

National Wildland Significant Fire Potential Outlook



National Interagency Fire Center
Predictive Services

Issued: March 2, 2009

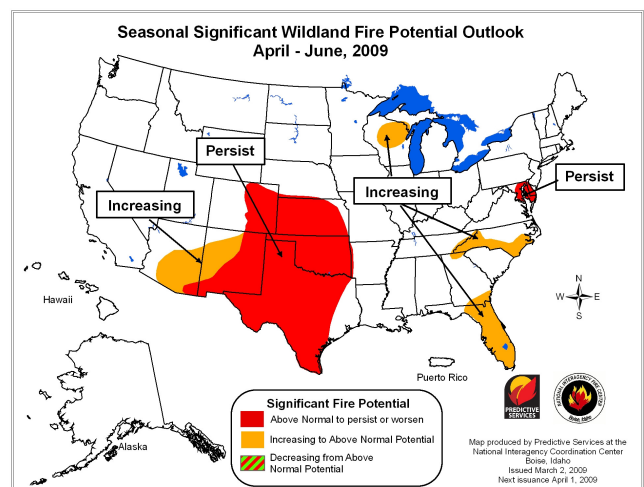
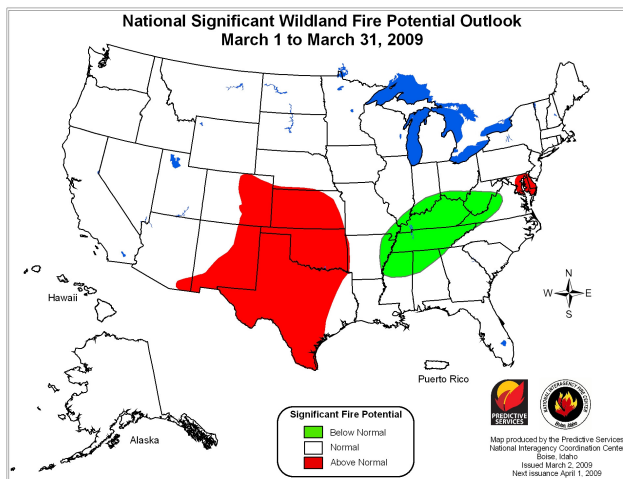
Next Issue: April 1, 2009



Wildland Fire Outlook – March 2009 through June 2009

During March, above normal significant fire potential is expected across portions of the Southwest, Rocky Mountain, Southern, and Eastern Areas. Below normal significant fire potential is forecast for portions of the Southern and Eastern Areas. For April through June, significant fire potential is forecast to persist and increase across parts of the Southwest, Rocky Mountain, Southern, and Eastern Areas. The primary factors influencing fire potential this outlook period are:

