North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook

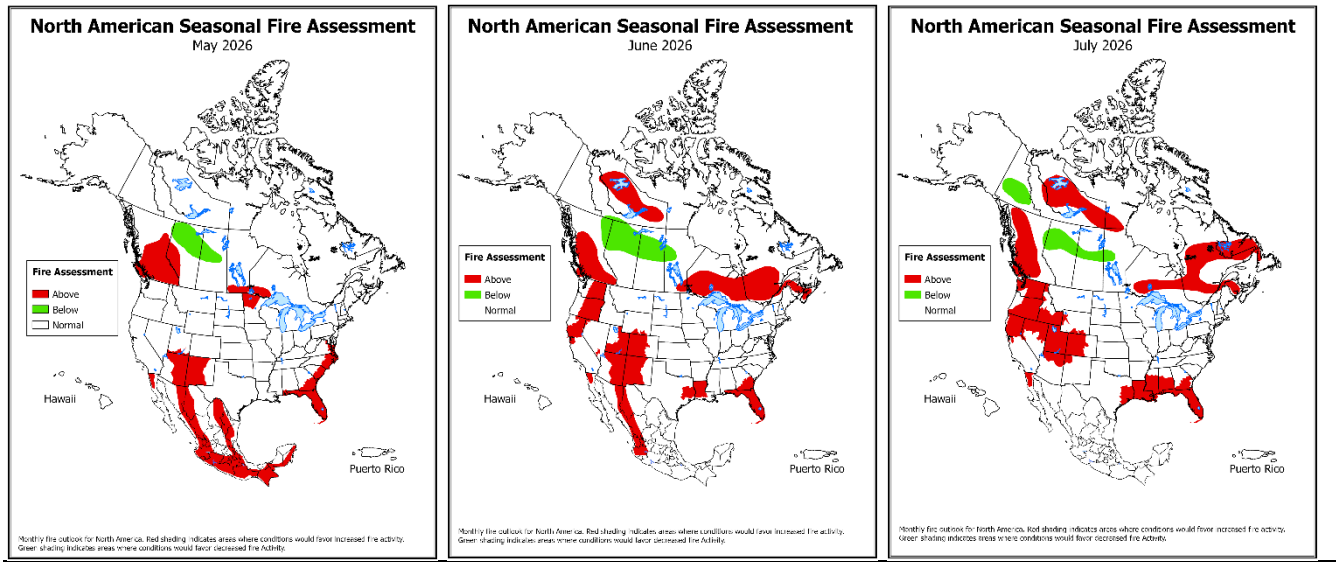
National Interagency Fire Center ● Natural Resources Canada ● Servicio Meteorológico Nacional
United States Canada Mexico

Outlook Period May through July 2026
Issued 15 May 2026

Executive Summary

April was cool in most of Canada, although British Columbia experienced warmer than normal temperatures and generally dry conditions, allowing an earlier start to fire season than in much of Canada. Snow continued to fall in many other parts of Canada during April, slowing the melt of the winter snowpack. Deep snow is still present from the eastern Northwest Territories, across the northern Saskatchewan/Manitoba border, and in portions of northern Ontario, Quebec, and Labrador.

A portion of northern Manitoba recorded 400% of its normal April precipitation. This coincides with the area of deep snow remaining in the north. Stubborn Arctic air masses coinciding with subpolar low pressure systems kept temperatures cooler than normal in much of the Prairies. The epicentre of the cold anomaly appears to have been in south central Saskatchewan with a departure of up to 4 C below normal.



Monthly fire outlook for North America for May 2026 (left), June 2026 (middle), and July 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.*

The cooler temperatures prevailed in northern Ontario and Quebec, and through Newfoundland and Labrador. The greatest negative anomaly occurred in extreme northern Labrador, but Arctic air appeared to dominate most of the east. In the first week of April, Schefferville (54.8°N latitude) recorded a minimum temperature of –40 C. A few other record low values occurred in northern parts of eastern Canada. Much of Quebec had pleasant spring temperatures late in April, which accelerated snowmelt. Close to normal temperatures were recorded around the north side of the Great Lakes, in southern Quebec, and New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia, although large fluctuations were reported in the Atlantic region. Above normal temperatures occurred southwest of Lake Ontario, which

felt the northern tip of the large warm anomaly that covered much of the central and eastern U.S. Some record highs were set early in April in this warm belt.

