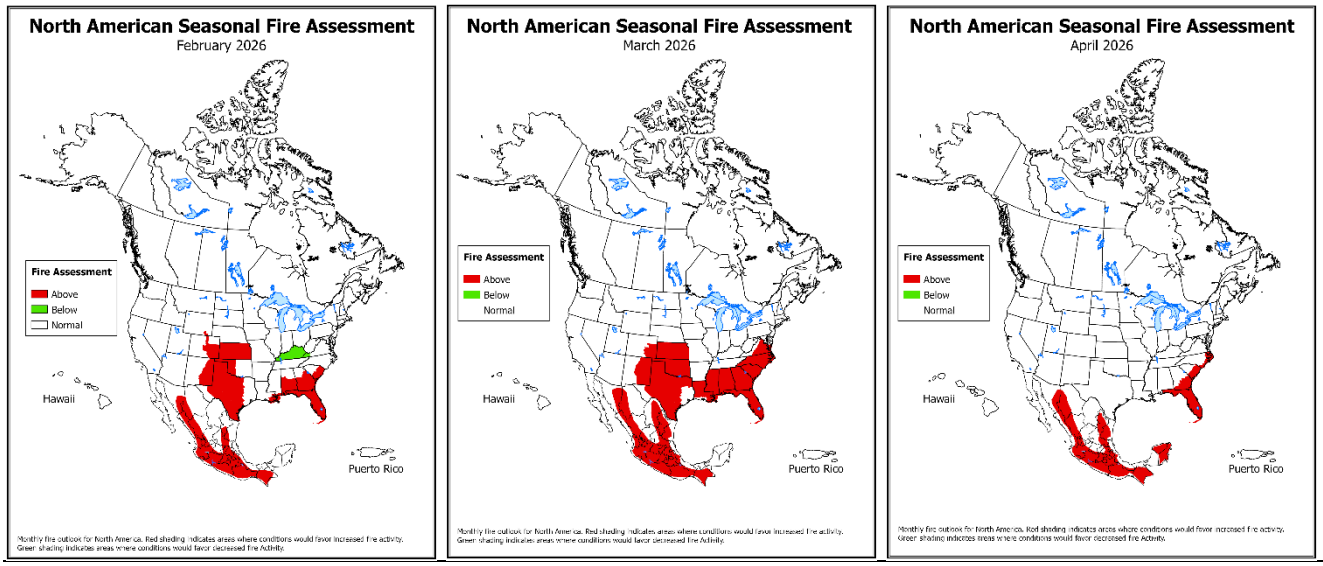
North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook

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

Outlook Period February through April 2026
Issued 13 February 2026

Executive Summary

In January there was a continued transition from La Niña to neutral conditions. With this, a more stagnant weather pattern sat over Canada. Additionally, an elongated polar vortex promoted a broad trough sitting over eastern Canada and the northeastern U.S. states. The persistent trough brought active weather and cold temperatures to much eastern Canada throughout the month including significant snowfall events to southern Ontario and Atlantic Canada. To the west, periods of ridging brought little precipitation to the prairies and Rocky Mountains. On the coast, several heavy precipitation events early in the month provided the bulk of precipitation to the west coast which finished the month with widespread dry conditions. Periods of warmth followed by seasonal temperatures have allowed much of the December snow to melt on the Prairies. The southern Rockies remain drier than normal. Additionally, in southwest Alberta, a region extending from the American border north to the Calgary-Red Deer region is largely snow-free, exposing the grasslands to warm temperatures. The dryness extends into southeastern British Columbia, where valleys remain snow-free.



