National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook

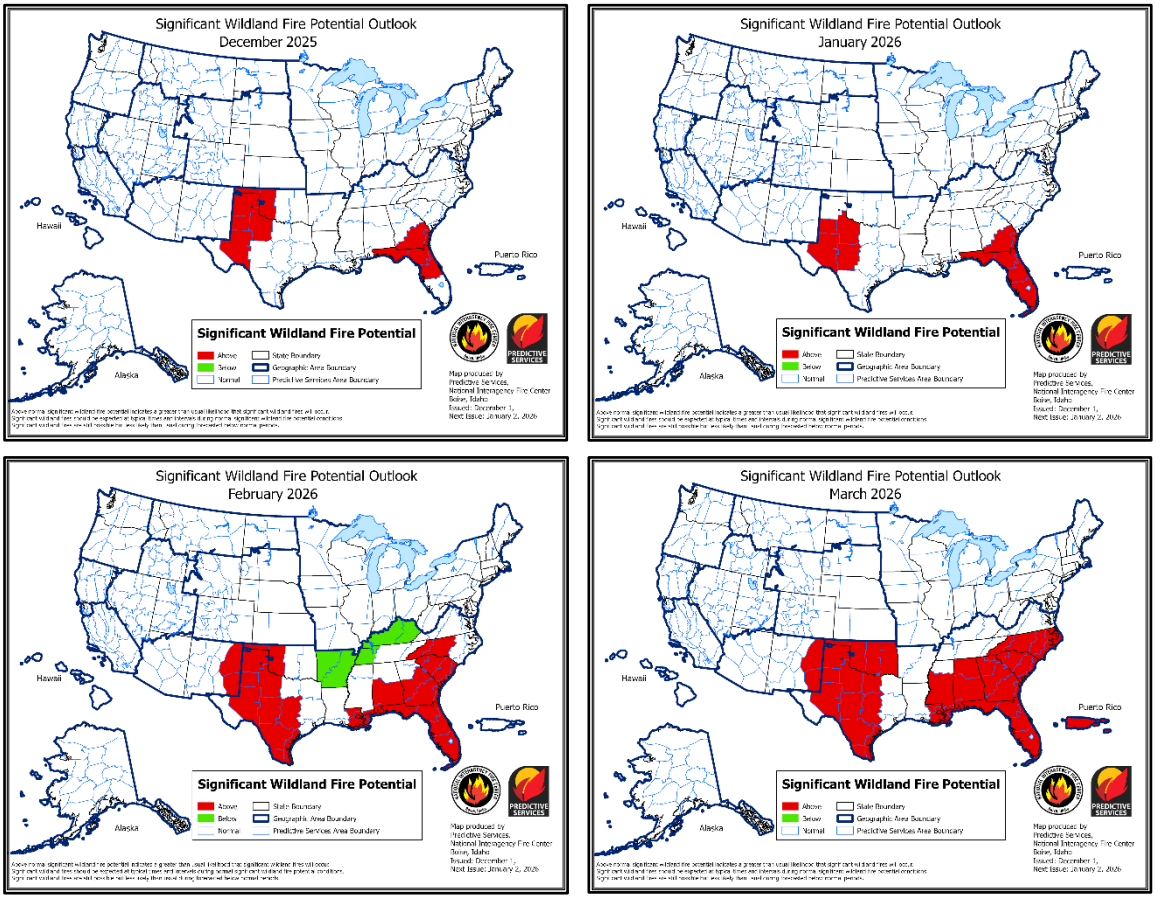
Predictive Services
National Interagency Fire Center

Issued: December 1, 2025
Next Issuance: January 2, 2026

Outlook Period – December 2025 through March 2026

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 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 November is below the 10-year average at 69%, but with an above average tally of wildfires of 113%.

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. Overall drought changed little with over 43% of the country remaining in drought. Most of the West remains in

drought, but improvement was noted in many areas, most notably in California where drought was removed from most locations. However, drought intensified in portions of the Southeast, especially the northeast Gulf Coast and across the southern Plains. Drought also developed in the Upper Midwest, but drought improved in the Appalachians and Northeast.

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. However, the period is likely to begin wet in the Southeast the first week of December before turning drier. 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. In March, above normal potential is forecast across most or all of the southern Plains, South Texas, the Southeast, and Puerto Rico.