Much of Ontario had a wet April, with only a band of normal precipitation stretching from Timmins, south of James Bay, into western Quebec. The highest anomalies occurred northwest of Lake Superior, with Thunder Bay, for example, receiving over 250% of its normal April precipitation. In Quebec, heavy precipitation fell along the east side of Hudson Bay but dry conditions dominated along the Labrador border and east through much of Labrador. This dry area was likely dominated by the Arctic air that brought cold temperatures to the region. Some patchy areas in southern Labrador had normal amounts of precipitation, and a small area of above normal precipitation was reported in the extreme southeast around Mary's Harbour. Most of the island of Newfoundland had normal precipitation but a dry band stretched along the southwest coast. Much of Newfoundland's precipitation fell as snow, with over 300% of normal snowfall reported in the highest regions.

Following nine months of dry weather, New Brunswick finally received above average precipitation, with heavier amounts in the north and in a thin band in central regions extending south to the Bay of Fundy. Snowfall exceeded the normal April amounts in extreme northern New Brunswick but remained below normal in southern regions, where mostly rain fell. Conditions remained dry in the extreme east, along with most of eastern and northern Nova Scotia. Elsewhere, precipitation was close to normal.

April precipitation anomalies were mixed across the U.S., with well below normal precipitation observed across the coastal Southeast and Piedmont and below normal precipitation extending into the Lower Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee valleys, Mid-Atlantic, and coastal New England. Below normal precipitation was also found across most of the High Plains, Southwest, and the coastal Northwest. Above normal precipitation occurred from Texas north and east to the Great Lakes, with above normal precipitation also occurring in scattered areas of Florida and larger areas of northern California and the northern and central Rockies. May has started very warm and dry in much of the West, with dry but cool conditions in the Midwest. May began wet in the Southeast bringing at least temporary relief from the drought. Overall drought increased across the country with over 61% of the U.S. now in drought. Fire activity was steady across the U.S. in April to early May, with a moderate uptick in activity the last half of May in the Southeast. Given the low but persistent level of activity, the National Preparedness Level remained at two (on a scale of 1-5) through May 13.

Climate Prediction Center and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late April forecast temperatures are likely to be above normal across most of the contiguous U.S. into July, focused on the West, with precipitation expected to be below normal for the northern half of the West. Above normal precipitation is possible for the Southwest and East Coast, of lower confidence and weighted toward July. Above normal significant fire potential is expected in the coastal Southeast in May, expanding west to the Lower Mississippi Valley by July. In the West, above normal significant fire potential is expected in the Southwest in May before returning to normal by July, but an increasing footprint of above normal potential is expected in the northern two-thirds of the West in June and July. Above normal potential is also forecast for northwest Minnesota in May.

In Mexico, wildfire activity continues to intensify across the central, western, northern, northeastern, southern, and southeastern regions of the country and is expected to reach relative peaks during the first half of May as environmental conditions continue to deteriorate. Nevertheless, the severity of these conditions is projected to remain moderated compared to previous years due to the above-average precipitation observed during March and April, which provided replenishment of soil moisture reserves. Preliminary records indicate that wildfire activity has remained below climatological averages despite the ongoing seasonal increase. A gradual decrease in activity is expected during the second half of May and throughout June, with minimum levels anticipated by July as the rainy season commences across most of the country. Northern Baja California, however, is expected to maintain elevated wildfire activity through May due to the later seasonal behavior characteristic of the region.

Should this warm and humid pattern persist as forecast for Mexico through late spring and early summer, increasing atmospheric moisture and the gradual establishment of the rainy season are

expected to promote a progressive reduction in wildfire activity by June and July, despite the persistence of above-normal temperatures across much of the country. Nevertheless, localized extreme dry and wet events cannot be ruled out under the evolving influence of the El Niño transition.