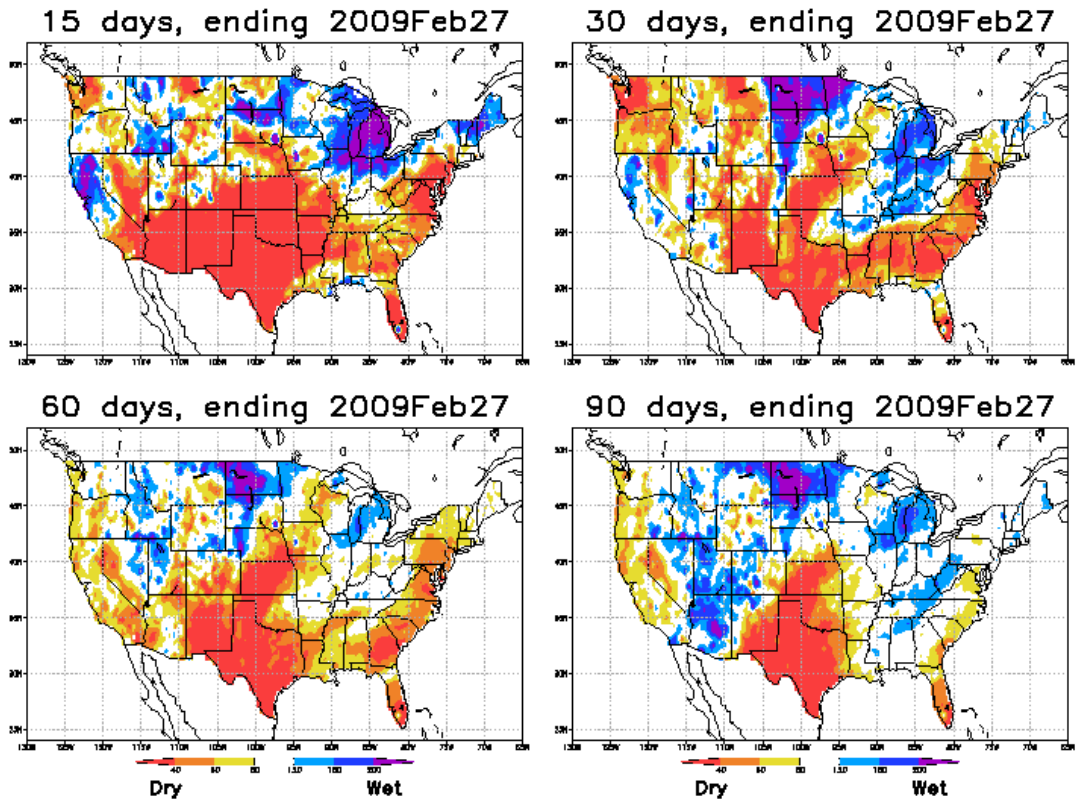
- Drought conditions in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and southeast Colorado are expected to persist and/or expand over the next several months.
- Trees damaged from hurricane and/or ice storm events over the past several winters are creating areas of high fuel loadings.
- Continued dryness and carry-over fine fuels across eastern New Mexico and southern Arizona will cause above normal significant fire potential conditions to expand though the outlook period.
- Below-average precipitation and developing drought are forecast across much of Florida this spring.
- Soil moisture deficits and continuing drought persist across portions of North and South Carolina, northern Wisconsin, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Problematic ground fires are expected in peat and/or deep duff across portions of these areas.



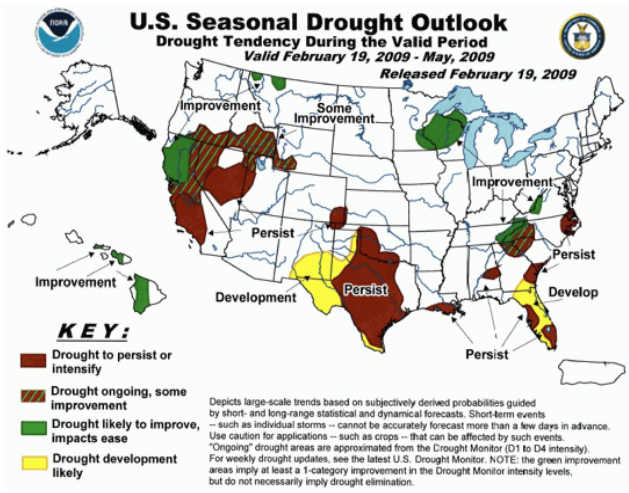
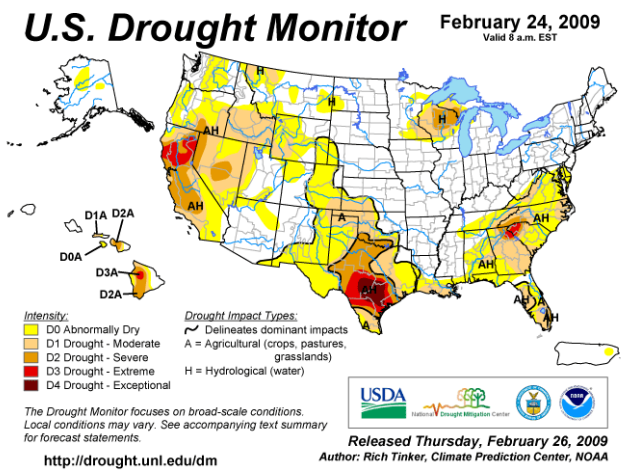
Note: Significant fire potential is defined as the likelihood that a wildland fire event will require mobilization of additional resources from outside the area in which the fire situation originates.