Monthly fire outlook for North America for February 2026 (left), March 2026 (middle), and April 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 the Canadian Yukon, temperature fluctuations were drastic with the first two weeks being approximately 6 C cooler than normal and southern Yukon was 3-7 C warmer than normal during the last two weeks of the month. To the south, British Columbia and Alberta were generally warmer than normal. The warmest area was the Peace River region at 3-5 C warmer than normal. The Prairies had significant temperature fluctuations throughout the month. A mid-month warm spell had temperatures 10-20 C above normal, and Claresholm, Alberta hit 19.5 C on January 14. Troughing over eastern Canada brought cooler than normal temperatures to much of Ontario and southwestern Quebec. The London and Windsor regions had the coolest temperatures relative to normal. Despite the cold, a brief

warm spell brought all-time high temperatures in the Toronto region, reaching 15 C in many locations on January 8 and 9. Later in the month, many record lows were recorded in Ontario, with Kirkland Lake hitting -43.7 C. Generally normal temperatures were observed across most of central Quebec and the maritime provinces. Warmer than normal conditions were observed in northern Quebec, Labrador, and, to a lesser extent, Newfoundland. On January 24, between Montreal and Quebec City, the maximum daily temperature did not exceed -20 C, the coldest daytime high in the last 50 years for the region. Additionally, on January 29, Kuujjuaq recorded its highest overnight temperature of the month, at -13.7 C. In the Maritimes, temperatures fluctuated from 10 C below normal to 10 C above normal and back again resulting in a January mean temperature near normal.

British Columbia had a variable precipitation pattern with the northwest, southwest coast, and Revelstoke region being wetter than normal. The southern and central interior, as well as the Columbia Trench and northeastern region were all drier than normal. Most coastal precipitation fell during a three-day atmospheric river event from January 10-12 that brought 213.3mm of precipitation to Port Mellon, 173.8mm to Squamish, and 116.6mm to Pitt Meadows. At the end of the month another atmospheric river brought 328.6mm of rain to Lennard Island, 312.2mm to Ucluelet and 243mm to Zeballos. Warm temperatures on the Prairies brought a mixed bag of precipitation. Manitoba saw a significant amount of rain and freezing rain. Given the trough location, Ontario generally had less rain than normal, outside some Great Lakes-adjacent cities that were impacted by lake-effect precipitation. Dry or normal conditions occurred across Quebec and Atlantic Canada, with a mixture of rain and snow throughout the month. Trois-Rivières, Quebec received only 43% (36mm) of its normal precipitation. New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island were drier than normal while Nova Scotia had a normal January precipitation-wise. Storms preferentially swept across Nova Scotia northeast into Newfoundland.

Early January was wetter than normal for the Canadian Yukon, with most of the region receiving 125-325% of normal precipitation by January 15. After this, much of the Yukon had a dry finish to the month, outside of Dawson. The Whitehorse, Faro, and Watson Lake region all had the highest January precipitation anomaly in the Northwest Territories. Snowfall was lower than normal across most of British Columbia outside of the Fort Nelson region. The lack of snowfall was most notable in southeastern British Columbia, with a region from Penticton to Cranbrook receiving less than 25% of their normal snowfall. A dry month in the southern Prairies resulted in diminishing snow depths. Overall, snow depths decreased across Alberta by approximately 10cm compared to December values and 1-5cm in Saskatchewan, with the decrease less noticeable in Manitoba. The northeast Prairies had normal to slightly above normal precipitation amounts during January. Ontario generally received less snowfall than normal outside of a corridor north of Lake Ontario. Toronto-Pearson received 284% (89cm) of its normal snowfall, similarly, Sault Ste Marie received 203% (170cm). Additionally, Ottawa had 138% (82cm) of its normal snowfall. Snow cover in Quebec was highly variable, with Kuujjuaq and Roberval having approximately half of their normal snow depth. Conversely, Val d'Or and Sept-Îles had almost twice their normal amount. Outside of central New Brunswick and a few coastal regions of Nova Scotia, which were dry, the remainder of the Maritimes had generally normal snowfall amounts. Below-normal snowfall in New Brunswick is tied to storms both missing the region and providing rain rather than snow. Several strong winter storms impacted Newfoundland and Labrador resulting in above normal snow depths across the region. Eastern Labrador and western Newfoundland both received more than 100cm of snow.