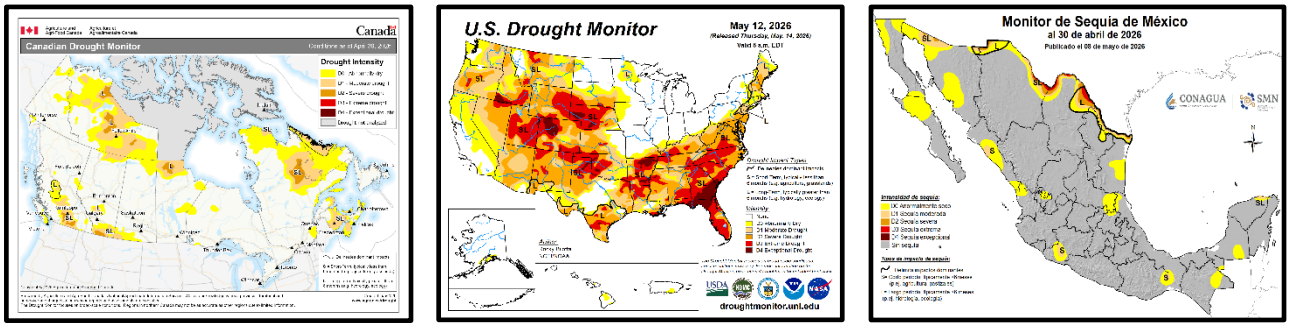
Critical Factors

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

El Niño-Southern Oscillation and Other Climate Teleconnections:

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) has moved into a neutral state as sea surface temperatures (SSTs) have warmed to near to slightly above average in the central equatorial Pacific Ocean. However, SSTs off the west coast of South America have warmed to above normal, and temperatures below the surface, about 100 meters down, are extremely warm and exceeding 7 C above normal east of the International Date Line. As a result, the Climate Prediction Center (CPC) forecasts the emergence of El Niño soon, with 82% chance of El Niño conditions developing later this month into June and July. The chance of El Niño developing by late summer is 95%, with very high confidence El Niño will continue into the winter. In addition, the CPC is forecasting a 45% chance of a strong El Niño by August, and a 35% chance of a very strong El Niño by late fall and winter.

The Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) remains in a negative phase and is likely to remain negative through the outlook period. The Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) was active in the western Pacific and western hemisphere in late April but was weak in early May. The MJO is forecast to remain weak for most of May and has little impact on this forecast, with a small contribution from the PDO. The main climate driver for the outlook will be the rapid transition to El Niño over the summer.



Left: Canadian Drought Monitor from *Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.* **Middle:** United States Drought Monitor. **Right:** Mexican Drought Monitor from *CONAGUA-Servicio Meteorológico Nacional.*

Drought:

Improvements in drought conditions for much of Canada continued through April, with normal to above normal precipitation in much of Canada. Some areas recorded up to twice the monthly climatological average, much like March's totals. Regional precipitation deficits continued in southern British Columbia, extreme southern Alberta, northeastern Quebec, and central Labrador; drought in these regions has either not improved or has intensified.

As of April 30, 27% of Canada is in some stage of abnormal dryness. The largest contiguous region stretches from the central Yukon/Northwest Territories border, southeast through the Northwest Territories and into northern Manitoba. The Northwest Territories, northern Manitoba, northeastern Quebec, and extreme western Labrador show pockets of severe drought. Southern Interior British Columbia and southern Alberta also show pockets of severe drought, which have already contributed to early wildfires as snow departs earlier in the spring.

Temperatures in April were above normal for much of the United States, with temperatures averaging 3-5 C (5-9°F) above normal across much of the southern Plains into the Lower Great Lakes, Ohio and Tennessee valleys, and Appalachians. Temperatures were slightly below normal for eastern Montana into northwest Minnesota, and much of Alaska. Temperatures in Hawai'i averaged near to below normal for most of the state in April but were above normal for eastern portions of the Big Island. In May, temperatures have been above normal across west of the Continental Divide, warmest in the Northwest where temperature anomalies more than 5 C (9°F) have been observed.