Past Weather and Drought

February was generally drier than normal across the Pacific Northwest, New Mexico, Texas and much of the country east of the Mississippi. Wetter than normal conditions prevailed in portions of California, Great Basin, Arizona, the Great Lakes, and an area stretching from the Dakotas to western Nebraska. The West and Florida were cooler than normal in February. Above normal temperatures were common in the central US. Alaska was much cooler than average in early February but was considerably warmer over the last half of the month. Precipitation amounts were above normal across all parts of the state except South Central, where only about half the normal precipitation was recorded. The latest Drought Monitor and outlook products are shown below. Drought conditions are expected to persist or expand primarily in Texas, Florida, and portions of New Mexico, California, and Nevada.



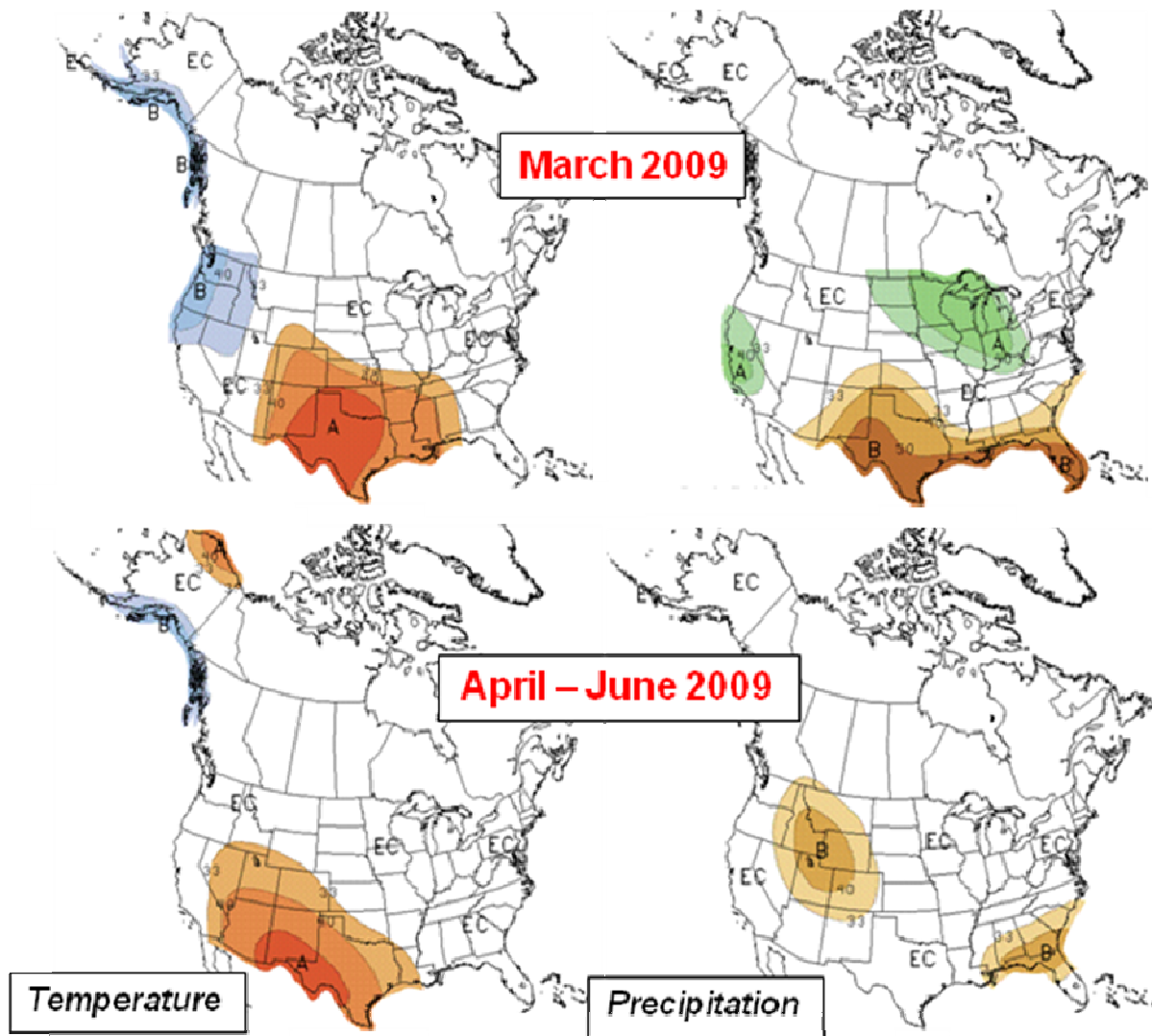
www.cdc.noaa.gov/Drought/images/prec4.gif



