

Colorado Fire Potential Outlook

Developed by Rocky Mountain Area Predictive Services

January 31, 2006

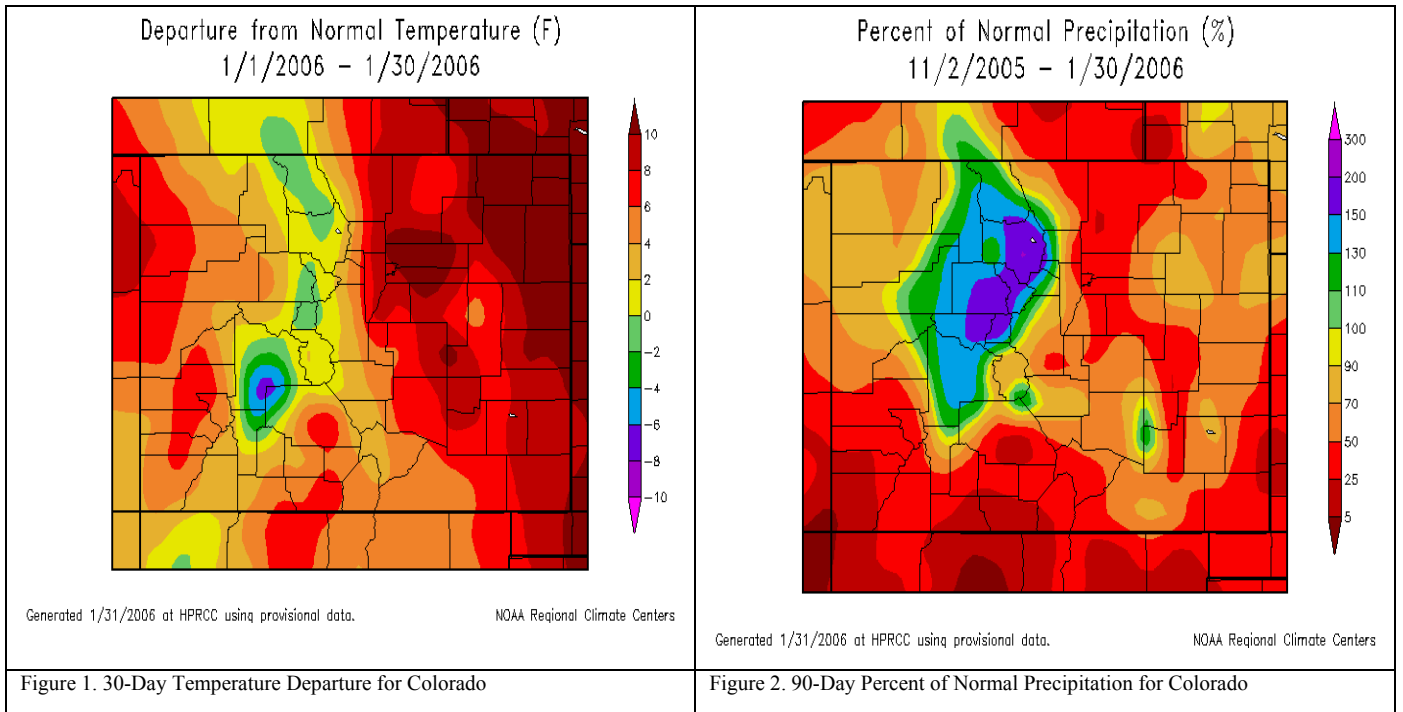
This product will be updated as conditions warrant

Current Weather and Climate Situation:

Fire activity decreased across Colorado during the second half of January. Temperatures were slightly cooler (but still above average), and RH slightly higher across Colorado during the second half of the month. However, January 2006 will probably end up as one of the warmest Januarys on record (top ten) for Colorado. Otherwise, a snow event on the 9th brought short-term relief to the central and southern Front Range of Colorado, as well as to southwest portions of state. Windy trends continued east of the divide through the second half of the month.