Precipitation was more varied across the U.S. in April, with below-normal precipitation found from the Lower Mississippi and Ohio valleys to the East Coast, mainly from southern New England to North Florida. Precipitation was well below normal for the Florida Panhandle northeast into the Piedmont where less than 20% of normal precipitation fell in April. Precipitation was largely above normal to the north and west, from much of Texas into the Mid-Mississippi Valley, Great Lakes, and northern New England. Precipitation was below normal for western Washington and Oregon, as well as much of the High Plains, New Mexico, and Mojave and Sonoran deserts. However, precipitation was above normal for northern California into much of Nevada, eastern Oregon, southwest Idaho, and portions of the Four Corners. Hawai'i precipitation was well above normal, but Alaska precipitation was mixed with above-normal precipitation for the central and eastern Interior but below normal for the panhandle and North Slope. In May, most of the U.S. has been dry, the greatest anomalies in the West through the northern Plains and Midwest. Wetter than normal conditions have been limited to southern Arizona and New Mexico, the northern Gulf Coast, the shores of Lake Erie, and Maine.

Snowpack across the West is well below normal, indicative of a snow drought, with many river basins from Oregon and California to the Great Basin, Colorado, and Southwest less than 20% of normal, if not already barren of snow at all observing locations in a basin. While snowpack in the Washington Cascades to Idaho and western Montana is 40-60% of normal, much of the snow resides at the highest elevations above 7,000 feet.

Overall drought increased across the U.S. during April and early May with over 61% of the country in drought as of May 12. Drought developed and/or intensified in much of the West, and from the Lower Mississippi Valley to Southeast and Mid-Atlantic. Significant drought intensification occurred in the Southeast and the central High Plains. However, drought improved in much of Texas and eastern Oklahoma, with drought removal occurring in the Lower Great Lakes, northern Missouri, and portions of northern New England. Areas of extreme drought continued to expand across the U.S. and is now found across more than 18% of the country. The most extensive extreme drought is in the Lower Mississippi Valley, Southeast, and from much of Utah into the central Rockies and the central and southern High Plains. Exceptional drought has also expanded with the largest areas in southwest Idaho, northwest Colorado, western Nebraska, northern Arkansas, South Georgia, and North Florida. Drought is expected to persist and expand across most of the West through July. Drought is expected to persist in the Mid-Atlantic and southern Appalachians, while improvement is expected from much of Texas into the Southeast, weighted toward the climatologically wetter months of June and July.

During the second half of April, the interaction of multiple atmospheric systems, including the subtropical jet stream, four cold fronts, upper-level troughs, and low-pressure systems, promoted above-average precipitation across the northeastern and central regions of Mexico. These rainfall events contributed to a reduction in areas affected by moderate to exceptional drought, particularly in northern Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas.

In contrast, precipitation remained below the climatological average across northwestern and southern Mexico, as well as along the Gulf of Mexico coast and the Yucatán Peninsula. Additionally, the persistence of several mid-level high pressure systems, particularly the one associated with the heat wave during the final week of April, promoted warmer and drier conditions over large portions of the country. Consequently, areas classified under abnormally dry conditions expanded across the Baja California Peninsula, Sonora, Sinaloa, Chiapas, and the transitional region between San Luis Potosí, Querétaro, Hidalgo, and Veracruz.

Fire Season Status:

Fire activity has continued a slow build across Canada, with most new activity in British Columbia and Alberta, including several requiring evacuation alerts or orders. A few new fires are appearing in other regions. Some holdover fires from 2025 are being monitored in Alberta, Yukon, and Nova Scotia, and may be detected in other regions once snow has melted. As of May 12, the number of reported fires was 842, about 90% of the ten-year average, and area burned at about 3,665 hectares thus far is less than 2% of the 10-year average.