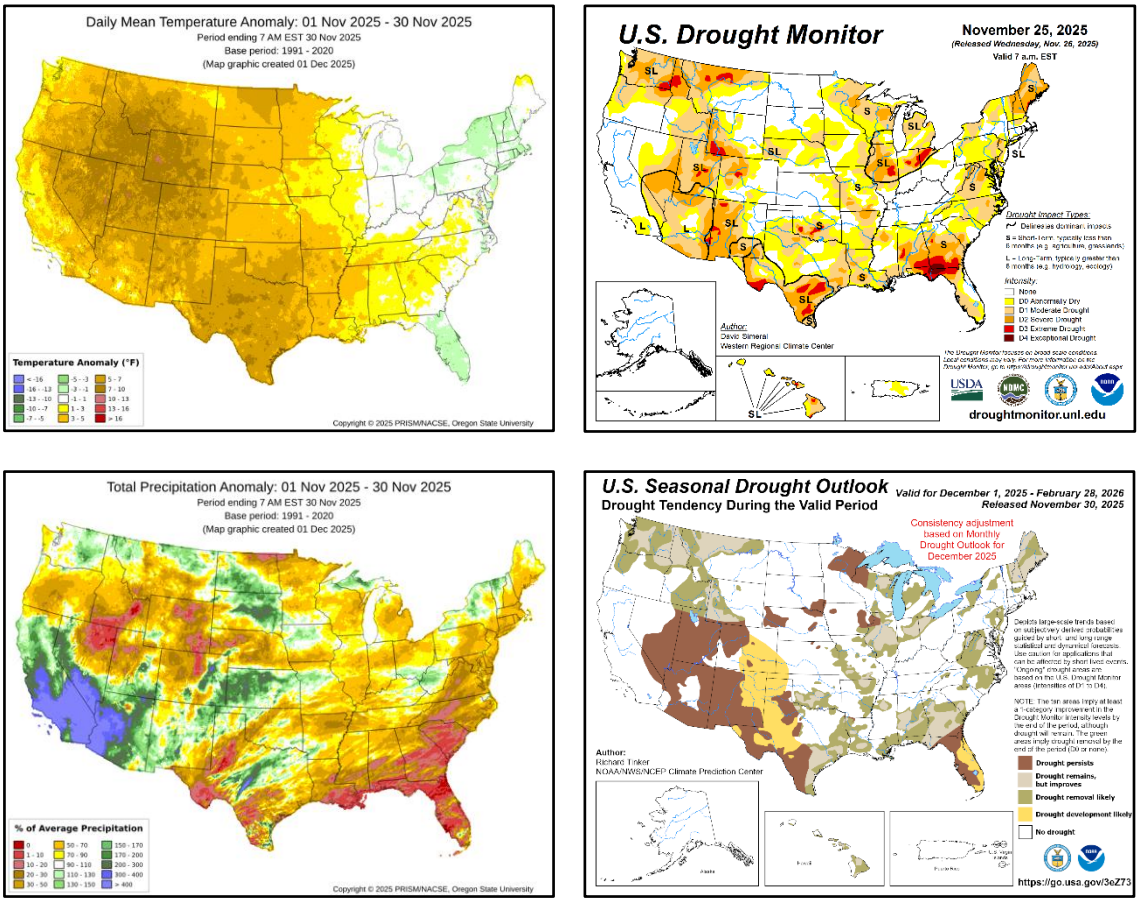
Past Weather and Drought

Temperatures in November were above normal for most of the US, extending from the West Coast to the Mississippi River. Many portions of the Rockies into the Plains were well above normal, averaging 5-10 degrees above normal for the month. However, temperatures were near to below normal from the Appalachians to the East Coast, with below normal temperatures found in portions of the Northeast and much of Florida. Temperatures were above normal for most of Alaska and Hawai'i, although near normal temperatures were observed on Molokai and Maui in Hawai'i and in portions of southwest Alaska.

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 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.

With fire activity low across the US, there were no significant fire-effective events across the country. However, a series of strong storms that affected southern California in mid-November effectively ended the Santa Ana fire season for the area. A period of dry conditions and downslope winds across the Appalachians and Southeast mid-November resulted in an increase in initial

attack and a few large fires. However, it was followed by light but meaningful precipitation that reduced fire potential for the rest of the month.



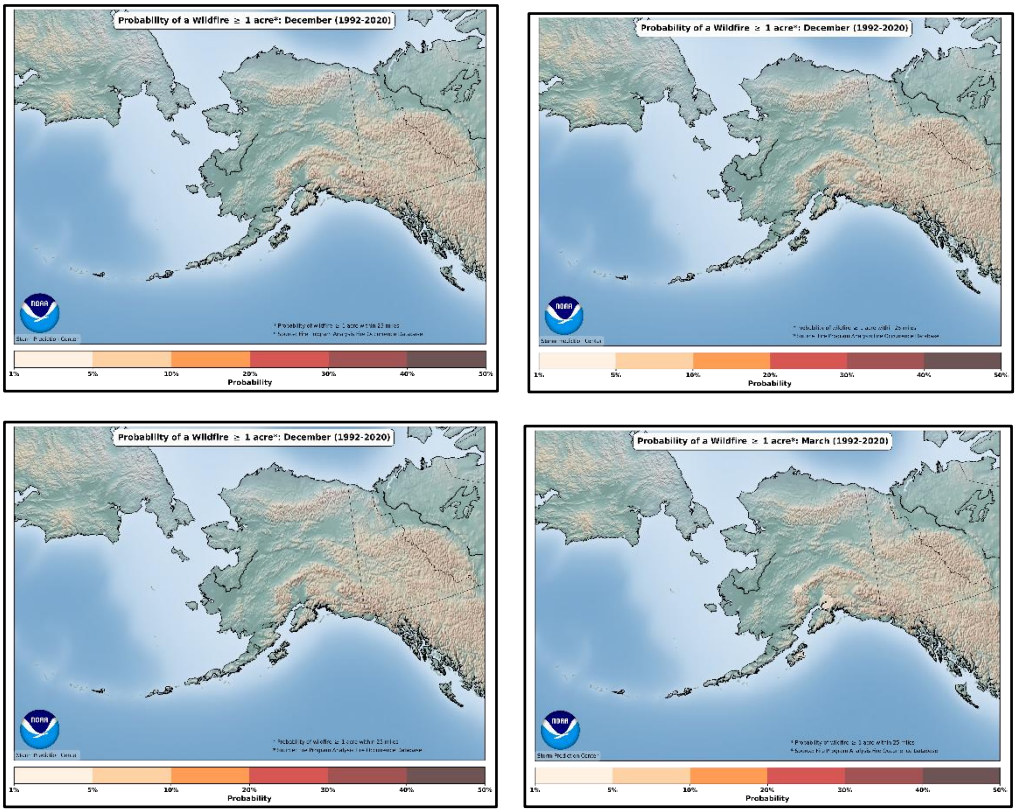
Left: Departure from Normal Temperature (top) and Percent of Normal Precipitation (bottom) *(from PRISM Climate Group, Oregon State University).* **Right: U.S. Drought Monitor (top) and Seasonal Drought Outlook (bottom)** *(from National Drought Mitigation Center and the Climate Prediction Center).*