Current snowpack over the northern and central mountains of Colorado does not reflect conditions along the Front Range, adjacent plains, and portions of southwest Colorado. The last *significant* widespread precipitation event for the northern Front Range Colorado was October 9th and 10th of 2005. Recent snowfall over the southern Front Range and southwest Colorado only brought short-term relief to that area. Areas that typically have snowpack this time of year along the Front Range remain bare.

Figure 1 and 2 show a 30-day temperature departure for Colorado and 90-day percent of normal precipitation for Colorado, respectively. The red colors for the 30-day temperature departure illustrate areas of above average temperatures. The red colors for the 90-day percent of normal precipitation for Colorado illustrate areas of below average precipitation, with blue and purple colors illustrating areas of above average precipitation.



Current Fuel Conditions:

ERC values have increased since the January 19th storm system, with current readings near the 97th percentile across the northern Front Range, near the 90th percentile across the southern Front Range, and near the seasonal averages for southwest Colorado. Overall, fuel conditions remain considerably dry below 8500 feet along the Front Range foothills and adjacent plains of Colorado. Though ERCs have improved over southwest Colorado since mid January, fire potential remains above average for extreme southwest Colorado (four corners) and the lower foothill regions of south-central Colorado.

Current ERC curves for the northern Front Range, southern Front Range, and southwest Colorado (Figure 3-5) show current ERCs (black line) above average (grey line).