www.drought.unl.edu/dm/monitor.html

Weather and Climate Outlooks

La Niña conditions (i.e. cooler than normal sea surface temperatures in the tropical Pacific) are expected to continue into the spring with an eventual dissipation this summer. Climate outlooks for March and April through June (shown below) are based on weather patterns associated with typical La Niña conditions as well as long-term climate trends. La Niña's maximum influence on U.S. climate and weather often occurs during the winter and spring months.



A = Above normal, **B = Below** normal, **N = Normal**, **EC = Equal Chances** of Above/Below/Normal.
www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/multi_season/13_seasonal_outlooks/color/page2.gif

Area Discussions

Alaska: Alaska is currently out of fire season and significant fire potential is projected to be normal through June. Temperatures started out about 20 degrees colder than normal across much of Alaska in February warming to slightly above normal during the latter half of the month. Precipitation totals during February were above normal across the state except in the south/central section where amounts were about fifty percent of normal. Overall, expect March temperatures and precipitation to be near normal. During April through June, temperatures and precipitation are expected to be near normal, with the possibility of a slightly warmer than average spring in the northern interior. Fire season in Alaska officially begins on April 1st, however it is expected that large fire activity will not occur until late May.

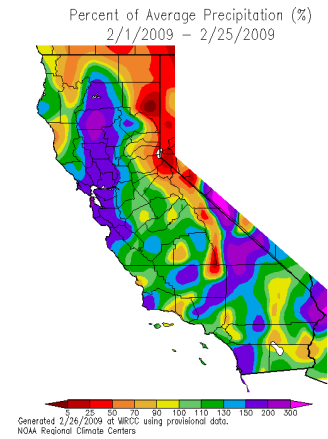
Southwest: Above normal significant fire potential is forecast for west Texas, eastern and southern New Mexico and a small portion of southeast Arizona during March. For April through June, above normal significant fire potential will expand westward across most of New Mexico and much of southeastern Arizona. Some improvement is possible across west Texas and eastern New Mexico late in the period, depending on precipitation and the extent and degree of green up. Elsewhere significant fire potential is expected to be normal. February was drier than normal across much of the Area and warmer than normal across much of eastern New Mexico. During March, brief periods of stormy weather are expected across the north/northwestern sections of the region. These active weather patterns will be interspersed with periods of high pressure that will ultimately lead to drier and warmer weather region-wide. During April through June, temperatures are expected to be above normal primarily east of the continental divide. Precipitation during the extended outlook period will generally be below average across much of the region, except for portions of western and north-central Arizona.