Overall drought changed little across the US with just over 43% of the country in drought as of November 26. Drought intensified in portions of the southern Plains and Southeast, especially along the northeast Gulf Coast. Drought also developed and intensified in the Upper Midwest. However, drought improved across much of the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast, especially toward the end of the month. Drought also improved across much of the West despite drought persisting in most areas, with drought removal across much of California into portions of western Washington and Oregon. Drought development was also noted in portions of the southern Plains and Minnesota. Areas of extreme drought persist in small portions of northeast Oregon, southeast Washington, the Idaho Panhandle, 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. A small area of exceptional drought has developed in portions of southwest Georgia and the Florida Panhandle. Drought is expected to persist where it exists across the southern US, notably in the Southwest, with development expected in the southern High Plains. Drought improvement is expected in eastern Oklahoma and Texas into the Mid-Mississippi Valley, Lower Great Lakes, and Northeast, with drought improvement expected in the northwestern US, as well. A period of drought improvement is expected in the Southeast due to forecast rain early this month, but drought may redevelop and/or intensify over the winter with forecast drier than normal conditions.

Weather and Climate Outlooks

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) has been active over the past six weeks and is currently active in the western tropical Pacific Ocean. Most models are forecasting the MJO to remain active in December as it moves east into the western hemisphere. The weak La Niña and the negative PDO will be the main drivers of this outlook, with some modulation of the pattern likely through at least the first half of December due to the active phase of the MJO.

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. (Based on 1992-2020 FPA Data. Analysis courtesy of the Storm Prediction Center.) Note that December is shown three times, and January/February occurrence is similar to December, which is minimal.

Alaska

Normal fire potential is expected for Alaska during the next four months. Ample rainfall, snow, and cold temperatures will keep minimal fire activity through March.

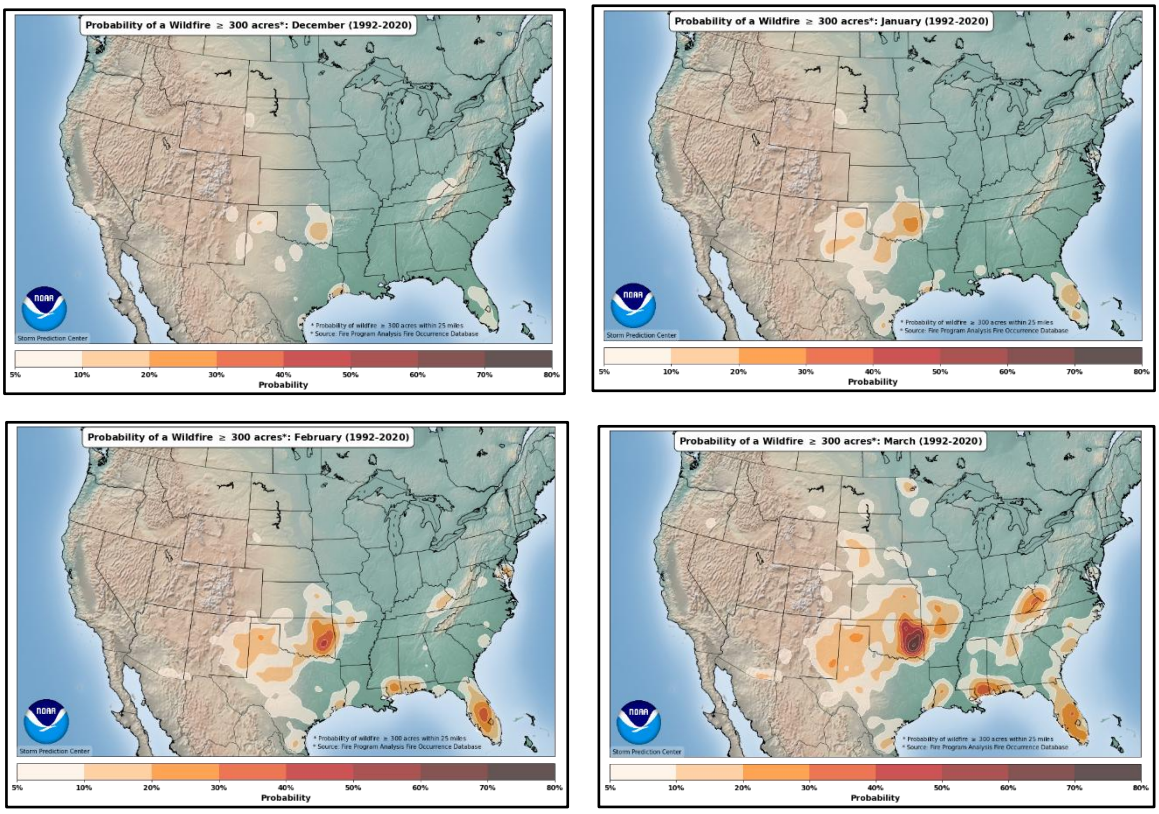
November brought a continuous snowpack to much of the state, with the only exception along the coastal areas of the south, where wet conditions dominate and fire is unlikely.