Fire activity was steady across the U.S. in April and early May, with a moderate uptick in activity the latter half of the month focused on the Southeast. The Southern Area observed the most notable increase in activity the last two weeks of the month, with more modest increases in the Southwest and Eastern Areas. Low but consistent levels of activity were observed in the Rocky Mountain Area and California. Given the low but persistent level of activity, the National Preparedness Level remained at two (on a scale of 1-5) as of May 15, when this document was published. As of then, 776,359 hectares (1,918,424) acres have burned across the country, which is 177% of the previous 10-year average. So far this year 26,568 wildfires have been reported, also well above average, at 141%.

As of May 7, Mexico had recorded 3,730 wildfires across all 32 states, affecting a total area of 213,303 hectares. Approximately 95% of the impacted area corresponds to grass and brush, while the remaining 5% involves timber. The states with the highest number of wildfires were Jalisco, State of México, Michoacán, México City, Guerrero, Puebla, Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Chiapas, and Durango that represent the 72% of the national total. The states with the largest burned areas were Guerrero, Jalisco, Oaxaca, San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Campeche, Chiapas, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Durango that represent the 79% of the national total. From the total wildfires to date, 908 (25%) fires occurred in fire-sensitive ecosystems. These incidents burned 68,652 hectares, which is equivalent to 32% of the total affected area.

Canada Discussion

May: Weather conditions in May appear undecided whether to conform to typical La Niña or El Niño spring weather. Flips between cool and wet and warm and dry have been appearing recently, with windy periods as these patterns change, likely a consequence of the recent neutral ENSO conditions. Lightning is emerging regularly but not in huge amounts, and dry areas such as southern British Columbia are experiencing some lightning-caused fires. Alberta has been mostly dry for the first half of May, but a mid-month change is expected to bring a greater abundance of showers. While New Brunswick has had some fires, recent and expected rainfall will likely limit May activity. Much of the rest of Canada is still emerging from an abundance of winter snow, so fire weather calculations have either not started, or the ground is moist enough to prevent much fire activity.

June: Above-normal temperatures are favored in much of western Canada in June, although the northern Prairies remains a holdout as normal or even below normal temperatures appear likely. Some of this may be due to late snow melt and lingering surface moisture, but some modeling suggests a band of heavier rainfall may occur across the boreal region. Temperatures are most likely to remain warmest, and rainfall lightest, in southern regions and the Northwest Territories, thus fire activity is most likely in these regions. Western Ontario remains ambiguous as disagreement between model ensemble members is significant, but less so in eastern Canada.

July: Temperature forecasts imply a northwest to southeast upper-level flow across Canada, which would maintain warmer than normal temperatures in southwest Canada and cooler temperatures towards the northeast. Rainfall may be plentiful along this path should it prevail. While precipitation forecasts show great uncertainty, the consensus is for dry conditions in British Columbia and the Northwest Territories, hence a greater chance of fire activity there. Moist conditions in the southern

boreal region are likely to limit fire activity, while a balance between slightly warmer than normal temperatures may override slight precipitation surpluses in eastern Canada, giving the potential for fire but with less certainty than in northern and far western regions.

United States Discussion

May: Climate Prediction Center (CPC) and Predictive Services outlooks issued in late April forecast warmer and drier than normal conditions across the northwestern U.S. in May, with the drier than normal conditions extending east in the Midwest. Temperatures are also likely to be above normal in the Southwest and Florida, with below normal temperatures in the Great Lakes south and east into the Ohio Valley and Appalachians. Above normal precipitation is likely in southern New Mexico east into the Lower Mississippi Valley, with no preferred outcome across the rest of the U.S. As a result, above normal significant fire potential is forecast in May for the coastal Southeast, far southern Alabama, and Florida. Above normal potential is also forecast for much of the Southwest into far southwest Utah, as well as northwest Minnesota.

