive Summary

March brought highly variable weather to Canada, with brief periods of early spring warmth affecting parts of southern Canada while much of the country, especially northern and eastern regions, remained colder than normal overall. Repeated storm systems also brought a mix of heavy snowfall, freezing rain, and intense rainfall to the west and east coasts, and Ontario and Québec. Overall, March was marked by lingering winter cold across much of northern Canada, brief but notable warm spells in the south, and a series of storms that produced a wide range of impacts from region to region.



Monthly fire outlook for North America for April 2026 (left), May 2026 (middle), and June 2026 (right). Red shading indicates areas where conditions would favor increased fire activity. Green shading indicates areas where conditions would favor decreased fire activity. [Click on each image to see larger versions.](#)

Atlantic Canada experienced mixed conditions in March. In the Maritimes, below-normal temperatures early in the month quickly shifted to well above normal before colder conditions returned later in the month. Overall precipitation was near normal, but warmer storm systems often brought mixed precipitation and rain instead of snow, leading to below-normal snowfall in parts of New Brunswick, western Prince Edward Island, and southwestern Nova Scotia. Newfoundland and Labrador showed a strong contrast between the island and the mainland: Newfoundland was repeatedly affected by storm systems that brought above-average snowfall and precipitation in some areas, while Labrador remained much colder than normal. Several Labrador locations recorded one of their coldest Marches on record, while parts of Newfoundland reported exceptionally wet conditions including the wettest March on record in Corner Brook.

Québec and Ontario both saw strong north-south differences. In Québec, northern areas had well below normal temperature, and Kuujuaq recorded one of its coldest Marches on record. At the same time, a brief warm spell brought daily temperature records to several parts of the province. Southern

Québec was also affected by two freezing rain events in early and mid-March, with the heaviest impacts in the Outaouais, Laurentides, and along the St. Lawrence Valley. In Ontario, the far north stayed notably cold while the south was closer to normal overall. Northern parts of the province were especially snowy, while southern Ontario saw a short burst of record-breaking warmth around March 10 followed by freezing rain the next day, which caused widespread power outages throughout the Ottawa Valley, and heavy snow throughout northeastern areas beginning March 15.

Farther west and north, winter conditions persisted through much of March. The Canadian prairies were dominated by cold temperatures, frequent winter storms, and widespread above-average snowfall, especially in central Alberta. The most notable temperatures were in the northern prairies, where repeated Arctic air brought temperatures down to the -40s C. This contrasts significantly with the southern prairies, where multiple temperature swings brought rain, freezing drizzle and a significant snowfall mid-month that led to widespread avalanches and highway closures. Yukon also stood out for its severity, with one of its coldest Marches on record and several stations reporting record-low mean monthly temperatures. Early in the month, daily minimum temperatures dropped to near or below -40 C in some locations, reinforcing the unusually cold conditions across the North.

British Columbia experienced a different pattern, with a mix of near-normal to below-normal temperatures and generally near- to above-normal precipitation in many areas. A strong atmospheric river in mid-March contributed to heavy rainfall, rapid snowmelt, and elevated flood risk in parts of the province. Precipitation and snowfall varied considerably by location: some southern stations were unusually dry, while parts of the north and coast were much wetter and snowier than normal. Several stations in northern British Columbia also ranked among their coldest on record for March.

Fire activity in the U.S. increased in mid-March and continued at low to moderate levels into early April. March precipitation was below normal across most of the U.S., while temperatures were well above normal across most of the country. Precipitation was below normal for most of the country, as well, with much of the southern tier of the U.S. receiving less than 50% of normal rainfall. Drought increased across the country, with more than 60% of the country in drought as of April 7. In addition, much of the West is in a snow drought, with a notable lack of snow at all but the highest elevations.

The extremely warm March as evident as temperatures averaged more than 5.6 C (10°F) above normal in much of California into the central Rockies and Southwest, while the southern Plains to the Ohio and Tennessee Valleys averaged 3.3-3.9 C (7-10°F) above normal. More modestly above normal temperatures were observed in the Northwest, Upper Midwest, Northeast, and Florida, while well below normal temperatures continued in Alaska. Temperatures across California into the Great Basin, Southwest, and southern Plains were dominated by an unprecedented early season heat wave March 15-25. Many locations not only set record high temperatures for March during this heat wave, but a few would have been record-high values for April, as well. As a result of this heat wave, most locations have their all-time warmest March on record, in many cases exceeding the previous record by up to 3.3 C (6°F), where these values would have been in the top-ten warmest Aprils if they occurred a month later. In fact, Las Vegas, Nevada's March average temperature of 22.8 C (73.0°F) would have exceeded the warmest ever April on record of 22.6 C (72.7°F) set in 1989.

Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late March forecast temperatures are likely to be above normal across most of the contiguous U.S., with precipitation expected to be below normal for most of the West into the central Plains but above normal along the East Coast. Much of the southern U.S. will have above normal significant fire potential in April, becoming more focused on the Southwest and Gulf Coast by June. Above normal potential is also expected to expand into much of the northwestern U.S. and Greater Four Corners in June.

As of the beginning of April, Mexico has recorded 2,332 wildfires affecting an area of 115,170 hectares. Although activity is currently ascending across the central, western, northern, northeastern, southern, and southeastern regions, the intensity of the peaks expected for April and May is projected to be moderated by favorable moisture profiles. Despite a dry February, the precipitation surplus during

January and March provided a significant soil moisture reserve, acting as a palliative factor against nationwide drought conditions.

The convergence of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) and the Pacific-North American (PNA) pattern in their negative phases, alongside the current neutral-to-El Niño transition, significantly reduces uncertainty in the seasonal forecast for Mexico. This configuration points toward a highly unstable spring, marked by significant heat and generally wetter-than-normal conditions across much of the country. According to the International Research Institute for Climate and Society seasonal forecast, these dynamics will drive distinct regional contrasts. Below normal precipitation is expected in the southeast (Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo) and parts of the Northeast (Nuevo León and Tamaulipas), but above normal rainfall is anticipated across the western and north-central regions, including Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Guanajuato, Michoacán, and Aguascalientes, as well as portions of Baja California, Chihuahua, Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Guerrero, and Oaxaca.

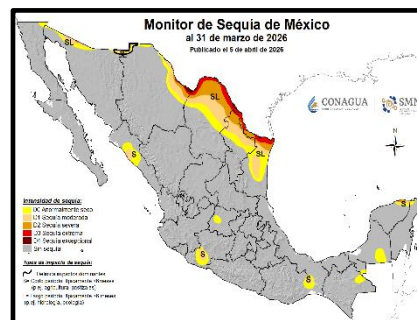
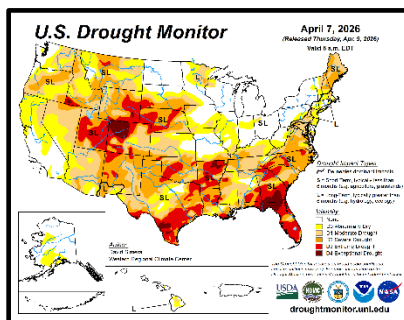
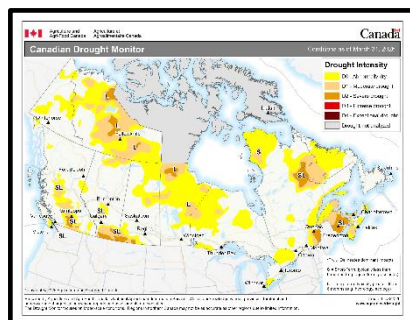
Should this outlook of humidity and above-normal temperatures occur, it will continue to modulate wildfire intensity across Mexico. While thermal stress will remain elevated nationwide, a rapid decrease in wildfire activity is anticipated in June due to the seasonal increase in moisture, except for northern Baja California, where the season typically extends through the end of the period.

Critical Factors

The critical factors influencing significant fire potential for this outlook period are global climate patterns related to sea surface temperatures, particularly in the Pacific Ocean, and large scale, longer-term soil moisture deficits:

El Niño-Southern Oscillation and Other Climate Teleconnections:

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) has transitioned to an ENSO-neutral state from La Niña, as sea surface temperatures (SSTs) have warmed to near average. However, a significant amount of warm water lurks below the surface, indicating a likely rapid transition to El Niño. The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) ENSO-neutral conditions to persist for most of the spring. El Niño conditions may develop as early as late spring, with a 60% chance forecast by the CPC, but are more likely to arise over the summer at a 90% probability. However, the strength of the El Niño is yet to be forecasted with confidence due to the spring predictability barrier. The Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) remains in a weak negative phase and has less impact on this forecast than prior years. The Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) has strengthened in the tropical western Pacific and is expected to continue to strengthen as it moves into the western hemisphere late in the month and has a significant impact on the outlook for April. Otherwise, the transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral conditions followed by El Niño will be the main driver of this outlook.