Climate Prediction Center outlooks for December through March show warmer than normal potential for northern and western Alaska, and colder than normal conditions for the southeast. Between the two regions, equal chances of warmer or colder conditions are forecasted. For precipitation, wetter than normal potential mirrors the warmer area of the west, while drier than normal potential covers most of the panhandle.

La Niña conditions are in the forecast for the rest of winter, typically indicating a slightly colder and wetter winter than normal for some parts of the state. However, the correlation seems to be best south of the Alaska Range, yet that has not panned out in recent years. Despite the changing climate, fire season in Alaska remains virtually non-existent in winter months, and these temperature or precipitation leanings in the winter do not have much impact on the summer fire season, which is more dependent on springtime temperatures and melt rates.

Fire activity has been nonexistent for November with no new ignitions. Fuels are very wet or snow-covered across the state. Fire weather indices have been shut off statewide due to snowpack or cold, wet fuels.

Alaska's snowpack has returned for the winter. Fire potential will remain near zero through February, with a little activity possible in March. This describes normal fire conditions across the state for the winter months.



Normal fire season progression across the contiguous US 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

Frequent Pacific storms in November brought above average precipitation to western Oregon and Washington, though high snow levels limited snowpack development. A weak La Niña continues, favoring variable but generally cool and wet conditions. Fuels are minimally receptive, and significant fire potential remains very low at this time of year.

November featured a continuation of the active weather pattern that began in late October, with frequent Pacific frontal systems bringing above-average precipitation to much of western Oregon and Washington. Rainfall totals ranged from 110% to over 150% of average in many areas west of the Cascades. However, snow levels remained relatively high, and warm intrusions between systems limited mountain snow accumulation.

Despite the typical stormy pattern, early-season snowpack remains well below normal. As of late November, most snowpack basins report less than 25% of median snow water equivalent, reflecting the warm nature of recent storms. Temperatures for the month were generally near to slightly above normal, with brief ridging episodes contributing to mild conditions between systems.

The US Drought Monitor shows improvement in western Oregon and Washington, where many areas were downgraded to moderate drought or abnormally dry classifications. In contrast, moderate to severe drought persists across the Washington Cascades, eastern Washington, and northeast Oregon where precipitation deficits and soil moisture are slow to recover. Only far southeast Washington and the far northern Blue Mountains of Oregon continue in extreme drought.

For the most part, initial attack activity across the Pacific Northwest was average for November and minimal. Above average human caused initial attack activity occurred across the northeast Oregon mountains with a little over half of the total incidents across the geographic area. The largest fire reached about 14 acres.

Frequent precipitation and cooler temperatures continued to moderate fuel conditions across Oregon and Washington. Live fuels have returned to seasonally appropriate values, and dead fuel moisture remains elevated due to repeated wetting events. Energy Release Component (ERC) values steadily declined and reached seasonal minimums across most zones. While brief drying periods occurred between systems, they were not sufficient to reintroduce fire weather concerns. Fuels across the region are now minimally receptive to ignition.

The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) forecasts that La Niña conditions currently present are expected to persist through February. A transition to ENSO-neutral is likely by early spring, with a 60% chance. A weak La Niña typically reduces predictability in the Pacific Northwest and produces a wide range of outcomes, from dry and mild to cool and stormy. Analogs of repeating ENSO neutral to weak La Niña winter seasons tend to produce drier spring months regardless of the preceding winter results.

The CPC forecasts continue to favor slightly below-average temperatures across western and northern Washington and northwest Oregon through February. The remainder of the region shows equal chances for above, near, or below normal temperatures, reflecting the uncertainty typical of weak La Niña winters. While brief ridging may bring occasional warm spells, the overall trend leans cooler than average.

The CPC precipitation forecasts remain above average across western Oregon and Washington through January. February precipitation trends remain uncertain, with no strong signal favoring any one outcome. While snowpack may build slowly, frequent storms should support gradual accumulation at mid and high elevations. Overall, conditions still favor near to slightly below average snowpack by mid-winter, depending on storm track and snow level trends.

