North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook

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

Outlook Period December 2025 through February 2026
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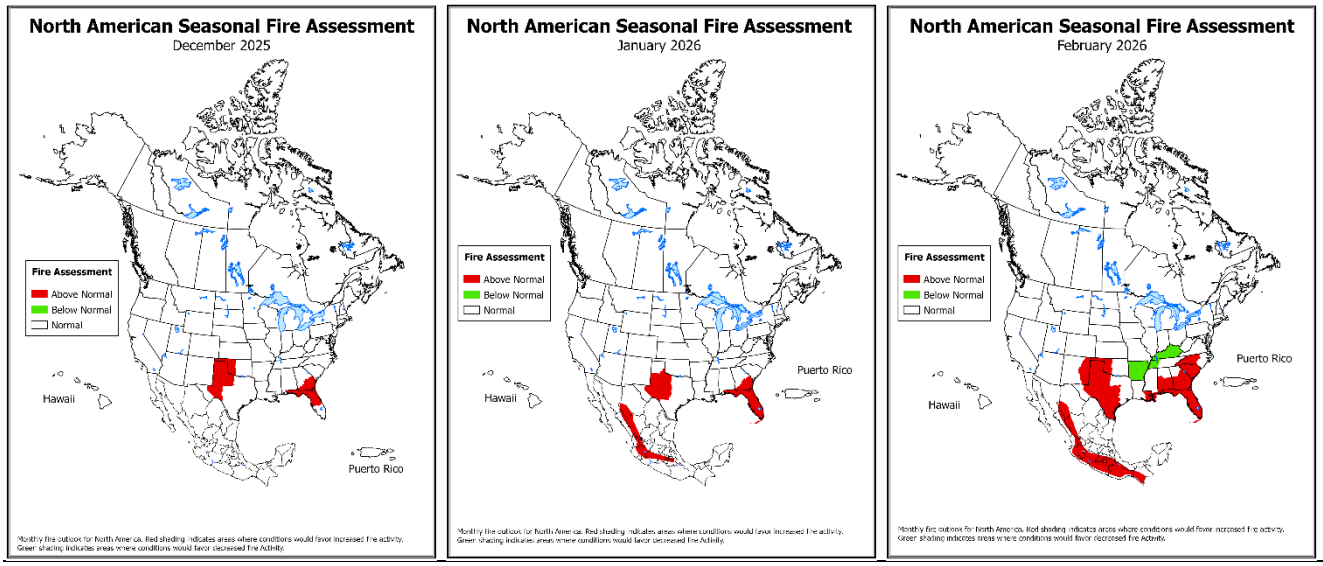
Executive Summary

La Niña played a key role in driving Canada's November weather. The hurricane season ended with minimal impact on the Atlantic provinces. The polar vortex helped to return Atlantic Canada to a more typical fall/winter weather pattern with significant precipitation throughout the month. A wintertime weather pattern also set up on the West Coast with numerous troughs and fronts moving inland. Moisture on both coasts is likely to help ease the impacts of a dry summer and autumn in a few regions, though it will not remove the widespread drought conditions. Snowfall did not occur on the Prairies until the last week of the month.



Monthly fire outlook for North America for December 2025 (left), January 2026 (middle), and February 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.*

In November, it was warmer than normal for most of the country. All the western Territories, British Columbia, and the Prairies were warmer than normal and western Hudson Bay had the highest temperature anomalies. Makkovik and Nain, Labrador both had their warmest November on record. In the Chilcotin region (British Columbia), daily maximum temperatures were in the top 2% climatologically. Warm temperatures extended into northern Ontario and Quebec, though the southern half of Quebec was near normal. A small region of cooler than normal temperatures extend from the St. Lawrence Valley near Montreal southwest into Ontario near Brockville. Much of south and east Ontario and Maritime Provinces had near normal temperatures.