Left: [Canadian Drought Monitor](#) from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Middle: [United States Drought Monitor](#). Right: [Mexican Drought Monitor](#) from CONAGUA-Servicio Meteorológico Nacional.

Drought:

Improvements in drought conditions for much of Canada continued through March, with broad areas of western Canada as well as Ontario and Québec recording up to twice the climatological monthly mean precipitation. Regional deficits continued in several areas already experiencing long-term drought including the Northwest Territories and southern Alberta. As of March 31, 39% of Canada was in some stage of abnormal dryness, including 32% of its agricultural area. The area of abnormal dryness represents a 14% improvement from the February assessment, but much of the country's forested area remains abnormally dry or in moderate to severe drought. The largest contiguous region stretches from central Yukon, through most of the Northwest Territories, northern Saskatchewan and into northern Manitoba and Ontario. Of these, Northwest Territories, northern Manitoba and northeast Québec and Labrador show significant pockets of severe drought. Southern interior British Columbia, southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, southeastern Québec and most of New Brunswick also report smaller pockets of moderate and severe drought, which have already contributed to early spring wildfires.

Temperatures in March were above normal for much of the U.S., with temperatures well above normal for most of the West into the Plains, Lower Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee Valleys. In addition to the widespread warmth, precipitation was below normal across most of the U.S. for March. Precipitation less than 25% of normal was observed across large areas of California, the Great Basin, Southwest, and central and southern High Plains. Areas of above normal precipitation were limited to western Washington, the Idaho Panhandle, much of Montana, and the Great Lakes south to the Ohio River. Precipitation in Alaska was mostly well below normal, except for portions of the panhandle which were closer to normal. Hawai'i precipitation was well above normal for most areas due to two strong Kona Lows in mid-March. The beginning of April has turned wetter along most of the West Coast into the northern Intermountain West, but very dry conditions persist in the Southeast, with most areas receiving less than half of normal precipitation.

Snowpack across the western U.S. is well below normal, indicative of a snow drought, with many river basins from Oregon and California to the Great Basin, Colorado, and Southwest less than 25% of normal. Much of this was due to the heat wave that triggered a much earlier melt-off than normal, during a period of the year when the peak snowpack is observed in most locations. Several river basins in the Southwest and Great Basin have no snow at any of their monitoring stations, such as the Humboldt Basin in Nevada, and the Lower San Juan Basin in the Four Corners. The melt-off in these basins is not just several weeks or months earlier than normal, but also 4-6 weeks earlier than the previously recorded earliest melt-off dates.

Overall drought increased across the U.S. during March with more than 60% of the country in drought as of April 7. Drought developed and/or intensified in much of the West and Southeast. Drought also developed and intensified in portions of the Plains focused on Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota. Drought improved in much of the Mid-Mississippi Valley and Great Lakes with removal in many locations. Areas of extreme drought have expanded across the U.S. and is now found across more than 14% of the country. The most extensive extreme drought is in South Texas, Florida, South Georgia, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and the central Rockies. Exceptional drought has also expanded and now exists in western Colorado, South Texas, northern Arkansas, South Georgia, north Florida, and small portions of southwest Idaho and southeast Wyoming. However, drought has improved in much of Hawai'i due to the very wet month. It is important to note that the many areas of snow drought in the West are not yet reflected in the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Across Mexico during the second half of March, a series of weather systems, including cold fronts, jet streams, and low-pressure troughs, driven by the current atmospheric instability, resulted in above-average rainfall across the northwest, west-central, north-central, central, and southern regions, as well as the Yucatán Peninsula. These precipitation events directly contributed to a noticeable decrease in drought-stricken areas in southern Mexico and the Yucatán Peninsula, while effectively eliminating abnormally dry conditions in the states of Nayarit, Morelos, and Puebla.