Northern Rockies: The Area is currently out of fire season and normal significant fire potential is expected for the entire outlook period. Current snowpack amounts are running near average across southwest Montana and slightly below average across the northern portions of the Area. Recent storms have brought heavy, wet snow to the mountains of northern Idaho and western Montana and weak La Niña conditions should help to improve snowpack amounts in the mountains, especially on westerly aspects. However, conditions east of the Divide typically remain dry during March. April through June are typically the wettest months east of the Divide. Some fire activity is expected east of the Divide during late winter and prior to green up in mid to late May. La Niña conditions during the spring tend to be wet and cool for the Area with snow accumulation well into May.

Great Basin: Significant fire potential is expected to be normal across the Area through June. During February, rainfall was well below normal in northwest Nevada, much of southwestern Idaho, and central and southeastern Utah; however central and southern Nevada received 100-150% of normal rainfall. Current snow water content is running approximately 70-85 percent of normal in western Nevada, southern Idaho and portions of central and northeast Utah. Moderate to severe drought continues across much of southern Idaho, southwest Wyoming, and Nevada. Some improvement is expected across southern Idaho, western Wyoming, and northwestern Nevada this spring. However, drought is forecast to persist across much of central Nevada. Climate forecasts call for above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation across the southern and eastern portions of the Area April through June. The Area typically has minimal large fire activity until June.

Northwest: The Area is currently out of fire season and normal significant fire potential is expected through June. February was generally cooler than normal but also much drier than normal. Roughly one quarter to one half of the normal February precipitation was recorded across much of Washington and Oregon. Only southwestern Oregon received normal amounts of precipitation. Most SNOTEL sites across Oregon and Washington are showing below normal year-to-date precipitation and snow water content. Climate outlooks suggest cooler than usual weather for March. Significant wildland fire occurrence is unlikely during March and April. Large fire risk typically begins to increase towards the end of May.

California: Normal significant fire potential is projected through June. A major weather pattern change developed during the first half of February bringing the main storm track down into California. This resulted in 100%-250% of the average monthly precipitation over much of the Area during the latter half of February (see figure). The snowpack also deepened significantly above 4,000 ft. Lesser rain amounts occurred across far northern and northeastern California. Temperatures in February also averaged one to four degrees cooler than normal for most areas. Weather models indicate this stormy pattern will continue through at least the first 10 days of March, and perhaps through mid-month. Moderate to extreme drought continues across most of the Area, but improvement is expected, especially across the northern sections, between now and May.



Rocky Mountain: Above normal significant fire potential is expected across the foothills and grasslands of eastern Colorado and most of Kansas during March. This area is highlighted due to abundant fine fuel loadings and below normal precipitation this winter, which are expected to exacerbate the drought and precipitation deficits that already exist. Agricultural burns are common during the spring in eastern Colorado and western Kansas, which increases the risk for wildfires during windy and dry prefrontal conditions. Significant fire potential is expected to persist through April, with improvement once green up begins later in the outlook period. Persisting significant fire potential will be depicted on the seasonal outlook map until there is more confidence on the extent and timing of green up this spring.

Eastern Area: Above normal significant fire potential is forecast from March through June for portions of Maryland and Delaware. Below normal significant fire potential is forecast for southern sections of Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and West Virginia during March. Most locations have received ample seasonal snowfall and precipitation this winter. However, the far southeastern Mid-Atlantic States experienced below normal precipitation the first two months of 2009. This led to below normal soil moisture levels and unusual fire activity during February across portions of Maryland and Delaware. These conditions are expected to persist well into the spring. Soil moisture values across much of northern Wisconsin and the extreme south/central part of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan also remain below average due to extended drought conditions. This is expected to lead to increasing significant fire potential as snow cover diminishes in late spring and dry fuels become available. Elsewhere, significant fire potential is expected to be normal.