Significant fire potential is expected to remain normal, or very low, across the region through February. Persistent precipitation, elevated fuel moisture, and limited ignition potential suggest that it would take several weeks of warm, dry weather combined with a notable wind event to meaningfully elevate fire potential for more than a single burn period.

Northern California and Hawai'i

For northern California, significant fire potential is projected to be normal December through March. Historically less than one large fire occurs on average within each Predictive Services Area (PSA) from December through March. Hawaii's significant fire potential is also expected to be normal December through March.

The storm track was active during most of November across northern California with at least six separate systems, which included two strong atmospheric rivers. Precipitation was generally above normal with near normal amounts found near the Oregon border. Average temperatures were above normal. A total of 66 lightning strikes were observed using the Vaisala detection system with the majority occurring during the two atmospheric river periods. There were three weak to moderate dry northerly and easterly wind periods. There were three moderate to strong southerly and westerly wind events, but relative humidity was generally elevated. No National Weather Service Red Flag Warnings were issued during the month.

Distinct moistening trends occurred during November and generally produced near to above normal dead fuel moisture levels. Regional Energy Release Component values were generally near or below normal. The most noticeable drying trend occurred during the last week of the month. Live fuels are generally dormant with mixed flammability. Herbaceous green-up remained robust below 3,500 feet and acted as a heat sink while dormancy and a cured state was generally found above 3,500 feet. Snow cover was generally found above 7,000 feet depending on aspect and sheltering, favoring the Lake Tahoe area. No drought conditions exist based on the US Drought Monitor. The two-month evaporative demand drought index (EDDI) value on November 21 showed no discernible drought or stress signals.

The diminishing wildfire business trend of the fall continued during November. The daily wildfire ignition average during November was two compared to five during October. In comparison, the November 2008-2024 daily ignition average is four. No significant fires were reported, with the largest fire occurring east of Corning in the Sacramento Valley and burning 3.3 acres. The regional significant fire average for November based on a 1992-2023 database is two. The regional preparedness level remained at one. Prescribed burning was steady during the month with pile burns being the dominant type.

Whiplash weather patterns remain the likely weather scenario during the next four months with both extended dry-warm and cool-moist periods brought on by abrupt changes in the jet stream due to various teleconnection states. Guidance signals are mixed based on the use of analogs and projections from dynamic climate models, therefore chances of either below or above normal temperature and precipitation anomalies are equally likely.

Based on the current fuel state and future weather predictions, normal significant fire potential is projected for December through March, which means very little overall. Critically flammable live and dead fuel alignments are likely to be minimal, although some extended dry-warm periods could create heightened flammability periods and benefit prescribed burning. Lowland herbaceous green-up, upper elevation snow, shorter day periods, and lower sun angles will also lessen the risk or shorten the burn periods. Dry-gusty wind events preceded by an extended dry period would create the most spread potential during the next four months.

Sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies surrounding the Hawai'ian Islands were near to above average during November. Average temperature anomalies were near to above normal and

precipitation anomalies were near to below normal. Drought conditions changed slightly between late October to late November with an intensification across Maui while slightly improving across Oahu and the Big Island. Moderate drought touched all the islands while severe to extreme drought touched most of the island chain, especially favoring the lower half. Herbaceous green-up remained mixed across the leeward sides. No Red Flag Warnings were issued by the National Weather Service. The Mana Road fire ignited on November 7 eighteen miles west of Hilo and grew to a little over 2,100 acres.

The El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is expected to be in a La Niña state during the front portion of the outlook period. Near to above normal temperature anomalies are expected for Hawai'i. Precipitation anomalies should be near to above normal with more propensity for Kona Lows. Drought stress is likely to lessen or improve and lead to less stress on the live fuels. Herbaceous green-up should also increase and lessen spread potential across the leeward sides. There will likely be some enhanced trade wind periods that could create some spread potential during the next few months, but normal significant fire potential is projected for the four-month outlook period for the islands.

Southern California

Strong high pressure off the California coast brought well above normal temperatures away from the coast November 1-11. Temperatures were 10 to 20 degrees above normal for much of this time. A series of Pacific storms from the Gulf of Alaska brought below normal temperatures November 12-22. Temperatures were mainly 10 to 15 degrees below normal during this period. Weak high pressure off the California Coast brought temperatures within 5 degrees of normal November 23-30. Overall, temperatures for the month were near to a little below normal for coastal areas and near to a little above normal inland. Periods of widespread rain and isolated thunderstorms moved across the region November 12-22 as storms moved down the coast and inland over southern California. The snow level was above 8,000 feet with the first storm, but the snow level dropped to around 6,000 feet with subsequent storms. Many feet of new snow fell over the High Sierra, with up to a foot of new snow over the higher mountain locations of southern California. Overall, precipitation for the month was well above normal across the entire region. Strong southeast to southwest winds occurred ahead of and with each storm. There was light offshore flow with the areas of high pressure, but there were no Santa Ana wind events last month.

There is much less drought across the region compared to October due to the significant rainfall that occurred in November. There is now no drought over much of central and southern California. However, there are abnormally dry conditions across southern California east and south of Los Angeles County. There are also abnormally dry conditions to moderate drought across the deserts bordering Nevada and Arizona. There is now only one small area of severe drought over northern Inyo County bordering Nevada. The 1000-hr and 100-hr dead fuel moisture started near to a little below normal but became well above normal during the middle and end of November. There was a significant increase in the live fuel moisture last month, and it is now mainly between 80% and 100%. Widespread green-up is now occurring across the lower elevations.