In contrast, persistent dry conditions in the north and northeast led to a localized deterioration. Areas experiencing severe to exceptional drought expanded across Chihuahua and Coahuila, as well as northern Nuevo León and Tamaulipas. As of March 31, the nationwide extent of moderate to exceptional drought was 7.5%. This represents a slight increase of 0.6 percentage points compared to mid-March, reflecting the sharp contrast between significant regional recoveries and the intensifying moisture deficit along Mexico's northern border states.

Fire Season Status:

In Canada, fire activity in March was negligible, with most boreal areas still snow-covered at the end of the month. Exceptions were southern interior British Columbia and southern Alberta, where generally warm and dry conditions have brought some fire potential, but no notable fires. While April marks the administrative start of fire season in most Canadian jurisdictions, the potential as of early April is negligible thanks to continued cool temperatures, rain, or extensive snow cover except in the aforementioned regions.

In the U.S., fire activity increased in mid-March and remained at moderately elevated levels through early April. Most fire activity has been in the Southern Area, followed by portions of the Northern Rockies, Rocky Mountain, Southwest, and Eastern Areas. The most notable increase in activity occurred March 12 due to a fire outbreak in the central Plains focused on Nebraska. Large wind-driven fires emerged in Wyoming, western South Dakota, and the Nebraska Panhandle as winds gusted to 90 mph, including the Morrill Fire that burned over 235,000 hectares (640,000) acres across western Nebraska, which wasn't contained until March 25. In the Southeast, an active spring season continues due to widespread drought, with several large fires emerging every day.

Due to the observed increase in activity in the U.S., the National Preparedness Level increased to two (on a scale of 1-5) March 20, with the Southern Area at a geographic area Preparedness Level of three. As of April 14, 705,864 hectares (1,744,190 acres) have burned across the country, which is 200% of the previous 10-year average. So far this year 20,311 wildfires have been reported, also well above average, at 153%.

As the end of March, Mexico has recorded 2,332 wildfires across all 32 federal entities, affecting a total area of 115,170 hectares. Of the area burned, 98% consisted of grass and brush, while only 2% affected timber. The states with the highest number of wildfires were the State of Mexico, Jalisco, Mexico City, Puebla, Michoacán, Morelos, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chihuahua, and Hidalgo, which accounted for about 71% of the national total. The states with the largest burned areas were San Luis Potosí, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Zacatecas, Jalisco, Campeche, Chiapas, Guanajuato, State of Mexico, and Puebla which together represent 80% of the total area burned. From the national total of wildfires, 578 (25%) incidents occurred in fire-sensitive ecosystems. These incidents burned 34,052 hectares, equivalent to 30% of the total affected area.

Canada Discussion

April/May/June: For April, El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)-neutral conditions suggest variable versus persistent weather in most parts of Canada, with no clear trends in monthly temperature or precipitation. Widespread snow cover throughout the north and much of the west, and wet conditions in Atlantic Canada will continue to keep the potential for significant fire activity muted except in southern interior British Columbia and parts of the southern prairies, where moderate potential is expected to continue through April. Positive temperature anomalies are forecast for May in southern British Columbia, where fuels will likely be primed for fire activity, and in portions of southern Ontario and Québec, while there are some indications of cool temperatures through the far north and the northern prairies. This, combined with snow cover as of early April suggests a late start to the boreal fire season, but some potential in May for more frequent or larger fires in the southern prairies and southern British Columbia. For June, much of the country shows at least a moderate probability of positive temperature

anomalies, but these are particularly evident throughout British Columbia and Labrador as well as areas surrounding Hudson's Bay. Precipitation outlooks offer no clear signal and minimal skill. That, combined with likely ENSO-neutral conditions supports higher fire potential in June throughout British Columbia and areas surrounding James Bay, west of Hudson's Bay, and extending into the eastern Northwest Territories. Near-normal activity is expected in the rest of Canada in June.

United States Discussion

April/May/June: Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late March forecast above normal temperatures across most of the country, with above normal precipitation from the Great Lakes and Appalachians to the East Coast and below normal precipitation from most of the West to central Plains. In the West, April has begun wetter than expected, with above normal precipitation along the West Coast and into the northern Rockies. Much drier conditions are anticipated to begin sometime in May. In the eastern U.S., below normal precipitation persists in the Southeast and is expected to persist the rest of April before a gradual transition to wetter conditions in May.