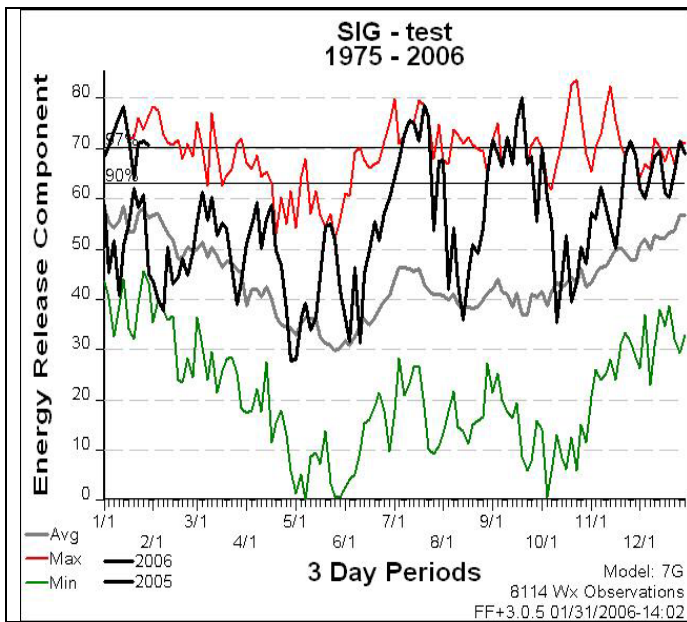


Figure 3. Current ERC-Northern Front Range

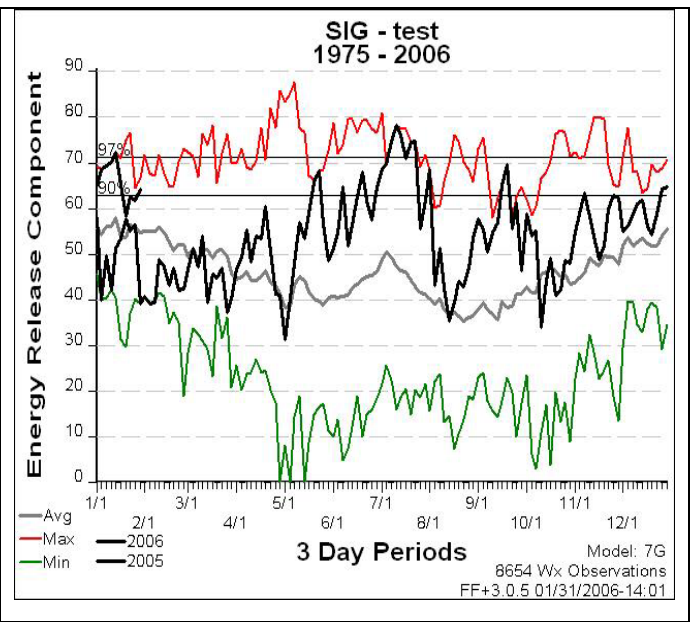


Figure 4. Current ERC-Southern Front Range

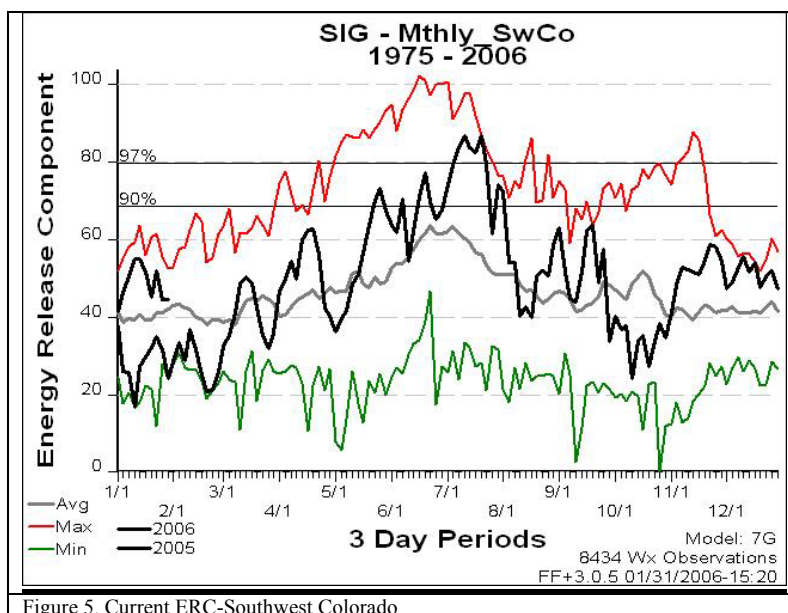


Figure 5. Current ERC-Southwest Colorado

Fire Weather/Potential Outlook:

The weather pattern during the next 10 days will keep temperatures average to above average through the outlook period. An occasional cold front will bring slight chances of moisture to the Front Range and southwest Colorado, with better chances of moisture over the northern and central mountains and northwest Colorado Plateau. Pre-frontal conditions (warm, low humidity, windy, unstable) are likely during the forecast period as fronts approach the region. These periods should be monitored closely.

Fire communities should continue to monitor local forecasts for changing fire weather conditions. Pre-frontal fire weather continues to be a concern in the dry fuel areas. Fire starts this time of year will likely be confined to human causes (arson, power lines, cigarettes, cars, escaped agricultural burns) and not natural causes (lightning). Fire Potential remains above the seasonal averages through the outlook period.

3 Month Outlooks:

A 3-month precipitation outlook developed by NOAA-CIRES Climate Diagnostic Center suggests little change over the next few months with odds leaning towards below average precipitation (Figure 6) over eastern Colorado/southwest Colorado and above average precipitation over the northern and central mountains. CPC outlooks for the next 3 months (FMA) indicate above average temperatures and below average precipitation for portions of Colorado (Figure 7 and 8).