There has been significant cooling across the Pacific Basin over the last month and instead of above normal sea surface temperatures across the entire basin, there are below normal sea surface temperatures across the North Pacific Ocean from Japan to Canada. Also, the area of well above normal sea surface temperatures across the central Pacific Ocean is much less than a month ago. Computer models show that the sea surface temperatures over the Pacific Basin will continue to slowly cool through February and then warm starting in March. Therefore, Pacific storms will likely continue to drop down the West Coast and inland into California through February. Expect temperatures to be below normal and precipitation above normal through February. The storm track will likely move north causing temperatures to be near to a little above normal and precipitation a little below normal in March. There will most likely be a below normal amount of Santa Ana wind events through March. The large fire threat will be negligible through

March due to the significant precipitation that has occurred and the expected significant precipitation to come over the next few months. There is normally no significant fire activity across central and southern California from December through March, and significant fire potential is expected to remain normal for this outlook period.

Northern Rockies

Significant wildland fire potential is expected to remain normal across the Northern Rockies Geographic Area (NRGA) through the outlook period. A switch to a winter pattern in early December will mitigate dryness concerns that developed during a dry November for most of the NRGA. Seasonal outlooks lean towards below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation, which should mitigate fuel availability during periods of windy and dry conditions if they develop.

During the month of November, drought classification improved over north Idaho and Montana west of the Continental Divide. East of the Continental Divide, northern Montana experienced one to two category drought class degradation while southern Montana and North Dakota experienced no change. North Idaho continues to experience long term drought impacts due to ground water shortages with areas of severe to extreme drought. Northern Montana east of the Continental Divide has degraded to areas of moderate to severe drought with southern Montana east of the Continental Divide and North Dakota reporting no drought.

Below normal precipitation was reported across the NRGA during November except for the northern panhandle of Idaho and northwest Montana, which reported above normal precipitation. Temperatures were above normal across the NRGA with parts of central and southwest Montana reporting temperatures 7 to 12 degrees above normal.

No new large fires occurred in November. Prescribed fire was continuously active during the month as the dry weather permitted access to pile burning sites and periodic fronts provided periods of improved dispersion.

The early December forecast has trended towards colder than normal temperatures and leans towards above normal precipitation. This pattern change is supported by global teleconnection patterns that lean toward cooler and wetter than normal conditions across the northern tier of the central US this winter. With the expectation of patterns that support accumulating snow cover across the region, fuels are expected to increase current moisture levels and be resistant to fire.

Great Basin

Normal significant fire potential is expected across the Great Basin through the period, which results in low fire activity and little, if any, potential for large fires. However, fine fuels could dry quickly and remain a concern in southern Idaho and northern and western Nevada where above normal fine fuel loading has been reported. These areas may have localized concern in the mid to lower elevations during periods of strong winds after prolonged dry spells until snow begins.

Temperatures in November were well above normal across the Great Basin. Precipitation was well above normal in western and southern Nevada, the Arizona Strip, and southern Utah, but below normal elsewhere. Colder storms brought snow to higher elevations throughout November, but the snowpack remained well below normal in most areas. Although drought improved, moderate to severe drought with pockets of extreme drought continue in southern and eastern Nevada, the Arizona Strip, Utah, southern and eastern Idaho, and Wyoming. The drought is expected to improve through the winter across Idaho and Wyoming but persist in southern and eastern Nevada, Utah, and the Arizona Strip.

Fuel moisture is near to below normal, except for areas of the west and south where wetter conditions have been more frequent. Despite the drier conditions, fuel moisture is still well above critical levels. Heavy fine fuel loading in parts of northwest and north central Nevada and southwest Idaho will remain a concern through the fall and early winter during windy conditions after prolonged dry periods.

Low wildfire activity occurred throughout November with no large fires and high prescribed fire activity, especially in central Idaho and Utah.

Global patterns suggest a higher likelihood of below normal temperatures from January through March across the Great Basin. Precipitation patterns are not as definitive; however, forecasts lean toward above normal precipitation in northern areas and below normal precipitation across southern areas. There will be storms that drop farther south and affect all areas at times. This pattern may lead to above normal snowpack for Idaho and Wyoming and potentially into the northern Sierra and northern Utah mountains. Therefore, normal significant fire potential is expected through March, which would indicate overall low fire potential for the region. The only exception might be localized events through early winter across northwest and north central Nevada into southern Idaho in areas of above normal fine fuel loading. If conditions remain drier and absent from snow, strong winds associated with cold fronts could increase fire potential for a burning period.

Southwest

As of late November, the US Drought Monitor indicated widespread areas of severe to extreme drought across most areas west of the Divide. These drought conditions will likely gradually worsen into the end of the year, with drier than normal conditions expected.

Precipitation in November was much above normal across Arizona and southwest New Mexico, with below normal values over portions of northern and southeastern New Mexico. The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) forecasts La Niña to persist this winter. Therefore, precipitation is expected to decline and become below normal for the rest of the year into January and possibly February.