Northeast British Columbia received normal precipitation amounts. The central and south coasts were drier than normal, while the southern Okanagan region received the most precipitation relative to normal. The Prairies had two regions that were wetter than normal in November, the southwest, and northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Northern Alberta, central Saskatchewan, and southern

Manitoba were all drier than normal. The Brandon and Winnipeg, Manitoba regions received the least precipitation relative to normal on the Prairies. Ontario generally had near normal precipitation. However, the James Bay region was wetter than normal, with Kapuskasing receiving 184% of its monthly normal (123 mm), while the Kenora and Toronto regions only received half of their monthly normal precipitation. Variable precipitation occurred over Quebec, with the lower north shore receiving more than normal precipitation. North-central Quebec was drier than normal. In northern Labrador, some regions received three times the normal amounts of precipitation driven by many intense weather systems. The St. Lawrence Valley and the southwest portion of the Avalon Peninsula also received more than double their monthly average precipitation. On Newfoundland this precipitation has not been enough to reverse the summer precipitation deficit. On Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, it appears enough precipitation (150 mm) has fallen to help mitigate the summer deficit. However, the rest of the Maritime Provinces were drier than normal with pockets of normal precipitation, extending the dry trend which has been occurring since June.

The East Coast saw above normal rainfall, but below normal snowfall, aided by periods of warmer than normal temperatures. Snowfall over southern Labrador, eastern Newfoundland, and much of Atlantic Canda was well below normal. The Maritime Provinces also received less snowfall than normal, and most snow has melted as of early December. The St. Lawrence Valley saw nearly double its normal snowfall, notably Trios-Rivières received 270% of its normal snowfall (65 cm). In Ontario, the Kenora region received less than half of its normal snowfall, while Toronto Pearson received 290% of its normal snowfall. A large portion of the southern Prairies remained snow free until the last week of November. Conversely, the Rocky Mountains received significant snowfall amounts. This trend extended into the Okanagan, British Columbia region where Osoyoos and Penticton received up to 250% and 350% of their typical November snowfall. No measurable snow was on the ground in Prince George, British Columbia at the end of the month. Farther north, Whitehorse, Yukon received 14 mm of snow-water-equivalent precipitation. Coastal Yukon also received more than 200% of its normal snowfall, while central Yukon was drier than normal.

Fire activity remained at low levels across the US through November, although periodic slight increases in activity occurred in the Southern and Eastern Areas, typical of fall. November precipitation was generally below normal for the northern two-thirds of the West, but well above normal for much of California and Arizona, with some areas receiving more than 400% of normal precipitation. Precipitation anomalies were mixed on the Plains, with above normal precipitation in portions of the Dakotas, western Kansas, and central Texas. Precipitation was mostly below normal near and east of the Mississippi River, except for small areas of above normal precipitation in the Upper Ohio Valley and northern New England. To start December, precipitation has been above normal across the northern tier of the US from Washington to Minnesota and along the northern Gulf Coast to the eastern Carolinas. However, much of the rest of the US has started December drier than normal.

Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late November forecast likely above normal temperatures across the southern third of the US and most of the East Coast. Temperatures are likely to be near to below normal from the Northwest into the northern Plains and Upper Great Lakes. Precipitation is expected to be below normal for the southern tier of the US. Precipitation is likely to be above normal for the northwestern US into the northern Plains, Great Lakes, and Ohio Valley through the winter.

Most of the US is forecast to have seasonally low significant fire potential for the outlook period. In December, above normal potential is forecast for portions of southern High Plains and northeast Gulf Coast that will continue into January expanding throughout Florida. By February, a much larger footprint of above normal significant fire potential is forecast across the southern Plains and much of the northern Gulf Coast into the southern Appalachians. However, below normal potential is forecast from Arkansas into portions of the Ohio Valley.