Above normal significant fire potential is forecast for April across much of the central and southern High Plains into most of New Mexico and southeast Arizona. Above normal potential is also forecast across South Texas and much of the Southeast. In May, normal potential will return to the Plains and most of the Southeast, but above normal will persist for the southeast Atlantic coast and Florida. Above normal significant fire potential will also expand across the Southwest into far West Texas and extreme southern Utah, with another area of above normal potential forecast for the Sacramento Valley and East Bay. In June, above normal potential will continue in much of the Southwest, while also expected into much of southern Nevada, southern Utah, and the Colorado West Slope. Above normal potential will also expand across much of northern California and the Inland Northwest. In the Southeast, above normal potential is forecast to persist for South Georgia and Florida, while also expected for portions of East Texas and Louisiana.

Mexico Discussion

April/May/June: For the April-May-June period, a complex moisture profile is expected, with above normal precipitation projected across the vast majority of Mexico. This outlook suggests a continuation of wet conditions for a significant portion of the country, potentially acting as a natural moderator for wildfire intensity during the peak of the season.

Regarding thermal patterns, above normal maximum temperatures are expected to prevail across most of the nation. However, a notable exception is forecast for the Baja California Peninsula and scattered regions in the north, northeast, west, central, east, south, and southeast, where maximum temperatures are anticipated to remain below normal. This thermal contrast, driven by the atmospheric instability of the ENSO-neutral transition, will be a defining characteristic of the spring season.

Considering current temperature and precipitation patterns, national drought status, and seasonal forecasts, wildfire activity is expected to escalate across most of Mexico during April and May. While activity typically reaches its seasonal peak during these months, this spring is projected to be comparatively less warm due to slightly above average rainfall, which will enhance soil moisture and effectively modulate fire intensity. The climate forecast through June indicates a prevalence of warm and humid conditions. However, while patterns remain close to climatological averages under the influence of weak La Niña conditions, the transitioning to ENSO-neutral in May keeps the potential for extreme dry or wet events. This variability is driven by the modulating influence of the PDO and PNA patterns, which, despite their complexity, maintain a degree of certainty regarding the ENSO transition. In summary, a highly unstable and wetter than normal spring is expected compared to previous years, though significant heat will still characterize the season.

The greatest potential for wildfire activity will continue across the major mountain ranges of Mexico, the Sierra Madre Occidental and Sierra Madre Oriental, southern Mexico, portions of the Yucatan Peninsula, and northern Baja Peninsula. These risks are driven by the ongoing dry season, further modulated by the spring transition. As environmental conditions gradually deteriorate, wildfire activity is expected to intensify, reaching relative peaks during April and May. Subsequently, a shift in activity is anticipated toward northern Baja California, where the fire season will initiate in May and continue through the remainder of the period.

Additional Information

Additional and supplemental information for this outlook can be obtained at:

United States:

National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook

https://www.nifc.gov/nicc-files/predictive/outlooks/monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf

Canada:

Canadian Wildland Fire Information System

<https://cwfis.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca>

Mexico:

Servicio Meteorológico Nacional

<https://smn.conagua.gob.mx/es/observando-el-tiempo/monitoreo-atmosferico-ambiental>

Outlook Objective

The North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook is a general discussion of conditions that will affect the occurrence of wildland fires across Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Wildland fire is a natural part of many ecosystems across North America. This document provides a broad assessment of those factors that will contribute to an increase or decrease of seasonal fire activity. The objective is to assist wildland fire managers in preparing for the potential variations in a typical fire season. It is not intended as a prediction of where and when wildland fires will occur nor is it intended to suggest any area is safe from the hazards of wildfire.

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Contributions to this document were made by:

Canada: Richard Carr, Natural Resources Canada
Michael Smith, Natural Resources Canada
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United States: Jim Wallmann, Predictive Services Meteorologist, US Forest Service
Julie Osterkamp, GIS, Bureau of Land Management
Steve Larrabee, Predictive Services Fire Analyst, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Mexico: Roberto Pineda León, Servicio Meteorológico Nacional
Martín Ibarra Ochoa, Servicio Meteorológico Nacional
Darío Rodríguez Rangel, Servicio Meteorológico Nacional
José L. Solís Aguirre, Servicio Meteorológico Nacional