Temperatures in November were 2-4 degrees above normal across most of the region. The CPC outlook for December is for above normal temperatures across the region. This trend is expected to continue into the new year.

Fire activity has been minimal during the month of November due to both the above average precipitation as well as decreasing day lengths and good overnight relative humidity recovery. The CPC outlooks call for warmer and drier than normal conditions into early next year, which may allow for a slight increase in fire activity. Overall large fire activity should remain low, which is normal for this time of year. Fire potential is expected to increase to above normal across eastern New Mexico in February and March due to an abundant grass crop, the forecasted dry winter weather, and lack of compacting snowpack. Furthermore, downslope wind events become more common by March on the eastern plains.

Rocky Mountain

November began with widespread warmth and limited precipitation throughout the Rocky Mountain Area (RMA). Mid-month brought a shift toward more active conditions, allowing for increased precipitation and some high-elevation snowfall, though overall precipitation and snowpack remain below normal. Fire danger was elevated early in the month due to dry fuels and unseasonably warm temperatures, particularly along the northern Front Range. With the pattern change, fire danger moderated back towards seasonal averages. Fire activity was minimal, with

most incidents quickly contained, remaining small. La Niña is expected to develop and persist into early spring, typically bringing cooler, wetter conditions to the northern RMA and continued dryness in the southern portion, especially eastern Colorado. While normal fire potential is forecast through winter, brief periods of elevated risk may arise during dry, windy conditions when fuels are exposed.

The first half of November was dominated by a high-pressure system over the western US, with conditions becoming slightly more active mid-month. This pattern brought above-normal temperatures across the RMA, with many areas experiencing anomalies of 5 to 10 degrees above average. The ridge also suppressed precipitation early in the month, with only the Shoshone National Forest east of Yellowstone and parts of eastern South Dakota, east of Aberdeen, receiving notable moisture. As the pattern shifted, precipitation increased across much of the area, and snow began accumulating at elevations above 9,000 feet. Despite this, monthly precipitation remains below normal for most of the RMA, except for Kansas and the eastern half of South Dakota. Warmer-than-average temperatures have delayed the first seasonal snowfall in many low to mid-elevation areas. Snowpack is generally below 50 percent of normal, with Wyoming around 30 percent, and southwest Colorado closer to 75 percent. Drought-affected areas have seen little improvement, and new dryness is emerging along the Front Range, the Nebraska Panhandle, and northeastern South Dakota.

The combination of limited precipitation and unseasonably warm temperatures elevated fire danger above normal through mid-month, leaving mid-elevation fuels snow-free and available to burn, while grasses and fine fuels on the Plains remained very dry. Fire danger briefly exceeded seasonal thresholds along the northern Front Range around mid-November. Following the pattern shift, fire danger has generally returned to more seasonable levels across the area.

Fire activity across the RMA in November consisted of mostly initial attack incidents, with over 80% of fires contained within one or two operational periods and held to 10 acres or less. Fires that exceeded 10 acres were mostly driven by warm, dry conditions combined with gusty winds.

La Niña conditions are present and forecast to persist into early spring. Historically, La Niña winters in the RMA are associated with cooler, wetter conditions across the northern third of the area, while the southern third typically experiences warmer and drier weather. These patterns suggest drought improvement or even removal in parts of western Wyoming over the winter, while continued dryness in Colorado may sustain or expand drought conditions, particularly across eastern areas. Additionally, La Niña winters often bring slightly enhanced wind activity across the RMA during the cool season.

With fuel conditions currently near seasonal norms and the December to March period typically associated with minimal large fire activity, normal fire potential is expected through the outlook period. However, due to the potential for increased wind events linked to La Niña, brief episodes of elevated fire potential may occur, particularly following stretches of warm, dry weather when fuels are no longer snow-covered. 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 the Eastern Area through March. Though there are some areas that are still a little drier than normal, the overall outlook for the winter months is for minimal fire activity.

Following the late summer and fall trend, most of the Eastern Area was drier than normal for November, continuing the precipitation deficit for the region. Of greatest concern is the area from central Minnesota into northern Wisconsin and Michigan, where less than 30% of normal November rainfall was observed. However, a winter storm recently brought precipitation and

snowfall to this region and more snow fell at the end of November. Eastern West Virginia to the Maryland coastline also remains dry, though moderate November precipitation eased conditions there. Another dry band from Missouri through Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio is of lower concern due to fuel type. The Northeast has received closer to normal amounts of precipitation for November, though the entire Eastern Area coastline has only received about 30-50% of normal rainfall amounts.

Though the US Drought Monitor indicates that drought persists in the Northeast, it has moderated, with the areal coverage of extreme drought now restricted to a small portion of the southern Maine coast. Severe drought is still widespread across much of the Eastern Area, with little change since last month. The only other area of extreme drought exists along a line from eastern Illinois through northern Indiana and into northwestern Ohio.

November temperatures ranged from three to five degrees below average in the Northeast, near normal from Pennsylvania west to Indiana, then gradually warmer farther west, with average temperatures five to seven degrees above normal in western Minnesota.