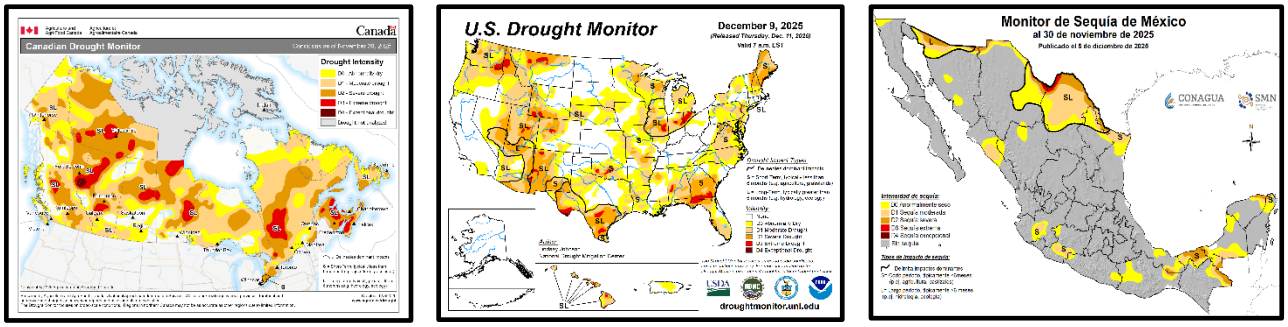
Minimal fire activity is expected across Mexico during December. This situation is expected to change, and activity is projected to gradually intensify starting in January due to the deterioration of environmental conditions, caused by scarce precipitation and warm weather.

January typically marks the beginning of the wildfire season, registering low activity; however, this is expected to increase gradually into February, mainly in the center, south, and west of the country. Recent weather patterns positively impacted drought conditions nationwide. Average temperatures remained above normal during the past three months. However, precipitation also exceeded normal levels in those three months, which resulted in a nationwide decrease in drought.

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 Climatic Teleconnections:
The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) has continued in a La Niña state since the Climate Prediction Center (CPC) declared a La Niña Advisory October 9. Sea surface temperatures now average more than 0.5 C below average and are approaching 1 C below average across the central equatorial Pacific Ocean, typical of La Niña. The CPC forecasts a weak La Niña to persist into early next year, but with slightly increased confidence in a transition to ENSO neutral conditions by March, with a 61% chance of transition. A strongly negative phase of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) persists. The Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) was active since late October but has weakened significantly as it moved into the western hemisphere the past week. It is possible a stronger MJO reemerges toward Africa and the Indian Ocean over the next two weeks. The weak La Niña and the negative PDO will be the main drivers of this outlook, with some modulation of the pattern due to the MJO possible if it reemerges later this month.



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:

As of November 30, 84% of Canada is classified as abnormally dry through exceptional drought. This impacts all provinces and 80% of Canada's growing region. The most significant regions of drought continue to be in the Maritime Provinces, near the Bay of Fundy and northeast New Brunswick as well as in northwestern Alberta extending into southwestern Northwest Territories. The only exceptional drought region sits along the Alberta-British Columbia border. Other extreme drought regions lie in central Alberta, central Saskatchewan, on the Ontario-Manitoba border, and in southwest Quebec. Drought free regions include coastal British Columbia and northern Vancouver Island, an area covering a small portion of northeast Alberta, northwest Saskatchewan, and southeast Northwest Territories. Additionally, southern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba all have drought-free areas. In eastern Canada, there are only small patches of drought free conditions near Hudson Bay and in central coastal Labrador.

Western Canada had minor changes in drought conditions while eastern Canada received significant precipitation which helped drought class improvement, though drought conditions remain. Dry conditions worsened over much of Quebec, especially in the central part of the province. Drying also occurred along the British Columbia coast and in western Alberta. However, a wet start to December is

likely to minimize the impacts in these regions. Southern Alberta had some drought improvement, while a dry trend was observed in the northeastern Prairies.

Precipitation across the US in November was well above normal across much of the southern half of California into southern Nevada and western Arizona, where most areas received more than four times their normal November precipitation. Precipitation was also above normal into northern California, western Nevada, and New Mexico in the West. However, most other areas of the West in the Great Basin, Oregon, and Rockies received below normal precipitation except near the Canadian border where precipitation was slightly above normal. In the eastern half of the US, above normal precipitation was observed in smaller areas such as portions of the Dakotas, western Kansas, central Texas, the Upper Ohio Valley, Upstate New York, and northern New England. Precipitation was below normal across the Gulf Coast and along much of the East Coast, with large areas of below normal precipitation also observed in the Mississippi Valley, Midwest, Nebraska, and South Texas. Precipitation in Alaska was mostly below normal except near to above normal for the panhandle. Precipitation was below normal across all of Hawai'i, most notably for portions of the Big Island and Oahu where some locations received less than half of normal November rainfall. December began very wet in the northwestern US with historic flooding in western Washington December 10-11.