Fire activity remained at low levels across the U.S. in January, with a modest increase in activity in early February in the Southwest and Southern Areas. January precipitation was below normal across most of the U.S., with well below normal precipitation observed in the northern Plains, southwest Arizona, South Texas, and most of Florida. Areas of above normal precipitation were restricted to southeast Arizona into far West Texas and in a line from Kansas to northern Michigan.

Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late January forecast temperatures above normal in the southern half of the U.S., but below normal in the northern Plains. Precipitation is likely to be above normal in the northern Rockies into North Dakota, and from the Great Lakes into the Ohio and Tennessee Valleys. Precipitation is likely to be below normal from California eastward into the southern Plains, with below normal precipitation also expected along the Gulf and

Southeast Coast. For Alaska, temperatures and precipitation are likely to be above normal for the western third of the state, but drier and cooler than normal in the southeastern portion of the state.

The northern half of the U.S. is forecast to normal significant fire potential through the period, indicating a very gradual increase in activity. However, a gradually increasing footprint of above normal potential is forecast in the Southern Area to peak in March. Above normal potential is also forecast in southeast Colorado, eastern New Mexico, and Kansas in March. Most of these areas will return to normal potential in April, but the southeast Atlantic coast and Florida will continue with above normal potential. A period of below normal potential is forecast in February in Kentucky and far western Virginia.

Wildfire activity continues to escalate across the central, western, northern, northeastern and southeastern regions of Mexico. This activity typically peaks in March and April as environmental conditions deteriorate. In January, 198 wildfires were recorded, affecting approximately 5,443 hectares.

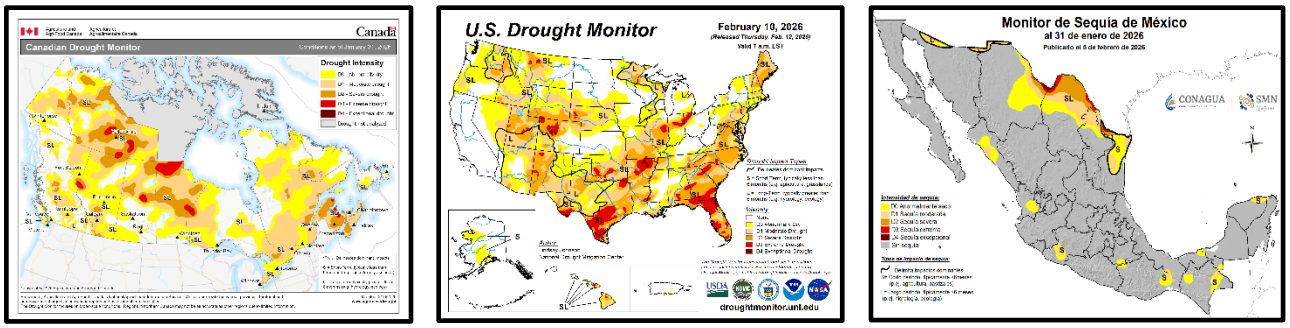
However, recent weather patterns across Mexico have begun to alleviate nationwide drought conditions. Monthly average rainfall between November 2025 and January 2026 remained slightly above average; consequently, this spring is expected to be less intense than previous seasons characterized by drier soil, even though average temperatures remain above historical norms. Based on these factors and current climatological analyses, warm and dry conditions are anticipated for the February-March-April quarter.