Southern Area: Above normal significant fire potential is expected to persist across much of Texas and Oklahoma through June. In March, below normal significant fire potential is forecasted for an area extending from eastern Arkansas and northern Mississippi, eastward into West Virginia. During April through June, significant fire potential is expected to increase in Florida and the southern tier of North Carolina. Drought is expected to persist or worsen across much of Texas, central Oklahoma, Florida, and western portions of the Carolinas through May. Green-up in late March and early April may help retard fire activity in Texas and Oklahoma for those areas east of I-35 and in the Texas Panhandle. However, a meager green-up is expected west of I-35. Heavy fuel loadings resulting from Hurricane Ike near Houston are also a concern. Fire activity is expected to increase across Florida, southeast Georgia and eastern portions of the Carolinas during March and April as fuel and soil moisture levels drop. Soil moisture deficits across the southern tier of North Carolina will cause duff layers and deep organic soils to dry during the spring, requiring additional mop up efforts on any fires that occur. Elsewhere across the Area significant fire potential is expected to be normal.

Historic and Predicted Wildland Fires and Acres Burned Data

Based on data reported in 2009, nationally there were 133% of the average numbers of fires burning approximately 122% of the average acres. The following table displays 10 year historical, current and predicted information pertaining to fire statistics.

	FEB 27, 2009 Reported Year-To-Date	Average reported for MAR	Projection for MAR 31 YTD+Forecast	Average Reported YTD MAR 31	Historical Low YTD MAR 31	Year of Low	Historical High YTD MAR 31	Year of High
ALASKA								
Fires	0	5	3	5	0	many	44	2003
Acres	0	29	29	72	0	many	716	2003
NORTHWEST								
Fires	3	16	19	18	0	1999	78	2005
Acres	1	87	88	88	0	1999	575	2001
NORTH OPS								
Fires	66	22	88	35	1	2000	99	2003
Acres	245	622	867	1,110	0	many	3,210	2008
SOUTH OPS								
Fires	125	89	214	206	10	2005	439	2002
Acres	995	2,331	3,326	3,885	0	2005	11,105	2006
NORTHERN ROCKIES								
Fires	7	20	27	21	0	many	46	2002
Acres	14,490	1,025	15,515	1,192	0	many	5,946	2008
EAST BASIN								
Fires	3	9	12	10	3	2005	36	2002
Acres	0	45	53	45	0	many	101	2006
WEST BASIN								
Fires	2	5	7	7	0	many	35	2007
Acres	6	75	157	89	0	many	677	2007
SOUTHWEST								
Fires	91	196	287	295	38	2001	577	2000
Acres	5,636	41,477	55,408	61,462	585	2004	220,893	2006
ROCKY MOUNTAIN								
Fires	73	58	178	73	0	many	143	2006
Acres	16,254	9,488	30,486	13,669	0	2001	92,433	2006
EASTERN AREA								
Fires	333	980	1,509	1,101	140	1999	3,251	2006
Acres	7,541	13,887	24,205	16,495	2,582	1999	48,067	2005
SOUTHERN AREA								
Fires	7,424	7,334	16,225	12,820	6,225	2003	17,087	2000
Acres	136,020	221,950	446,751	328,851	79,060	2003	1,483,905	2006
NATIONALLY								
Fires	8,127	8,736	18,570	14,591	7,395	2003	20,942	2006
Acres	181,188	291,014	576,883	426,958	91,970	2003	1,849,336	2006

Prepared March 2, 2009 by the National Interagency Coordination Center Predictive Services Staff. The information above was obtained *primarily* from Incident Management Situation Reports from 1998-2007, however some inaccuracies and inconsistencies have been corrected. Therefore, the data may not reflect other historic records and should *not* be considered for official statistical purposes.

Note: This national outlook and some geographic area assessments are currently available at the NICC and GACC websites. The GACC websites can also be accessed through the NICC webpage at:

<http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/predictive/outlooks/outlooks.htm>