Overall drought decreased slightly across the US with just over 40% of the country in drought as of December 26. Drought improved most significantly in the southwestern and northwestern US. Drought developed and intensified in the Upper Midwest, while portions of the Plains and East Coast saw a mix of drought improvement and degradation. Areas of extreme drought persist in small portions of northeast Oregon, southeast Washington, the Idaho Panhandle, northern Montana, southwest Wyoming, central Utah, western Colorado, and western New Mexico. Other areas of extreme drought are noted in portions of South Texas, southern Oklahoma, Alabama, Georgia, North Florida, eastern Illinois, northern Indiana, and northwest Ohio.

In Mexico during the first half of November, above average rainfall was observed in portions of Baja California, Puebla, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Chiapas, and the Yucatán Peninsula. This rainfall was primarily associated with the combination of several meteorological phenomena, including the passage of a tropical wave, three cold fronts, and "Norte" strong north wind events.

These events resulted in a decrease in the areas affected by moderate to severe drought across Tabasco and the Yucatán Peninsula. However, a precipitation deficit was observed in a large portion of the national territory, which led to the expansion of moderate to severe drought in the country's northeast. As of November 15, the national percentage of areas with moderate to exceptional drought was just over 9%, a slight decrease from what was reported at the end of October.

Fire Season Status:

Now firmly in winter, fire activity is non-existent except for a few smoldering peat fires in northwestern parts of the country (northwest Alberta, northeast British Columbia, and southern Northwest Territories). Pile burning is being conducted in many regions across Canada, particularly in the west, as temperatures and snow cover now permit such activities. In the southwest Prairies, where snow cover is often blown away by strong winds, some moderate fire weather indices can be found at times, though concern for grass fires at this time is low.

The Rocky Mountains have received more snowfall than normal for this time of year which may help the start of the 2026 fire season in the west. Cape Breton and a significant portion of Labrador are also receiving ample snow and may ease early season wildfire concerns which would be driven by drought conditions.

In the US, fire activity remained at low levels across the US through November, although periodic slight increases in activity occurred in the Southern and Eastern Areas, typical of fall. The National Preparedness Level remained at one (on a scale of 1-5) due to the low level of activity nationally. Total

acres burned through December 12 is below the 10-year average at 69%, but with an above average tally of wildfires of 113%.

Between January and November, Mexico experienced a significant wildfire season, with a total of 6,924 wildfires recorded across all 32 states. These wildfires affected over 1,204,168 hectares. Most of the burned area, 95%, consisted of brush and grass, with the remaining 5% impacting timber. The states with the highest number of wildfires were Jalisco, State of Mexico, Michoacán, Chihuahua, Mexico City, Durango, Puebla, Chiapas, Guerrero, and Morelos. Together, these states accounted for about 73% of the national total. The states with the largest burned areas were Chihuahua, Durango, Sinaloa, Guerrero, Jalisco, Tabasco, Nayarit, Baja California, Sonora and Michoacán. Collectively, they represented 76% of the total burned area nationwide.

Canada Discussion

December/January/February: The December temperature forecast calls for above normal temperatures across eastern Canada. Over British Columbia, southern Yukon, and western Alberta, some models are calling for below normal temperatures. Confidence is higher in the east than the west. Most of Canada is likely to start with cooler than normal with widespread troughing forecast for the first ten or so days of the month. Model uncertainty is tied to neutral to negative values of the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) and Arctic Oscillation (AO) indices. This is likely helping to drive the troughing and create a more variable temperature pattern. Overall, expect extended periods of cold air impacting much of the western half of the country, and generally more normal conditions in the east.