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) remains in a weak La Niña state, but sea surface temperatures (SSTs) are warming and now averaging near 0.5 C below average in the central equatorial Pacific Ocean, showing that La Niña is weakening. Forecasts are for La Niña to continue to weaken, with the onset of ENSO-neutral conditions likely expected by March. ENSO-neutral conditions are then expected to persist through the spring. The negative phase of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) persists but continues to weaken, with the negative phase now the weakest it has been in the past several years. As a result, it is likely to have less impact on this forecast than prior years. The Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) has become more active the past week in the Indian Ocean and will likely impact the weather over North America for the remainder of February. However, the transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral conditions will be the main drivers 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:

Much of Canada saw marginal drought improvements throughout January, though 68% of the country remains abnormally dry or in some stage of drought. This includes 72% of the growing region. Generally, there was an improvement in drought conditions from the end of December. Pockets of extreme drought persist over eastern New Brunswick, along the Manitoba elbow, along the Manitoba-Nunavut border, central Saskatchewan, along the Alberta-British Columbia border, and in the vicinity of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories. Drought conditions deteriorated most significantly over southern and central Alberta where little precipitation fell throughout the month. Additionally, parts of the southern British Columbia interior, northern Manitoba, and Maritime provinces all had marginal degradation of drought conditions. In Prince Edward Island, long-term drying allowed for some drought expansion despite precipitation falling throughout the month. The region of most significant improvement was over southeast Yukon, central Northwest Territories, northern Saskatchewan, as well as in western Quebec and most of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Precipitation was below normal across most of the U.S. for January. Well below normal precipitation, less than 25%, was observed in southwest Arizona, the northern High Plains, and South Texas. Precipitation less than 50% of normal was also observed in much of Florida. Small areas of above normal precipitation occurred in January in southeast Arizona, southern New Mexico, and far West Texas, then from southeast Colorado and Kansas northeast to northern Michigan. Smaller areas of above normal precipitation occurred in the Deep South, western New York, and far southern California. Precipitation in Alaska was a bit above normal for most of the state except the northwest which was below normal. Precipitation in Hawai'i was near to below normal, except for the southern third of the Big Island which was above normal.

With fire activity low across the U.S., there were no significant fire-effective events across the country in January. However, a strong winter storm moved across the country January 23-26, seriously impacting areas over a fifteen-hundred-mile swath and bringing catastrophic ice accretion to northern Mississippi and central Tennessee, where firefighting resources were mobilized to aid in recovery. Extensive icing was also observed westward into northeast Texas and northeast into West Virginia with severe tree damage. Heavy snow fell with this storm from eastern New Mexico through Kansas and Oklahoma into the Ohio Valley, Mid-Atlantic, and Northeast.

Overall drought increased slightly across the U.S. with nearly 45% of the country in drought as of February 10. Drought persisted in the Rockies and Northwest, with small areas of development in Idaho and Montana. Drought improvement was noted in southern Arizona and New Mexico, and across much of Alabama, Mississippi, and central Tennessee. However, drought worsened in much of the southern Plains and Florida. Areas of extreme drought persist in small portions of north-central Montana, central Utah, western Colorado, and western New Mexico. Other areas of extreme drought are noted in much of South Texas and the Florida peninsula, as well as portions of southern Oklahoma, northern Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, North Florida, eastern Illinois, northern Indiana, and northwest Ohio. Small areas of exceptional drought exist in northern Arkansas, central Colorado, and the Big Bend. Drought persists across much of the southern Hawai'ian Islands, with small areas of extreme drought on Maui and the Big Island.

In Mexico during the first half of January, above-average precipitation was recorded across the northeast, north, south, and east of the country. These rains were driven by the passage of cold fronts, the interaction of the polar and subtropical jet streams, and the development of the season's second winter storm. These wet conditions led to a reduction in moderate-to-severe drought areas in Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila and Tabasco, as well as the elimination of abnormally dry conditions in Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí. Conversely, precipitation deficits in northeastern and west-central Mexico, as well as the Yucatán Peninsula, led to an expansion of areas of moderate to extreme drought in northern Tamaulipas. These deficits also caused a slight increase in abnormally dry and moderate drought conditions across west-central Mexico. Despite these regional increases, as of January 15, the national

coverage of moderate to exceptional drought areas stood at 7.4%, a decrease of 1.9% compared to the figures recorded on December 31, 2025.