EXPERIMENTAL CDC PRECIPITATION FORECAST GUIDANCE JAN-MAR 2006 (issued January 13, 2006)

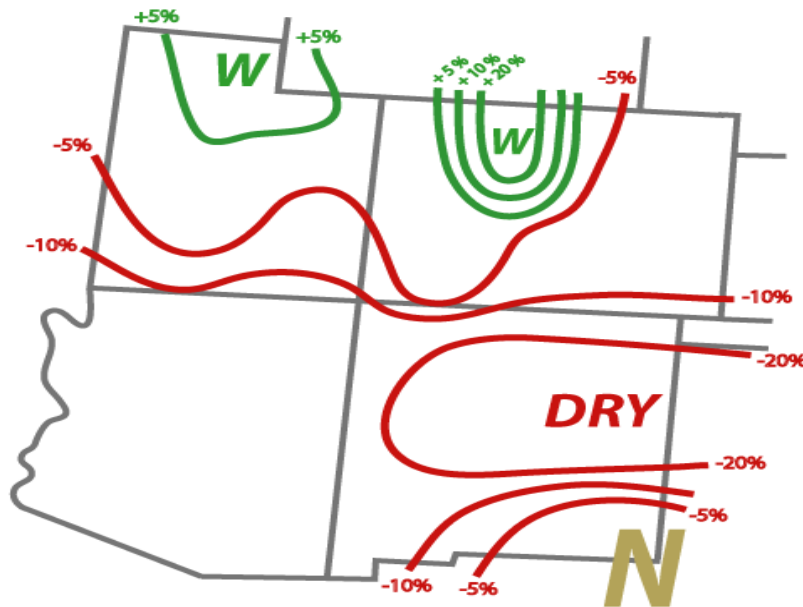


Figure 6. Experimental CDC Precipitation Forecast Guidance

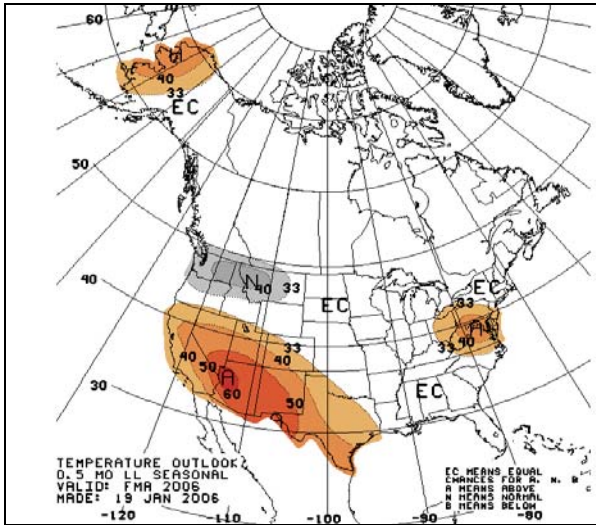


Figure 7. CPC Temperature Outlook for February, March, April

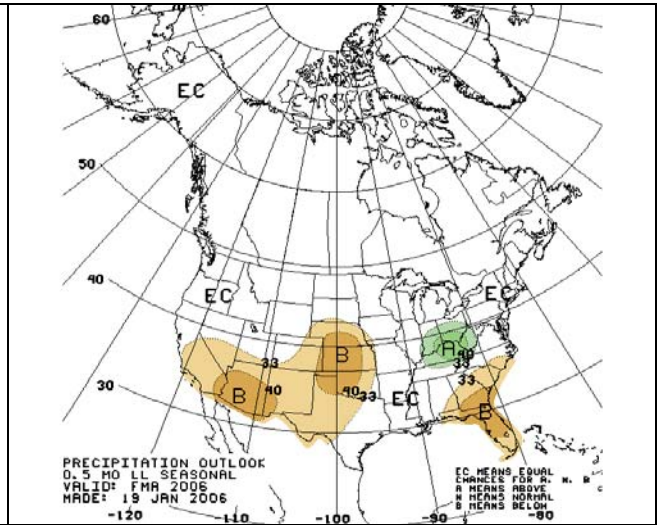


Figure 8. CPC Precipitation Outlook for February, March, April

This forecast will be updated periodically as significant changes develop or are expected to develop. For questions please contact Tim Mathewson-Fire Meteorologist (303)445-4309. For questions from the media, contact Larry Helmerick (303) 638-9660.