The December precipitation forecast corresponds well with an active jet stream helping to generate snowfall over the mountains of British Columbia and Alberta as well as Mackenzie low-pressure systems which track from the Northwest Territories east towards Hudson Bay. Finally, an active polar vortex looks to bring regular snowfall to eastern Ontario, Quebec, Labrador. Atlantic Canada will also receive some snowfall, though uncertainty is higher and near normal amounts are more likely. Finally, the Prairies are also forecast to receive near normal snowfall with the signal for a few strong Alberta Clipper systems helping to bring brief, intense snowfalls.

Longer-range outlooks for the NAO and AO have negative to neutral conditions continuing into January. Given this, the January temperature outlook is similar to December. A region of cool temperatures will continue to sit over the Yukon, western Northwest Territories, northern British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. The remainder of British Columbia, Prairies, and northwestern Ontario will likely have close to normal temperatures. Central Ontario and eastward will be slightly warmer than normal given an active polar vortex helping to transport some warmer air from the south.

The January precipitation forecast shows a high likelihood for a wavy jet stream, resulting in low-pressure systems initiating and dissipating over Canada. The signal for Alberta Clipper and Colorado Lows is strong, with an above normal precipitation signal for the central Prairies as well as the Great Lakes region. The south coast of British Columbia looks to be a bit drier than normal while the north coast receives most frontal systems moving in from the Pacific. Atlantic Canada, Labrador, and eastern Quebec also are forecast to be drier than normal, likely related to variations in the January polar vortex. Outside of these regions, January precipitation is likely to be near normal.

By February, the La Niña conditions are expected to return to a more neutral state adding uncertainty to the three-month forecast. The temperature outlook continues to look similar to the previous two months with cold anomalies over much of western Canada, near-normal conditions over Manitoba and southern Nunavut, and generally warmer than normal over eastern Canada. The precipitation forecast calls for generally normal to above normal precipitation for most of the country. The highest anomalies sit over British Columbia, western Alberta, Ontario, western Quebec, and western Atlantic Canada. Signals are present for continued, active low-pressure systems across Canada.

United States Discussion

December/January/February: Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late November forecast a pattern typical of La Niña. Temperatures are likely to be above normal across the southern third of the US and most of the East Coast. Temperatures are likely to be near to below normal from the Northwest into the northern Plains and Upper Great Lakes. Precipitation is expected to trend below normal for the southern tier of the US, particularly from the Southwest to the Gulf Coast, with the greatest chance of below normal precipitation in the Southeast. Precipitation is likely to be above normal for the northwestern US into the northern Plains, Great Lakes, and Ohio Valley through the winter.

Most of the US is forecast to have seasonally low significant fire potential for the outlook period. However, for December, above normal potential is forecast for portions of southern High Plains and northeast Gulf Coast. In January, above normal potential will persist for most of these areas, although normal potential will briefly return to the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles while above normal potential expands across all of Florida. By February, a much larger footprint of above normal significant fire potential is forecast, encompassing the southern Plains, South Texas, and much of the northern and western Gulf Coast into the southern Appalachians. However, below normal potential is forecast from Arkansas into portions of the Ohio Valley due to an expected wet winter.

Mexico Discussion

December/January/February: The climatological outlook for the next three months shows warm and dry conditions, although temperature and precipitation patterns are expected to remain near climatological averages under the influence of La Niña. The possibility of extreme events (both dry and wet) cannot be ruled out. This uncertainty is largely due to the modulating effects of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) and the Pacific/North American (PNA) pattern. However, the inverse polarities of these remote influences maintain uncertainty regarding the effects of La Niña.

The regions with the highest potential for wildfire development through February are in the mountainous areas of western and southern Mexico. This high potential is due to the end of the rainy season and the continuation of the dry season, which is modulated by winter events. Environmental conditions are expected to deteriorate as the dry season continues, leading to an increase in wildfire activity, reaching relative maximums in February over the central and western regions of the Mexican Republic.

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
http://cwfis.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/home

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 prepare 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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