Fire Season Status:

In Canada, there were no significant wildfires during the month of January, though pile burning and other hazard reduction burns continued throughout the nation. Southern Alberta and southeast British Columbia have significant snow free areas and exposed grasslands and forested areas. A warm, dry month for the region has kickstarted Fire Weather Index calculations, and a prolonged period of snow cover will be required to return to more winter-like conditions.

At the time of writing, an approximately 275-hectare fire is burning northwest of Calgary. A fire of this size in Alberta is uncommon for early February. The rest of the region is similarly dry and will be monitored closely in the coming weeks. Some precipitation is likely to fall over the region by the last week of February, though the risk of wildfire will remain somewhat elevated. Even with the ongoing, dry conditions, a robust snowpack in the Rocky Mountains will help with moisture in the mountains and eastern slopes during the spring melt.

In the U.S., fire activity remained at low levels nationwide through January, with a modest increase in activity in early February. The increase in activity was primarily focused in the Southwest and Southern Areas, with Florida showing the most substantial increase in activity. The National Preparedness Level remained at one (on a scale of 1-5) due to the low level of activity nationally. As of February 6, a total of 24,736 hectares (61,122 acres) burned, which is over 145% of the previous 10-year average. The corresponding total of 3,797 fires across the U.S. is 182% of the 10-year average for the period.

In Mexico through the end of January, 198 wildfires had been recorded across 24 federal entities, covering a total area of 5,443 hectares. Of this affected area, 99% corresponded to grass and brush, while only 1% affected timber. Of the total national wildfires, 77 (39%) occurred in fire-sensitive ecosystems. These incidents burned nearly 2,635 hectares, which is equivalent to 48% of the total affected area.

The Mexican states with the highest number of wildfires were Morelos, Michoacán, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Puebla, State of México, Guanajuato, Mexico City, Hidalgo, and Zacatecas. Together, these entities accounted for approximately 80% of the national total. The states with the most significant land impact were Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero, Durango, Puebla, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, Coahuila, and Morelos. Collectively, these states represented 90% of the total burned area nationwide.

Canada Discussion

February/March/April: Many climate-scale models have been having difficulty capturing the elongation of the polar vortex and transition towards a neutral El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) state. As such, they are giving highly variable February forecasts. Given the persistence of the polar vortex and a negligible Madden-Julian Oscillation impact, a warmer than normal February is forecast over western Canada. An early-month, historic heatwave for the western Prairies will certainly play a role in the month’s mean temperature. Additionally, periods of ridging will lead to warm temperatures over northern Quebec, Labrador, and the Arctic Islands. Upper-level troughing will continue to impact most of eastern Canada resulting in a cool month for Ontario and Quebec. Similar to January, significant winter storms are likely to bring highly variable temperatures to Atlantic Canada resulting in near normal mean temperatures.

Generally normal precipitation amounts are anticipated for the majority of Canada outside of two regions: the British Columbia Interior and Atlantic Canada extending in southern Quebec. Upper-level troughing driven by the polar vortex will promote high surface pressure over Atlantic Canada and subsequently little precipitation. Periods of relatively mundane weather followed by ridging will keep

things dry in the British Columbia interior and preferentially steer weather systems north and towards the Alaskan coast. It is likely that the dry signal over the British Columbia spills into southern Alberta and helps to enhance the already dry conditions and promote further drying and maintain an elevated wildfire risk.

In March, the effects of a neutral ENSO state are more strongly felt in the west while the effects of intermittent Arctic outbreaks are felt in central Canada and upper-level troughing continues over eastern Canada. The result is a warmer than normal forecast for British Columbia, western Alberta, and Southern Yukon. A cool March is forecast for Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and northwestern Ontario and slightly below normal temperatures for the majority of eastern Canada. Atlantic Canada is once again anticipated to have some of the most variable temperatures driven by storm systems.