June/July: Predictive Services and CPC outlooks indicate that warm and dry conditions are likely to continue through July in the northern half of the West, with some possibility of an increased North American Monsoon into the Southwest but is of lower confidence due to the rapidly developing El Niño. Otherwise, temperatures are expected to be above normal for most of the country except for the Upper Midwest where there is no preferred outcome. Above normal precipitation is also possible along much of the East Coast. In June, above normal significant fire potential in the Southeast will retreat to South Georgia and Florida, with normal potential returning to northwest Minnesota. However, above normal potential is forecast to expand from the Southwest to much of the Greater Four Corners and portions of southern Nevada. Above normal potential is also forecast to develop in portions of east Texas, most of Louisiana, northern California, and the Inland Northwest. In July, significant fire potential in the West will return to normal for most areas of the Southwest due to onset of the monsoon, but above normal will expand from Utah and western Colorado to all the northern Great Basin and most of northern California and Northwest. Above normal potential will persist in July in South Georgia, Florida, East Texas, and Louisiana as it broadens to add much of the Gulf Coast and Lower Mississippi Valley.

Mexico Discussion

May: For precipitation, above normal rainfall is expected across a significant portion of Mexico, particularly in Campeche, Chiapas, Mexico City, Coahuila, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Morelos, the State of Mexico, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Yucatán, and Zacatecas. In contrast, the remaining regions of the country are projected to experience below normal precipitation. For temperatures, above normal maximum temperatures are expected to prevail across most of the national territory. However, localized regions are forecast to experience below normal maximum temperatures, particularly across portions of the Baja California Peninsula, Sonora, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Durango, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Guanajuato, Michoacán, the State of Mexico, Mexico City, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo.

With the climate forecast for May, above normal wildfire potential is forecast in much of the mountainous regions of the country, portions of the Yucatan Peninsula, and northern Baja California. The greatest potential will occur in the first half of the month, before potential starts to decrease in the east and south as the rainy season begins.

June: Regarding precipitation, above normal rainfall is expected across portions of Baja California Sur, Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, and Yucatán during the period. Maximum temperatures are anticipated to be above normal across most of the country. However, localized regions are expected to remain below normal for maximum temperature anomalies. These areas include portions of the Baja California Peninsula, Sonora, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Durango, Jalisco, Colima, Guanajuato,

Michoacán, the State of Mexico, Guerrero, Puebla, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo.

Above normal wildfire potential will persist into June across much of the Sierra Madre Occidental and northern Baja California. A gradual decrease in potential is expected in the Sierra Madra Occidental throughout the month as the rainy season commences.

July: Precipitation is forecast to remain below normal across most of the Mexican Republic, while above normal rainfall is expected primarily over Sonora. For temperatures, above normal maximum temperatures are expected to prevail across most of the country. However, below normal maximum temperatures are forecast for localized regions of the Baja California Peninsula, Sonora, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Durango, Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Tamaulipas, the State of Mexico, Mexico City, Puebla, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo.

Despite the forecast for below normal precipitation across most of the country, wildfire potential is expected to remain normal for all areas except northern Baja California, which will be above normal. July is typically a wet month in the middle of the rainy season across most of Mexico, and enough precipitation will occur to keep the wildfire potential seasonally low. However, portions of northern Baja California will remain much drier.

Additional Information

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

United States:
National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook
https://www.nifc.gov/nicc-files/predictive/outlooks/monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf

Canada:
Canadian Wildland Fire Information System
https://cwfis.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca

Mexico:
Servicio Meteorológico Nacional
https://smn.conagua.gob.mx/es/observando-el-tiempo/monitoreo-atmosferico-ambiental

Outlook Objective

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

Acknowledgements

Contributions to this document were made by:

Canada: Richard Carr, Natural Resources Canada
Michael Smith, Natural Resources Canada
Ginny Marshall, Natural Resources Canada
Liam Buchart, Natural Resources Canada

United States: Jim Wallmann, Predictive Services Meteorologist, US Forest Service
Julie Osterkamp, Data Manager, US Wildland Fire Service
Steve Larrabee, Predictive Services Fire Analyst, US Wildland Fire Service

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