Recent fire activity has predominantly been in northern Minnesota, northern Wisconsin, southern Missouri, eastern Ohio, and southern West Virginia. Dry weather and recent leaf drop in Minnesota, Ohio, and West Virginia has caused fuel concerns to transition from a drought-stressed live fuels system to a dead fuels system. Northern Minnesota has the added concern of downed fuels from a wind event this past summer. Overall, fires have been kept small, though several over a hundred acres have managed to pop up in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and southern West Virginia in the last few weeks.

For the majority of the Eastern Area, this outlook period has the fall transition complete and fire potential will depend on the frequency of precipitation and wind events, in both speed and direction, so that days since rain or wind-dried fuels will be factors for increased fire potential. Combining these weather factors with increased human ignition activities like debris burning, hunting, and warming fires, leads to the expectation that the Eastern Area will occasionally have days of above normal fire activity in some areas. Fires arising in areas of long-term or intensified drought still have potential to burn deep into the ground, go underground, rekindle outside of control lines or require extensive mop-up, but this is becoming less likely with the colder temperatures and more frequent wetting rains in the south and snowpack in the north.

Overall temperatures forecast by the Climate Prediction Center (CPC) are likely to be above normal in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic over the winter, though December will be off to a colder than normal start. Normal temperatures are likely in the Big Rivers, while below normal temperatures are forecast for much of the Upper Midwest. Precipitation is expected to be normal for most of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, with an above normal signal for much of the Great Lakes and into the Big Rivers, with a particularly wet signal centered over Indiana. In addition, large weather systems look to continue bringing moisture to the eastern part of the country for the next couple of weeks.

Normal potential is forecast for the next four months for the Eastern Area as most areas traditionally have little to no fire activity over the winter. It is likely that parts of eastern West Virginia into Maryland and eastern Pennsylvania will still have a slightly higher concern, as will northern Minnesota and northern Wisconsin. However, activity here will be short-duration fires that pop up when low relative humidity combines with windy conditions after a warm, dry period. With the first part of December expected to be cold and wet, the forecast is for normal fire potential to dominate the Eastern Area.

Southern Area

Above normal grass loading throughout the southern Great Plains, ongoing and expected worsening drought from the established La Niña along with abundant fuels from drought, insect infestations, and storm damage in the Southeast are the primary considerations for wildland fire risks in winter and early spring. La Niña's winter impacts are more reliable in the Southern Area than generally anywhere else in the Contiguous US and are expected to persist beyond its official demise early in 2026. This will all set the stage for an early onset of a potentially busy spring fire season in the region.

High-end grass loading throughout most of the southern Plains will amplify wildland fire risks in Texas and Oklahoma until green-up occurs. Precipitation anomalies there this winter are irrelevant, with fire risks tied to accelerated drying over the course of one to two weeks, followed by fire-effective weather. It is likely that La Niña will amplify fire weather concerns at times through the dormant season. The combination of limited precipitation in early December and a likely warming trend later in the month in areas of freeze-cured grasses will result in above normal significant fire potential in West Texas and far western Oklahoma. Confidence is highest in longer stretches of warm and dry weather in central and western Texas into January, where above normal potential is forecast. By February and March, a potentially high-impact spring fire season appears increasingly likely across the Plains, with conditions expected to peak in March over a large area.

Historic drought for this time of year continues to worsen in the Southeast, an unfortunate consequence of a quiet 2025 hurricane season in the US coastal waters. Fall temperatures were near to below normal in the region, limiting evaporative demand, but rainfall deficits the past three months are broadly on the order of 6-12 inches across the Southeast coastal plain and western Florida peninsula. While a wet period is expected to start December, it is likely that drier than normal conditions will return the rest of the winter. Unless significant replenishment unexpectedly occurs over the winter, fire-prone vegetation during green-up will have limited soil moisture to draw from, resulting in abnormally low live fuel moistures during the most critical time of year. Dry swamps may limit opportunities for relying on waterways to inhibit fire spread. This drought is also likely to result in abnormally dry dead and down fuels from storm and drought damage or beetle infestations over the past 5-10 years, with heavy fuels from Helene and other recent hurricanes becoming increasingly available, as well.

Persistent drought along with drier and warmer than average conditions will result in above normal significant fire potential across most of central and northern Florida into southern Georgia through the period, with activity becoming increasingly likely and problematic in February and March's longer days. Drought across the western Florida peninsula will continue to intensify and expand to the East Coast and all South Florida through winter and early spring. The combination of La Niña's impacts along with abundant dead fuels in the southern Appalachians and pine-dominant Southeast coastal plain will result in an increasing footprint of above normal significant fire potential during February and March, as well, encompassing areas from the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Carolinas.

A wet pattern with flooding and severe thunderstorm outbreaks is likely to be more consistent from the far eastern Plains into the Mid-Mississippi Valley through winter, both limiting opportunities for prescribed fire and paving the way for a potentially quiet start to the spring fire season. Below normal significant fire potential is most likely during February across Arkansas into West Tennessee and Kentucky, which could continue for some of these areas into March. Virginia into the eastern half of Tennessee is of lower confidence due to the expected gradient in precipitation the next few months.

Finally, increasing dryness in the Caribbean is expected to deepen through the winter months, bringing intensifying drought that will result in above normal significant fire potential across most of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands by March.

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