Only weak precipitation signals are present for Canada. However, a slightly drier than normal early spring may occur over much of British Columbia. Additionally, storm tracks may preferentially steer weather systems off the coast of Atlantic Canada resulting in a precipitation deficit in March. However, this will be highly dependent on the state of the polar vortex and placement of the trough over eastern Canada.

The April forecast is for weaker temperature anomalies across Canada. This is the result of a combination of springtime warming and a neutral ENSO state. The strongest temperature anomalies sit over the east-central Prairie provinces and the Northwest Territories where cold air spilling south will result in colder than normal periods. A warm April is also more likely than not for coastal and southern British Columbia. Precipitation is forecast to be relatively scarce for most of Canada in April. Less significant springtime weather systems will limit precipitation and help to promote drying for the beginning of the fire season.

Despite the anomalously early onset of wildfire activity and fire danger tracking for some areas, significant fire potential is currently expected to remain normal across Canada for the February through April outlook period. Forecasts lean toward continuing warmer and drier than normal conditions in multiple areas during this outlook period, so monitoring will continue to determine if areas of above normal significant fire potential emerge for the ensuing outlook period, especially as fire activity escalates with the normal seasonal progression in areas with exposed fuels ahead of the growing season.

United States Discussion

February/March/April: Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late January forecast a pattern indicative of La Niña, but also consistent with its weakening. Temperatures are likely to be above normal in the West for February, with above normal temperatures for the three-month period across the southern half of the country. Temperatures are likely to be below normal in February for the eastern third of the country, and the three-month period expected to be below normal for only the northern Plains. Precipitation is likely to be above normal near the Canadian border from Washington eastward to Minnesota, with precipitation above normal for the three-month period in the northern Rockies and Great Lakes southward to the Tennessee Valley. Below normal precipitation is likely across the southern tier of the U.S. the next three months, focused on the Southwest and Southeast.

Normal significant fire potential is forecast for the northern half of the U.S. into April, with a gradual increase in activity in the northwestern U.S., and a normal spring peak in the Eastern Area. For February, above normal significant fire potential is forecast for much of the southern and central Plains as well as the northern Front Range of Colorado. Above normal potential is forecast for most of the Southeast and northern Gulf Coast, as well. Below normal potential is expected in February for Kentucky to far western Virginia. In March, above normal potential will expand to cover most of the Southern Area, except the northern tier from Arkansas to western Virginia, southeast and West Texas, and southwest Louisiana, which will remain normal. Above normal potential will continue in March in

eastern New Mexico and southeast Colorado into Kansas. For April, above normal significant fire potential will be reduced to the southeast Atlantic coast and Florida, with the rest of the U.S. normal.

Mexico Discussion

February/March/April: Considering the current temperature and precipitation patterns, the national drought situation, and the climatological forecast, wildfire activity across most of Mexico is expected to gradually increase across most of the country, reaching relative peaks in March and April. This is due to the seasonal nature of wildfires, with activity that typically peaks in spring. This spring is expected to be less warm due to rainfall that has been slightly above normal, which positively influences soil moisture.

The climate forecast for this period indicates warm and dry conditions. Although temperature and precipitation patterns are expected to remain near climatological averages under the influence of La Niña, the potential for extreme events (both dry and wet) cannot be ruled out. This is especially relevant due to the modulating influence of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation and the Pacific/North American pattern; however, the opposing polarities of these remote influences within the forecast horizon maintain uncertainty regarding the effects of either La Niña or ENSO-neutral conditions.

The regions of Mexico with the greatest potential for wildfire during the next three months are across most of the mountainous regions of the country and the south. However, normal activity is expected in much of the Chihuahuan and Sonoran Deserts, as well as Baja California. Potential increased activity is also expected in the Yucatan Peninsula in April. These risks are driven by the ongoing dry season, which is further modulated by winter weather patterns. As environmental conditions gradually deteriorate, wildfire activity is expected to escalate, reaching peak intensity during March and April across the central, western, northern, northeastern, and southeastern 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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